



caring about you & your environment

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Report to Policy and Finance Committee

From: Councillor Buchanan, Environment Committee Chair

International Conference on Sustainable Development – Hamilton 12-13 March 2001

1. The Event

Together with Councillor Chris Laidlaw, Dr Jane Bradbury and Mr Geoff Skene I attended the above Conference. It involved local government representatives, generally Mayors or their deputies, from major cities in the Asia Pacific Region plus New Zealand local body representatives. It was part of a wider Conference and summit meeting under the auspices of ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives) as that group prepares the Local Government position for the next Earth Summit (Rio + 10) to be held on Johannesburg in 2002.

The focus of the Conference was on the pivotal role of local government worldwide in delivering on the promise of the Rio Summit and its associated “Agenda 21”. A range of local and international speakers provided a variety of insights on initiatives taken since 1992, including case histories from around the Asia Pacific region, business initiatives (New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development) and discussions on climate change and related matters.

2. Impressions

While not particularly well organised, and sometimes difficult to follow, the Conference never the less provided a good opportunity for exposure to ideas and actions taking place at local government level throughout the region. It also provided the time for us (WRC attendees) to focus on our own patch, what we are doing, why we are doing it and what is the wider context that we need to operate within.

3. The WRC Case

The development of our Long-Term Financial Strategy (LTFS) examined the principles of Agenda 21 in the context of “Local Agenda 21” and the notion of sustainability. This

now underpins the LTFS, and supports the resourcing over time of a range of “traditional” and “new” initiatives and actions. All of these actions contain elements, with varying emphasis, of the cornerstones of economic, social and environmental sustainability. Such traditional involvements as

- Pest management
- Rivers management
- Regional parks
- Soil conservation
- Public transport and transport planning
- Environmental standards (regional plans) etc

Plus some new involvements in:

- Biodiversity
- Environmental indicators
- Environmental education
- Community connections (care groups) etc

These are all excellent programmes that have, and deserve, the full support of our Council.

If, however, we genuinely want to involve ourselves in the concept of a “sustainable region” a lot more thought is required on how this could be achieved, and the relationships needed to achieve it. While we may be doing our bit, concentrated largely, but certainly not exclusively, on the biophysical environment, we have yet to make the necessary connections with the social and economic environments that make up the sustainability triangle. This therefore involves engaging with territorial local authorities, business and industry, farming, interest groups, NGO’s and the wider public in order to achieve, admittedly over a long time frame, the required behavioural and attitudinal shifts to achieve sustainability. This can only happen, in my view, as the result of countless small actions, as opposed to one big one. What is required is the development of a framework on “sustainability plan” within which those many small actions are given direction and meaning. This is not a plan that WRC can develop. It can only be done by the region. We do, however, have a great opportunity to facilitate the development of this framework, and this needs to be carefully researched and thought through. How we eventually do this will become the Local Agenda 21 approach for this Council (although I doubt whether we will brand it in these terms!).

Beginning with attendance of the “Redesigning Resources:” Conference in Christchurch in 2000 the General Manager, Divisional, Manager Environment and myself have been developing our understanding of how we may wish to develop this matter. Conferences, such as the one just attended, a one day international seminar I wish to attend in Auckland on 6 April 2001 and the Australian RMLA Conference on sustainability in Queensland from 9 to 11 May 2001 are all useful opportunities to gain knowledge and discuss ideas with many people that have already started down the sustainability path, particularly at local government level. I have also been invited by the Mayor of Honolulu and the Mayor of Waitakere to attend the Pacific Basin Mayors Forum on sustainable development in early May. While this may be stretching Council’s indulgence somewhat, it is certainly worth discussing as we develop our commitment to basing our sustainability initiatives on sound concepts and understanding of how it fits nationally and internationally.

I have been joined in my endeavours to develop the political context for advancing this by Councillor Laidlaw. I would like Council to consider providing the resources required to attend some of the important national and international fora, and to visit some

outstanding examples of sustainability initiatives such as in Waitakere, Hornsby (Sydney) and elsewhere in Australia. It is quite possible that some internal sponsorship may be available to assist in the costs involved but this has yet to be explored. I am grateful for the opportunity provided to date, and look forward to discussing this further with the Council.

COUNCILLOR IAN BUCHANAN
Environment Committee Chair