

Keith Morfett and Clare Backes



2 March 2017.

A submission in favour of local government reorganisation of the West Coast.

Originally from England we have lived in New Zealand since 1988 and on the same block of land in Hokitika, Westland since 1993.

During our time here in Westland we have had direct experience with both district and regional councils on many fronts including the subdivision of a 37 hectare block of bare land into 12 separate titles, the building of 5 new dwellings on those new titles and we are currently involved in another subdivision creating 5 further new titles.

Along with my partner we have built 3 businesses based in Hokitika

- Blue Spur Lodge – offered a variety of self-catering accommodation
- Wilderness Lakes – a guided fly fishing operation
- Clarke Creek Consultants Ltd. – designs, delivers and reviews emergency management training.

We both have PhDs in freshwater chemistry.

I have been a Search and Rescue volunteer for over 25 years and have played a major role in SAR operations from Haast to Motueka and Clare has been active in West Coast Conservation including an eight year term on the Tai Poutini Conservation board including two years as Chair.

Reasons for change.

Current local government structures were developed to suit a world that was far less connected than the world we live in. Modern communications and transport infrastructure has resulted in a world that is in effect smaller and far better integrated than ever before. The tyranny of distance and isolation no longer applies.

Four Councils presiding over approximately 30,000 people results in a massive duplication of personnel and services. Economies of scale would surely result in a more efficient use of the rate take.

We believe that the current local government structure does not facilitate the election or appointment of top quality councillors or, in some cases, council staff. Current structures seem to encourage parochialism and often result in council in-fighting, rampant conflicts of interest and council capture by a narrow minority of vocal influential local interests.

In summary we believe that local government reorganisation would result in a more integrated and effective promotion of the West Coast in general, more efficient and effective representation and administration and would better facilitate our economic and social development.

Suggested new structures and pathways to achieve them.

Ultimately we believe that the West Coast would be best served through a Unitary Council supported by strong and democratic community boards throughout the region.

We believe the best and most effective pathway to break down parochialism and build a unitary Council would be through a staged approach to the amalgamation of the current four West Coast Councils.

Phase 1. Integrated services including: planning, mining and agriculture, waste management, building and compliance etc.... providing efficient and consistent services for the entire West Coast.

Phase 2. The amalgamation of Westland and Grey district Councils.

Phase 3. The creation of a Unitary Council for the entire West Coast supported by strong democratic community boards.

To achieve these aims some strong external pressure and leadership will need to be applied. The current Westland Council is steeped in parochialism and is vocal in its opposition to any real local government reorganisation. This major hurdle to a more efficient local government structure may require considerable time and energy to overcome. The alternative scenario of a major breakdown of local government in Westland, fuelled by a misunderstanding of the practices and processes of governance, is also a possibility and may provide an opportunity for change.