

## West Coast Local Government Alternative Application

Last year the Local Government Commission received an application asking them to look at local government arrangements on the West Coast, with a view to making changes. In February 2017 LGC released a public notice inviting alternative applications or other more general proposals for change to local government arrangements on the West Coast. The questions asked of the commission are.

1. What are the big challenges and opportunities for the West Coast?
2. What do you like about the current way your councils are set up and the way services are delivered?
3. Is there anything about the current way your councils are set up and the way services are delivered, that you would like to change?
4. Are there any council services you think would be better delivered over a wider area as shared services by existing councils?
5. Should some council's be combined?

In my alternative application I propose to seek a more collaborative and efficient administration body for a combined West Coast Council. With the above 5 questions in mind my present thoughts are as follows.

The challengers we face are;

1. The West Coast has only one vote in Parliament, therefore it is on the back foot all the way.
2. Geography- the Buller, West Coast and Westland local body electorates stretches from Jacksons Bay in the South to Karamea in the North. (The same distance as from Wellington to Auckland.) It is insurmountable to expect a small population of 32,000 people working on 15% of the total land base to make ends meet, let alone to be expected to meet their rate commitments. Also the weather and the topography of the South Islands West Coast, are always challenging.

3. With a small population base, widely distributed, we face a very uncertain future. With TPP affecting all small towns throughout New Zealand; we on the West Coast are no exception. Under present government policy we are not likely to see any medium to large business development on the West Coast, while it is cheaper to import and build these products overseas.

With this in mind, our future is in developing tourism and making this a 12 month industry.

Unfortunately the majority of jobs in the tourist industry are low paid and seasonal, we now need to look at long term rate relief for our families living on the West Coast.

What government could do to help local body councils throughout NZ, is to apply a disposal tax on all imported goods to our country, this collection of monies is then given back to councils throughout the country, to be used for supporting council infrastructure related to rubbish collection, toilets and other tourist related amenities under the umbrella of DOC.

The new tax could be seen as a Keep New Zealand Tidy incentive, where user pays and the benefits of better kept towns and facilities for tourist are enjoyed.

And at the same time small towns like ours benefit from government support, supplying job opportunities, and the prospects of rate decreases on council amenities.

4. At the moment we have a large visitor/tourist load on our infrastructure, provided for by a small ratepayer base (Punakaiki has 500,000 visitors per year and about 30 ratepayers who live in the area.)
5. The West Coast has seen a large increase in tourism but unfortunately it is very seasonal, from September to the end of April. It is also a low wage industry, in most cases offering temporary employment only. There is also a problem with freedom campers traveling throughout NZ in their vans without toilet facilities, desecrating the remote parking areas beach fronts and side roads. This problem is placing an extremely high infrastructural load on our toilets and water supplied to these remote areas.

6. As mentioned we have large tracts of unrated land, these being DOC conservation estates, which return no income to our councils.
7. Parochialism is strong between Buller, Grey and Westland Councils as each district competes against the other two to maximise its own outcomes, rather than a combined West Coast one.
8. At the moment we have 3 elected Mayors vying for the same pot of monies in hope that they get the major share to take back to their council. Where on the other hand if the West Coast could act as one under the auspice of a Regional Council run by a "Governor", not Mayors. Maybe the West Coast could act more like a "state" or back to a "province" than having 3 District Councils each vying for its own.
9. Lastly, the Local Government Act is a one size fits all and limits thinking or acting outside the box. Its prescriptions have to be followed by law, even though these may not produce desirable/optimised localised outcomes.

Thinking the same as in the past will not produce new solutions.

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. (Albert Einstein)

The fundamental issue I see is providing infrastructure to a very challenging geographic area with a small (rateable) population. I feel some sort of regional summit with the aim of thinking differently could help.

However I also know each district will turn up trying to get what's best for them, rather than putting that aside to get what's best for the Coast.

Can you please tell us where in the region you live? (Buller District)

Which age gap do you fall into? (65+)

Charles Richard Bruning

