

Standing again for Regional Council

I'm proud to be nominated as a candidate for the HB Regional Council by two of my long-time citizen heroes and friends – Chris Ryan, with whom I co-led the petition campaign that gathered over 10,000 names to reject the planned development of 900 homes at Ocean Beach; and David Renouf, who first educated me about the degraded state of the Tukituki back in 2006 and has held my feet to the fire on water issues ever since.

I'm not a career councillor, 'born again' as an environmentalist – I didn't discover the environmental challenges facing our region – fracking, GMOs, giveaway water bottling, renewable energy – just in time for this year's election campaign.

As a regional councillor, I've listened daily to people across Hawke's Bay about their concerns. I've done the homework, read the reports, challenged staff, dug into the issues. And, as editor of *BayBuzz*, I've reported on the key issues with depth, independence and persistence.

I've sounded alarms when needed, because I care about our future. A few might call this 'negative', but many, many more, who are eager to make Hawke's Bay better, have urged me on.

- They've urged me to fight against allowing cow poo and treatment pond overflows to ruin the Tukituki and the aquifer it feeds. To protect our aquifer waters from fracking. And to protect that water from exploitation in other ways, like giveaway water bottling that may prove unsustainable and generate no wealth for our community.
- They've urged me to mount the toughest possible challenge to a dam that will further degrade the Tukituki and risk council's (i.e., ratepayers') financial security and jeopardise its Port asset.
- They've urged me to fight for transparency, now sorely lacking, in council decision-making.

What about the opportunities ahead?

The choices we make in the next few years – about protecting our waterways and aquifers, positioning our primary producers to compete in demanding overseas markets, ensuring the resilience of our environment and economy in the face of global warming, safeguarding key assets, from our Port to our productive soils – will define Hawke's Bay for decades.

If given another term in the Regional Council, I will focus on:

- Getting it right on water, whether the issue is water storage, drinking water, swimmable rivers and beaches, water bottling, protecting aquifers and marine fisheries, or water security for growers.

- Protecting and restoring the hill country land that constitutes so much of Hawke's Bay, but whose invaluable and irreplaceable soils now erode by the millions of tonnes per year into our rivers and ultimately our marine environment, fouling both.
- Helping our primary sector create more sustainable value by supporting best practice adoption and by focusing on premium products (safe, GMO-free, environmentally sound) for discerning overseas consumers.
- Accelerating diversification to create more value and jobs from the knowledge, creative/cultural and innovation mini-economies that are quietly growing in Hawke's Bay, at no environmental cost.
- Making Hawke's Bay an envied region in terms of efficient, planet-friendly use of renewable energy – from solar power to electric cars to bio-energy.

All these goals are mutually compatible and achievable, if we smartly use our local brainpower (that's now under-tapped), draw upon best practices from beyond our region, and choose our direction only after inclusive and transparent debate.

But before we can achieve any of that we must regain the public trust this Regional Council has squandered.

As a regional councillor, I've seen the dangers from fixation on one all-consuming project that benefits too few. From unquestioning deference to staff agendas and control of information. From secrecy and 'box ticking' consultation. From disregard – sometimes disdain – of talent and expertise sitting right here in the Bay. From councillors who simply salute as a habit.

The tough choices ahead regarding priorities for moving forward and optimum use of ratepayer dollars cannot be made by a council whose 'trust account' is empty.

So, if re-elected, my first and ongoing priority will be to rebuild trust and confidence in our Regional Council.

I hope to have your support!

Tom