**Dam Vote Comments – Tom Belford, July 8, 2016**

Mr Chairman, I’d like to give some context for my vote today. Cr Hewitt often enthuses over the journey this proposal has taken. Well, this is my journey.

I first wrote about the Tukituki and its issues in September 2007, in an article titled *Tukituki Disinformation*. Those were days of total denial by HBRC that the river had problems.

But people were getting aroused about freshwater issues. And by year’s end, MP’s Foss and Tremain had not only visited the CHB poo ponds, but also were “*calling for an assurance from the HBRC that the Mohaka is in as pristine condition as the people of Hawke’s Bay believe and expect it to be.”*

By March 2008, Councillor Ewan McGregor wrote in *BayBuzz*: *“The gap in appreciation of the state of the (Tukituki) river between those responsible for its health and those who are dissatisfied with it is too wide to accept … Let’s build a bridge to cross the Tukituki divide.”*

But later that year, Councillor Scott and her Hearings Committee colleagues overruled staff, who had advised already that the river was over-allocated, and awarded consents for another 215,000 cubes per week to a handful of dairy farmers.

However, there was a modest breakthrough in 2009, when NIWA was called in by HBRC for an evaluation of the Tuki’s water quality. NIWA in large part supported the complaints of local environmentalists. The spotlight was on the wastewater discharge dumped into the Tukituki by the Waipukurau and Waipawa sewage treatment ponds.

Also in 2009 was my first learning of a possible water storage scheme for the catchment.

A few years of unsuccessful HBRC/CHB skirmishing over the poo ponds ensued, while much more quietly, work began on the storage scheme.

That work blossomed by early 2012, when the proposition, then a mere $170 million dam (now $345 million), was floated during the LTP process. A *BayBuzz* article that May reported:

*“The water storage scheme is floated in HBRC’s Long Term Plan (for 2012-2022), which must be adopted by June 30. Yet key decisions about water quality standards, allocation mechanisms, and mitigation practices and enforcement are yet to be made.*

*In fact, the key land use and environmental studies have not been completed and released to the public.*

*Yet the public’s opportunity to comment on the dam proposal will end on May 16. It seems the Regional Council has put the cart before the horse … perhaps leaving its process open to challenge.”*

How true!

And it got worse. Later that year in October, the infamous *Tukituki Choices* was put forward, supposedly testing various water management options for the catchment. It was called “thinly disguised propaganda” that “treats the reader as an idiot” by Cr Gilbertson, a dam supporter. But for such heresies he was promptly replaced by Cr Hewitt, who had been chairing the stakeholder group intended to promote the dam.

However, the environmental stakeholders on the group, after a nearly two-year process that became increasingly fractious, strongly rejected both *Tukituki Choices* and concurrently the *Pre-feasibility Report* compiled by HBRC staff and consultants.

That report recommended the dam was a goer, suited for hand-off to the freshly-minted HBRIC.

And as HBRIC Chairman Andy Pearce often points out, HBRIC has since steadfastly pursued the mission assigned by HBRC – get the dam built! And soon the Board of Inquiry was launched.

I think everyone is familiar with the story from that point. Most important was HBRC/HBRIC’s opposition to tougher environmental safeguards for the Tuki … safeguards the BoI ultimately endorsed.

Here’s my point. Any trust the environmental community might have had in this Council’s commitment to protect environmental values in the catchment was steadily undermined by over nine years of mismanagement of, first, the catchment itself, and then the policy planning around it.

The dam is presented as enabling a win/win outcome for the environment and the economy.

Yet nothing I have witnessed over those nine years, and particularly over the 32 months I have served as a councillor, waiting for evidence to the contrary, gives me any confidence that HBRIC or the HBRC, despite the framework imposed upon them by the Board of Inquiry, will conscientiously and effectively mitigate the damage to be done by intensified farming triggered by this dam.

I hope I am wrong about that. But I relate all this to explain the basis of my persistent questioning of this project.

I have concerns about its operational and financial viability and risks as well, and the cursory public-excluded ‘review’ we’ve been offered today. A process that epitomizes the key players’ lack of respect for public accountability. But a totally consistent performance in a process that could not have been better designed to create distrust and ill will toward the Regional Council and HBRIC.

I might swallow these other concerns if they were not so over-shadowed by my conclusion – reinforced over time – that this project will bring about further degradation of the Tukituki.

So, today I’m voting against ticking the boxes that would advance *this* dam, based upon what I’ve learnt during my years’ long involvement with its incubation and with its advocates. It is not a vote against water storage achievable in other ways, in other places, and with better consequences.

More importantly, I am voting against this dam to give voice to those I believe constitute the majority of the attentive public who are not convinced this project can or will satisfy either its environmental or economic claims … and want it stopped.

These are people who for four years have submitted, signed petitions, sent texts and letters to the media, and approached me almost daily to express their objections to the project and voice their distrust of this Council.

They expect and deserve representation, and I am proud to acknowledge their concerns by voting against progressing this project today.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.