



## FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK

**20 YEARS: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN CURRENT CHAIRMAN ALAN DICK AND REGIONAL COUNCILLOR EWAN MCGREGOR WHO WERE BOTH AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF HAWKE'S BAY REGIONAL COUNCIL ON 8 NOVEMBER 1989.**

**Ewan McGregor:** Well Alan, things have certainly changed since we were on the old Harbour Board. I remember thinking, as the inevitability of restructuring and therefore the end of the Board loomed, that there was nothing wrong with the status quo. But things have changed so much.

**Alan Dick:** I recall how many organisations there were before 1989. It was the first national shake up of local government since 1876 and the abolition of provincial councils. There was the Hawke's Bay United Council, the Catchment Board, Regional Water board, two Pest Destruction boards, four noxious plants authorities and the Harbour Board. There was no way we could have coped with the changes and the increasing complexity of the work over the last twenty years with that conglomeration.

**EM:** Exactly. You just need to look at what we now call biodiversity – it involves plant pest control (which the noxious plant authorities would have dealt with), animal pest control (the pest destruction boards), soil conservation (catchment boards) plus financial assistance (courtesy of the Harbour Board assets). It would have been no mean feat to get them all together to restore Pekapeka Wetland or Tangoio Reserve for instance!

**AD:** The same applies to so many areas of our work – river control and flood management, the recent sawfly issue, coastal hazards and water quality issues. A regional authority has policy, science, engineering and management staff that can tackle these things together... made even easier when we moved into the new building at the end of 2005.

**EM:** I think that Regional Councils have helped to bring town and country closer too. Water is perhaps the most important example of this. We all need water and use it and what happens in the headwaters has an effect right down to the coast, and both towns and rural land have an impact. Much easier to have one authority that is managing whole river catchments.

**AD:** And yet Warren Cooper's reforms in 1992 really threatened the existence of regional councils. I must say that we are only now hitting our straps and doing what we are mandated for... and yet we are in a similar phase of having our role questioned.



**Hawke's Bay Regional Council and key staff at the first meeting 8 November 1989.**

**Back Row from left:** Megan Williams (Cr), Rob van Voorthuysen, Ewan McGregor (Cr), Anne Tolley (Cr, now Minister of Education), the late Selwyn Begley (Cr), Lisa Pearce, Dinah Williams (Cr), the late Dudley Hawkes (General Manager), the late Jeremy Dwyer (former Mayor of Hastings), Sam Robinson (Cr, now Chairman of AgResearch), Rex McIntyre (Cr), Andrew Caseley (became General Manager 1994), Joan Roberts, Mike Healey.

**Front Row:** Takis Koutsos, Alan Dick (Cr and now current HBRC Chairman), Harry Romanes (Cr), David Marshall (Cr), Dave Prebensen (former Napier Mayor), the late Doug Walker (the first HBRC Chairman), Les Probert (current Mayor of Wairoa).

**EM:** That first Council, you will recall, had 14 members, which was reduced to nine through the 1992 restructuring. I didn't think that was a great idea as I was, with Sam Robinson, a CHB representative and in the 1992 election I came second. And it's interesting to see where those inaugural councillors are now. Several have retired, and sadly Jeremy Dwyer, Doug Walker and Selwyn Begley are no longer with us. But Les Probert is Mayor of Wairoa, Sam Robinson is now Chairman of AgResearch, Anne Tolley is now Minister of Education, and you and I are back on Council.

**AD:** There were some challenges for that first council to get up and running. But it kept the Port income and Harbour Board leasehold land. The Council has used its wealth well to keep the rates low and, particularly recently to make new investments with both economic and environmental, benefits.

**EM:** In those early days we had a big focus on flood control and erosion control, essential after Cyclone Bola, and we were the first regional council to support the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust with covenants for bush and wetland areas. But over time the resource management role has really developed. Possum control has been a big win though especially with farmers getting on board with the PCA programme, and now the first urban control resulting in more birds and better trees on Napier Hill.

**AD:** As for air quality – trying to reduce air pollution in our cities is a big challenge for everyone, and is certainly something we would never imagine as a problem back in 1989. The other role that has grown is transport, with the Government's roading funding being allocated through our Regional Transport Committee. Transport affects so many crucial sectors of the economy and community, and needs good forward planning.

**EM:** On a lighter note Alan, I recall one occasion on the first council you had to absent yourself from a meeting for an hour or so to

go out to Esk Valley Winery in your capacity as Mayor to open a "tourist vineyard". Upon your return you said, "Boy, that could have been embarrassing. When I was being introduced I realised that it was a "terraced" vineyard – my PA had mis-heard it. It was the quickest mental rewrite of a speech I have ever done".

**AD:** Okay Ewan, but what about the time you attended a meeting in your pyjamas?

**EM:** Oh come on Alan, it was only a small and informal meeting, and I was only up the Hill in the Napier Hospital. I was there with a smashed up leg, and getting bored but I knew there was a small workshop at Council on getting more trees into Hawke's Bay. So I called a taxi and went AWOL for a couple of hours. I wasn't missed on the ward, and although it's a bit bizarre, you've got to admire the commitment!

Anyway, what of the next 20 years Alan? I've got a feeling that the challenges may make those of the last two decades seem rather tame.

**AD:** It will be challenging I think – not just for the council but for the whole community. The amalgamation debate has taken off again, but who knows what that will mean for Hawke's Bay. There's something to be said for regional governance, but then smaller councils based on districts have a lot of advantages too. I don't think environmental management will get any easier because although people are more environmentally aware, they do expect more from the regional council. Water will become increasingly challenging, soil quality will be a bigger issue, more work is needed on increasing biodiversity... and with climate change on the world's agenda, heaven knows what the Government will be needing us to do to meet global commitments. Enough to keep the Regional Council busy for the next 20 years at least!



Cr Ewan McGregor Hastings



Cr Liz Remmerswaal Hastings

## COUNCILLOR PORTFOLIOS

Cr Ewan McGregor represents the Hastings Constituency. A farmer and forester all his life, he has always recognised that environmentalism is an essential part of commercial agriculture, with a particular focus on the integration of trees into farming systems and the region's landscapes.

Ewan oversees the portfolio for land use and its environmental effects. This is a pressing issue in Hawke's Bay, especially with the recent expansion of dairying and the downturn in new forestry plantings, which has frustrated the conversion of eroding hill country to trees.

"One of the foremost challenges for the Regional Council is to accommodate pressure for more intensive production without compromising the environment," he says.

Ewan sees many inspiring public and private environmental initiatives and projects in both urban and rural Hawke's Bay, often with significant support and leadership from the Council. But having been an original Regional Councillor in 1989, he well appreciates that there are always new challenges emerging to test resolve and resources... such as climate change.

Climate change is the portfolio of Cr Liz Remmerswaal. She has represented the Hastings constituency since 2007, is the Councillor appointed to the Rotary Pathways group and is a member of the Karamu Stream Care group.

Liz recently attended a United Nations climate change workshop in Vanuatu (self funded) with representatives from the Pacific region.

"In contrast to New Zealand, there was no-one denying this problem: the focus was on how to survive and convince the rest of us to reduce our emissions. Pacific people don't cause the dramatic increase in carbon dioxide which warms the planet, but they have to live with its terrible consequences every day. It is threatening the islands by destroying their coral reefs, increasing pests and weeds, eroding their shorelines and causing catastrophic pollution."

She says the Regional Council has a range of climate change-related initiatives, but it is the actions of society as a whole, voluntarily, that will really make the difference. "We can all make changes as individuals, as families, and as colleagues. After all, as someone once said "If not you, then who? If not now, then when?" And I can add "And if not Earth, then where?"