

Newsletter June 2017



The Northern Action Group Incorporated

Dear NAG Member/Supporter,

In my last newsletter, I explained that the process had now entered the phase where the Local Government Commission (LGC) would be studying and evaluating all the feedback and various alternatives for reorganisation they have received from the community in the previous rounds of consultation.

They have now engaged Australian management consultants Morrison Low and have given them a brief to evaluate the viability of seven different models (of their own choosing) for reorganisation of Auckland local governance - one of which is the status quo.

The Commission and consultants held a meeting with those whose “alternative applications” were accepted. These included members of the Our Waiheke group and also a representative from the Kumeu ratepayers’ association who oppose our leaving the region and instead want the Rodney ward split into two.

We went along expecting the meeting to be a two-way discussion on the various pros and cons of the different options to be considered but sadly it turned out to be anything but that.

Instead we were subjected to a lecture on what **they** had decided would be the assumptions to be used in their choice of models. Although we questioned their approach and sought engagement and transparency in the evaluation process, it became clear that they had no intention of taking any notice of our suggestions.

But worse was to come. We learnt that the model option called NRUC for North Rodney had been altered by the Commission. We believe that will impact the overall feasibility and effectiveness of what we had proposed based on the Thames Coromandel (TCDC) model which obviously works so well. For instance, one of the changes (there may also be others) was that they had increased the number of councilors to 10 from the 5 we proposed. We believe such an increase is totally unnecessary and will only serve to make the model look uneconomic and top heavy. We vigorously opposed such a change and insisted that our model be considered as it was presented to them but they have refused to do this. Their comment is that their changes were to bring the model into line with a ‘normal’ council (whatever that is!!)

We are not proposing a so-called ‘normal’ council, we want a **high performing** Council like TCDC!

They say they will overlay some of the 'sensitivities' of the NAG council on this so-called 'normal' model but we suspect all that will do in their models is add costs and make it more uneconomic.

We are now suspicious that that is exactly where they are heading so they can conclude that an NRUC will not work.

We have tried to get them to agree to an open and transparent evaluation approach. We have asked them some very pertinent questions such as:

1. *What criteria did the Commission use in selecting consultants for the assessment role and what qualifications and expertise do they have in evaluating economies of scale and scope across different organizational forms.*
2. *What are the assumptions and methodology the consultants are using in their modeling of alternatives? Why are these not being disclosed either to us or to the public now? (At the meeting the consultants outlined their general assessment principles, framework and draft general assumption., They did not identify any reasons or basis for, their approach, or how and why the options selected for the long list were chosen. There is no explanation for how their modeling will evaluate and rank the alternatives and what criteria will be used.)*
3. *Why has leaving disclosure of the terms of reference of the consultants and methodology until after their independent assessment is publicly released been the "standard practice" of the Commission?*
4. *Why can that not be changed to reflect the type of transparent approach to modeling and assessment shown by the regulatory branch of the Commerce Commission?*
5. *How were the long list alternatives chosen? What criteria were used for inclusion to the list?*
6. *Why is the original NAG application (unmodified) not one of the items to be evaluated? Will it be modeled and evaluated separately anyway and is the long list just for alternatives?*
7. *Why does the Commission consider it does not have power to make Auckland Council devolve more power to local Boards?*
8. *Why was David Hay's alternative proposal included at this late stage in the assessment?*
9. *Have other alternatives proposals been received which have not been included?*

We have received no answers to any of these and they seem to be proceeding 'behind closed doors'. They have no intention of proceeding in an engaging way with us until they have decided on a 'preferred option' which may not be anything like what this Community so overwhelmingly asked for.

We feel this whole process has now departed from the prescribed path in the legislation and could well be grounds for an appeal in the High Court if they don't arrive at a conclusion which meets our communities' needs.

Now for the good news.

Thanks to the generous support of our donor community and, in particular, one individual who does not wish to be named, we now think we are able to conduct

some serious publicity - much needed to boost our campaign going into this year's general election.

To do that effectively we need to find a professional PR person. Someone who is committed to our goal and can design and implement the right strategy.

The need for NR to get out of AC must become an election issue. We are a non-political organisation but it appears to be the National Party caucus who are driving the amalgamation concept ideologically. Other parties who have a view seem to recognize that amalgamation is not a one-size-fits-all solution and rural and coastal community districts like North Rodney should never be run by a bureaucratic and urban centric council that is remote from them and does not understand our needs and wants. We need our politicians to understand that it is the overwhelming desire of the people of North Rodney to get better local government through self-determination.

To support the strategy, we need a local 'front man' with the necessary profile and commitment to promote and represent our campaign to the people so our voice of disapproval will be heard loud and clear in the corridors of power.

If you have any ideas who could fill such 'large boots' in our community please let us know immediately as we want to get the campaign underway without delay.

Annual General Meeting

We will be having our AGM on **June 26th at 7.30pm in the Totara Park Retirement Village hall, 5 Melwood Drive, Warkworth.**

Please note it in your diaries

Greg Sayers will be our guest speaker and he's going to tell us what is really going on inside Auckland Council.

We have decided to open the meeting to the wider community and invite all comers. This has been advertised in the next issue of Mahurangi Matters accordingly.

I hope to see you all there!

Yours sincerely

Bill Townson
Chair - Northern Action Group Inc.

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