

BAY BUZZ

BayBuzz Questions for Wairoa District Mayoral Candidates

No response to questions: Kurawari Panere

Do you support the flood diversion scheme for North Clyde recommended by Crown Manager Lawrence Yule, the Regional Council and current Wairoa Council?

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: I absolutely support improved flood protection for our community. The model presented by Lawrence Yule provides a strong starting point, and I understand that further refinement is underway to ensure the best outcomes for Wairoa. It's vital we get this right for the future of North Clyde and the wider district.

Craig Little: Yes – our priority must be protecting our town from future flood events. I remain grateful to the Government for providing \$70million for this project to help protect our community. I fought long and hard to secure and ring-fence the funding for Wairoa, and I believe this presents an enormous opportunity for our town, which is vulnerable to flooding and has never had any flood mitigation measures in place in the past.

Camden Gaskin: I don't support the option of Lawrence Yule. I am asking for a Royal Commission of inquiry for Cyclone Gabriel. His brief was not to look at the cause only the results. It would be a waste of tax payers money (\$70 million) if the river could be rectified by stopping the cause not the result. Genesis energy control the flood gates from Turangi. The weather forecast was wrong and not corrected. The flood gates were opened 600 ft above Wairoa at Kaitawa and Tuai. Could this have been avoided? The last flood gates were opened at 10.30pm at Tuai, 4 hours later Wairoa flooded. The timing should be looked at.

The audit process for pine forest harvest is a responsibility of the Hawkes Bay Regional Council, was this a successful outcome? Forest slash takes out bridges that ratepayers pay for. The speed of the river flow has been suspected to be a dominant factor in the flood, how much effort has been given to this issue and can it be resolved to help stop the river from flooding. Either by dredging, better audit process in forest harvest, and control of the flood gates for safety not profits.

Genesis energy was in the process of changing turbines and time is money, was this a factor in the flood gates being opened?

Could control gates be used during Cyclone events? There are several places along the river where control gates could be used to dam the river when required.

If the safety of the town is not guaranteed Maori as guardians of the lakes and rivers should have control of the flood gates.

Name 2-3 specific WDC projects, policies or spends over the past three years with which you personally disagree.

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: As someone who has served at the Council table, I have stood by the decisions made during this term — they've been the result of robust discussion and collective governance. This question may be better directed to new candidates offering an outside perspective. My focus remains on building on what's working and identifying opportunities to strengthen future decision-making.

Craig Little: I support the supply of safe drinking water. However, because both the current and previous Governments have had reforms in this space, through 3 Waters and Local Waters Done Well, there have been unnecessary bureaucratic costs imposed on local government. Our Council has had to invest a significant amount of time and money supplying information to meet the changing and legislative requirements of Central Government.

The cost of compliance because of government acts, legislation and laws: Council is being expected to do more, but is often not provided with matching income streams. An example is the cost in a Civil Defence emergency, many of these expenses fall on the ratepayer, with limited associated funding from Central Government.

Camden Gaskin: Maori ward district councilor Bernetta Cairns was in charge of the District Councils \$500,000 upgrades to the playground at Tuai Village. Nothing has happened. I am concerned about this after attending a Maori Land Court hearing where Bernetta Cairns and other trustees were taken to task after not having filed tax returns for 5 years. I personally believe she is standing on the mana of the candidates by standing for another term.

What Council spending or other initiatives would you support to improve Wairoa's economic well-being?

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: I strongly support investment that creates employment, boosts local business resilience, and leverages external partnerships. Securing central government support for infrastructure and regional development projects is essential, as is continuing to back initiatives that grow skills, jobs, and opportunities for our whānau — especially young people.

Craig Little: My biggest concern is the government removing the four wellbeings (social, economic, cultural, and environmental) out of local government through the Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill. The government and its agencies are presently failing to deliver core services, leaving massive gaps, which is why councils have had to step in to support their communities. We need a guarantee from central government that if they remove the wellbeings that they will fill the void. I am all for Councils doing the basics well, but we are constantly picking up the pieces of other agencies that aren't delivering the services they are paid to deliver - and Councils are not compensated for this work. This wide-ranging and generalised approach could have very negative consequences on small, isolated communities like Wairoa, as we would not be able to focus and advocate on behalf of our community.

We are working on a Special Economic Zone for Wairoa to enable our district to realise its unique economic opportunities and achieve local, regional and national benefits.

We need a decision made on the future of rail within the Wairoa district so we can look at other options, such as cycleways and tourism.

It is encouraging to see the current government trying to lessen some of the regulations that everyone in our country has to abide by. However, they have a long way to go to get to a place where good old-fashioned kiwi ingenuity is not being stifled by legislation and costs. We need funding initiatives to help those not yet back in their homes and still suffering financially from Cyclone Gabrielle and the June HBRC flood event, and to support housing initiatives involving iwi and other stakeholders.

Camden Gaskin: There is a opportunity for a \$20 million dollars investment in hydro generation for Wairoa which I estimate would give free or very cheap electricity and pay for water infrastructure without rate payers money.

Free wifi for Wairoa District. Free or cheap power is needed now, and this alone will grow Wairoa. Microwave technology is now low cost and ratepayers can stop paying for phone accounts

Medical cannabis license for 200 contract growers, employees for \$3k a week.
Medical cannabis at \$100 a ounce using sunlight using police numbers this is achievable now.
200 container village for owner occupied freehold retirement

200 container village owner occupied and short term rental homes
This should give \$100k a week to retailers in Wairoa.

We need the Race course and passenger rail services back, It's been 5 years since the racing industry was regulated and it has failed, no decision has been made for the railway line to open, we are waiting. Revitalise racing course, bookies, jackpots night racing and event management.

Revitalise low cost pub drinking with brewery with mead to help the bee industry Distillation for top self and Ethanol for mixing with petrol to make a cheaper and better fuel.

Unlike Napier, Hastings and CHB Councils (who are forming a joint water entity), Wairoa Council has decided to 'go it alone' with respect to delivering water services. Do you agree?

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: Yes — I support the decision to establish a single Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) for water services in Wairoa. We've considered the long-term needs of our district and believe local control is vital to ensure our infrastructure is fit for purpose, resilient, and able to support our community in times of need. Due diligence was a key part of this decision.

Craig Little: Yes, the Council made the right decision. The best choice for Wairoa is to develop a localised plan and deliver it smartly, utilising Wairoa's nimbleness and drawing on specialised expertise where needed. We haven't shut the door on future relationships with Hawke's Bay, Tairāwhiti or anywhere else, and have retained flexibility to collaborate and cooperate with other water entities from other districts and to be adaptive around potential changes and standards. Wairoa has already experienced the detrimental impacts of removing localised services and delivering them from a more regionalised approach. It is also important to protect our localised arrangements, such as the water partnership with our biggest employer, the Affco processing plant.

Camden Gaskin: Yes I support the option of going alone but I will support water management for farmers and industrial use. If farmers have free power supply and unlimited water farmers would have the chance to keep cattle for 2 year cycles for restaurant grade sales and better income, diversity into stone fruit, and intense farming.

Most WDC debt relates to the need to maintain and improve its water assets, with significant improvement required. Should WDC step up its borrowing to make these improvements?

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: Council has a responsibility to provide safe and reliable infrastructure, particularly for water. That means investing wisely and, where necessary, borrowing prudently. We must ensure any borrowing decisions are sustainable and carefully balanced against the capacity of our ratepayers.

Craig Little: Wairoa's three waters, like the rest of the country, can be improved, but I don't believe 'significant improvement' is needed in Wairoa. Until the new CCO is formed, Wairoa District Council remains responsible for three water services and will continue business as usual. Under a new CCO, there will be more headroom to borrow; however, it is important that the new entity is prudent in its borrowings, ensuring it does not become unaffordable to the people connected to the services.

Camden Gaskin: By building a electricity department first the cash flow from power generation can also pay for water infrastructure without rate increases.

WDC current policy aims to limit rate increases to 5%. But this assumed WDC joined a regional water services entity, off-loading current debt and borrowing costs, which it has now declined to do (as noted above). Do you believe WDC rate increases can be kept to 5%? How?

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: I believe it is possible to keep rate increases within a manageable range, and Council should always be working towards that. This requires careful financial management, prioritisation of spending, and exploring alternative funding sources. It's about doing the basics well, being transparent with the community, and staying focused on essential services.

Craig Little: We are always committed to keeping rates as low as possible. The cost of running a Council is based on the levels of service the community want. I believe rate increases can be kept to 5% but the levels of service delivered would reflect that. This is a conversation we again need to have with our community.

In conjunction with that, we also need to continue advocating to receive external funding. I have been very successful in lobbying MPs and government agencies over the past few years, and I will continue to do so, which has significantly contributed to achieving this year's average rates increase of 5.2% - the lowest in Hawke's Bay and one of the lowest in the country. We are grateful for the attention, support and funding we have received from the Central Government. A single CCO operating Wairoa's three water services will have a very similar funding model to that of Wairoa joining a regional or any other model.

Camden Gaskin: Ratepayers can decide on rate increases.

As an example, If 4000 households no longer need to pay for phone and data accounts saving a \$100 a month the council could absorb the extra data use and only the outlay is the transmission equipment required .A transmission company is easy to set up. If ratepayers own the power company they will have free or lower cost power, this will help grow Wairoa.

Do you believe councils' rates should be 'capped' by legislation?

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: I'm open to any approach that genuinely keeps rates affordable while still enabling councils to deliver the essential services our communities depend on. A legislative cap could be part of that discussion, but it's not the only solution. Affordability is a real concern for many households — and it's a concern I share. What matters most is responsible financial management, clear priorities, and making sure every dollar spent delivers real value for ratepayers.

Craig Little: I share the government's concern about increased rates. However, one size does not fit all, especially in Wairoa's case. If the government wants rates to be capped at 5% or less, then all other associated costs need to be capped at the same rate, ie, insurance, power, construction, roading, services, and government legislation costs – and we know this isn't possible. The government also needs to guarantee it will pay 100% for the effects of weather events - otherwise, we won't be able to progress as a district.

Camden Gaskin: Rate payers want lower rates, if this is the focus then it is achievable at least in the short term, times are hard and we can prepare for things to get worse. In Tuai we have a community garden, it works for us. Building council owned departments which make money will get rates down. I don't know another way to do this.

Does Hawke's Bay need five councils, or do you support amalgamation, in any form?

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: I do not support amalgamation. Each district has unique needs and strengths. Local representation matters, and I believe Wairoa is best served by decisions made here, by people who live and work in our community.

Craig Little: Wairoa has seen the impacts of the erosion of services and centralisation, and it has not been kind to us. Our isolation means one local authority for the whole of Hawke's Bay would not serve us well. A sad but good example of this is Wairoa's continued battle to be heard at the Hawke's Bay Regional Council table.

Camden Gaskin: Amalgamation with Gisborne makes sense. And it could be done in 18 months.

Would you support Councils appointing an independent "Hawke's Bay Auditor General" to monitor councils' spending and programme performance?

Denise Eaglesome-Karekare: I support strong, independent monitoring of council performance — transparency and accountability are essential to maintaining public trust. Many oversight mechanisms already exist, particularly through central government agencies like the Department of Internal Affairs. However, if additional regional oversight adds value and builds public confidence, I would be open to exploring it further.

Craig Little: No, it would be another level of unnecessary bureaucracy. We need to address the elephant in the room, which is that the current funding model for local government is broken, not fit for purpose and needs urgent review.

Camden Gaskin: No. I don't see dishonesty or mismanagement so another level of concern would be expensive.

