**EIT Presentation on Tukituki Issues**

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**1. The Greatest Gamble Ever**

My presentation focuses on risks and uncertainties in the Council’s Tukituki plans. Uncertainties that are not being shared with the public, rendering the Regional Council’s current consultation – and especially this document – at best, deceptive.

With or without a dam, the Council must take steps to maintain and enhance river quality. This involves both cleaning up the river – removing, not adding nutrients – and improving summer flows that are too low.

**2. Environmental versus economic perspective**

Taking an environmental perspective, one would start by determining the water quality levels and the flows required to safeguard the river, then identify threats to providing that protection, then require practices by which those threats could be managed to yield the necessary water quality.

However the Council views the Tuki as an asset for promoting economic development. Starting with that goal, they estimate the polluting effects of increased production, then suggest mitigating those effects only to the degree that farmers are not ‘unduly’ burdened. You need to maximise the financial return to the scheme, you see.

For now, we can’t do anything about the prevailing Council ethos, other than identify the risks it presents … educate the public, lobby and attempt to negotiate for improvement … and if negotiation fails, ultimately engage in legal challenge.

So, what are the risks in the Council’s approach?

**3. Sniff Test**

Let’s begin with a sniff test. On the one hand, the Council concedes, after years of denial, that both nitrogen and phosphorus pollution is a problem for the Tuki and must be managed.

But on the other hand, they propose a farming intensification scheme that – at the very least – will double dairying in CHB and increase arable farming and horticulture as significantly, which could be even more harmful environmentally.

But here’s the good news – they tell us this massive increase in intensive farming – moving from 6000 irrigated hectares to 25,000, maybe more, will cause only a 25% increase in nitrogen in the river and 20% more phosphorus.

And for that the environment should be thankful.

Does that smell right to you?

**4. Superstar Farmers – The Top 20%**

Even that ‘acceptable’ amount of added pollution is based on a key assumption about farmers and farming practices. Namely, that ‘best practices’ associated theoretically with the top 20% of farmers, like Bruce Wills and Hugh, will be embraced, voluntarily, by 100% of the farmers who will be intensifying their farming. They’ve not bothered to model the leaching and runoff impact based on more likely outcomes.

Let me read you these comments from a national leader of NZ farming.

Beef & Lamb NZ chair Mike Petersen laments that the farmers who come to science days, where best practices are promoted, are already best performers, while “many remain content to stay home and do what they’re doing. Engaging with that group is still the biggest nut to crack. We talk to farmers about this all the time and to our farmers’ council and ask, ‘how do we change that?’ In the end we have to accept that many have no desire whatsoever to change and *that’s their prerogative*.”

Sorry. Not their prerogative. If there’s to be private use of the public’s water, best practices must be identified and mandated by regulation.

The mitigation measures outlined in Tuki Choices (p44) are implied to be in effect throughout the catchment. However, in fact the regime that the Regional Council would propose is yet to be fleshed out or committed to. The single document that discusses the mitigation regime is tilted toward education and voluntary self-management.

Truth be told, proponents expect the real mitigation to come from farms turning over – it’s predicted that 70% of land will change hands. Better farmers will come along we’re told in private conversations.

**5. Better news – the additional pollution won’t hurt the environment**

Anyway, don’t get too up tight about this leaching and runoff, says the Council. Why? Because we’re going to measure water quality differently. The Council is proposing to use new standards that effectively allow higher levels of pollution than existing levels in the river.

They only tabled these new standards in the last month of a 2-year ‘consultation’ process, at our August Stakeholder meetings. But unless you know what standards the Council plans to manage the catchment against, and are satisfied that they are appropriate, none of the other decisions can be reasonably made – how much mitigation effort will be required, at what cost, how will that added cost affect the economic position of individual farmers and the overall economic feasibility of the dam project?

From environmentalists’ standpoint, those judgments are yet to be made on an informed basis. We have demanded and are awaiting the opportunity for our own science experts to review the standards, how and where they would be applied, and the information gaps that still remain.

Yet our reservations are nowhere mentioned in this Tuki fairy tale. Nor in this bit of Council propaganda (regerring to the HBRC’s mailing to every ratepayer in HB). Why? Because the HBRC is determined to forge ahead with this scheme, no matter what.

**6. Thank god for the Environment Court!**

While the HBRC pushes on hellbent, two weeks ago the Environment Court issued its so-called One Plan decision, dealing with the plan for cleaning up freshwater in the Manawatu-Wanganui region.

The One Plan is a serious clean-up initiative, and the Court said in the strongest terms possible that farmers, by regulation, will need to meet stringent environmental standards so as to restore the health of waterways in that region. If farmers do not wish to comply with the new regime, they can, to paraphrase the Court, sell up and find other work.

This landmark decision will become the benchmark against which other regional plans, including ours will be judged.

Presumably the RC is studying this decision carefully and reflecting on the change in attitude and approach it will require of our water management in HB. One more reason to slow this process down.

We environmentalists have studied the decision … and we are determined to see its key elements incorporated in the Council’s Tukituki plan, either as the Council drafts its plan change, or failing that, when it is ordered to do so after legal challenge.

**7. A win/win – for accountants and outside investors**

So, is there a win/win here? For whom?

This is a $600 million project.

Not counting the $40 million HBRC plans to spend on tree planting on hill country farms to curb soil erosion that would compromise the dam.

Not counting unidentified financial incentives to get extremely reluctant farmers to buy into the scheme.

And not counting the hundreds of millions in additional investment dollars required to buy all that CHB farmland from the presumed 70% of exiting farmers.

Where’s all that money coming from? Who will wind up owning the storage scheme itself? Who will wind up owning the land?

And these new owners of our water and land … what will be their interest in protecting the environment and our recreational values here in HB?

Do you see any of that discussed in this *Tukituki Choices* document? The Council can barely bring itself to even mention in passing the basic $600 million cost of the dam.

All you see here in these four scenarios are unsubstantiated blue sky projections about the stupendous economic return this dam will create … and conversely, and equally unsubstantiated, all the economic doom that will be caused if Hawke’s Bay bows to environmental values.

Skeptics haven’t seen, let alone independently assessed, a single spreadsheet or report backing up any of these claims.

[There’s one paper on farm economics on the Council’s website, dated Sep 5.]

But you are nevertheless given 17 days from now to comment intelligently.

**8. Risks & Uncertainties**

Where does that leave us today? With these risks and uncertainties.

* Get the water quality standards wrong, and/or mis-apply them in the catchment
* Fail to deliver the higher minimum flows promised
* Miscalculate the additional amount of pollution intensified farming will produce
* Adopt too weak, non-mandatory mitigation measures
* Over-estimate adoption of best practices
* Under-estimate the costs of controlling the pollution
* Insufficient farmers subscribe to the scheme
* Lose local control of our water, our land and the profits

We’re asked to tolerate all these risks, to take the gamble, by a Regional Council that has zero equity in terms of credibility with the region’s environmental leaders. This is the Council that has allowed the river to get to the state it’s in today.

**9. Homer Simpson slide**

Ridiculously, the Council wants you to evaluate all this in one month, actually 17 more days until October 5th.

The Council’s timetable for public consultation and its disinformation reflects its true opinion of YOU.

The Regional Council thinks you are too lazy or too incapable to question any of this.

**10. Time and Vote**

I don’t think you are. However I think you need two things:

1. Time. More time for you to actually absorb the facts, when they are finally available, and to understand their full implications.

2. Opportunity. This is too monumental a decision to be made six weeks from now by nine councillors. It’s a decision about fundamental community values. This decision should be made by YOU, by referendum, AFTER the Council completes the needed homework, fleshes out key aspects of its plan that are now far too vague, and puts the issue back before ratepayers who are then as informed as you need to be given the importance of the issue.

In the meantime, the sky will not fall on HB.

Ends

HBRC Reports *still being finalized*:

* Tukituki river catchment: Identifying the native fish values
* Papanui Catchment; an Environmental Characterisation
* Economic Impact of Minimum Flow Proposals
* Economic Impacts of Future Scenarios for the Tukituki River
* Hydrology of the Tukituki Catchment
* Tukituki Catchment: Modelling the Impacts of Groundwater and Surface Water Abstraction
* Ruataniwha Plains Groundwater Quality State and Trends
* Water Quality Limits setting for nitrate toxicity and nitrogen load calculations - technical memorandum