

Federated Farmers AGM 2009

President Michael Morrow, members and invited guests

Good afternoon and thank you for once again inviting me to be on hand to open your Conference.

As we look back over the past year, so much has happened. We have a new Government, the world is experiencing a disastrous recession, and we may be facing a health issue of potentially pandemic proportions. Locally however, not all is negative. I believe our district will weather the economic storm better than most in New Zealand and from a "townie's" perspective the country looks pretty good at the moment.

During the past 12 months I have had a considerable time commitment as Chair of the Steering Group for the Canterbury Water Management Strategy, on behalf of the Canterbury Mayoral Forum. I would like to thank Mid-Canterbury Federated Farmers for their support and involvement through the stakeholder consultation process. The strategy is due to be signed off by the Mayoral Forum by August, and it is fair to say that the change in Government has assisted us immensely over the past 6 months. I urge all of you to make a submission before the 25th of May.

The goal of the Mayoral Forum is to gain the greatest benefit from our water resources with a sustainable framework both now and for future generations. A series of fundamental principles will provide the foundation of the final strategy. Taking a regional approach, the environment, customary uses, community supplies and stock water are given the highest priority, followed by irrigation, renewable electricity generation, recreation and amenity. Whether you agree with this prioritisation is for you to include in your submission. This fact gives a lie to the claim by many urbanites that water development is all about more dairy cows!

So far the process has been a truly collaborative exercise, where all sides of the water debate have diligently worked to find a common way forward. Without this approach we will only continue to repeat the mistakes of the past, jeopardising the further economic growth and development that is still possible throughout the Canterbury region.

Locally, continued access to clean water for potable and domestic use is a key concern for many in our district. There has been considerable hysteria around the level of Nitrates in recent times and the study by Lincoln Ventures is a timely warning to all of us. I believe the study has some positive messages, particularly for deep

groundwater aquifers surrounding Christchurch City. However the responsibility rests entirely with us to prove by our actions that we live, breathe and practice sustainable principles.

The changes in Wellington have been welcomed in many ways, but one area that may work against us, is in transport. There has been a clear shift in emphasis with a revised funding allocation to activity classes and an increase in State Highway construction, focusing first on the 7 roads of national significance. Great for Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, but the jury's out on the benefit to Ashburton. Funding is to be directed to projects that produce economic growth and increase productivity. We could all think of ways that might apply in our district and I had a great meeting with the Honourable Steve Joyce on 8th May. We talked about the underpass at Rakaia, shifting rail to the Ashburton Business Estate, a second bridge over the Ashburton River, lights in Tinwald and maintenance and upkeep of our vast rural network. Unfortunately there is again No movement in the FAR and no recognition of the fact that our cities have chosen to underfund their local networks over the years for local political expediency.

The new Minister of Local Government believes there should be greater transparency and accountability by local government. He states that we need to articulate our vision, what it will cost to achieve and that consultation is balanced so that Councils can "get on with it"! I wholeheartedly agree with him, but believe it would be nice if the Minister were to apply his own suggestion and tell us how much, in simple terms, the Auckland Super City is going to cost the rest of New Zealand.

On the topic of cost, submissions to our LTCCP have closed and once again Federated Farmers have made a very thoughtful and comprehensive submission. Thank you for your work and we will meet next week to hear in person all those who have asked to be heard. This year we have been overwhelmed with submissions and the Pool / Stadium project accounts for about 90% of approximately 2300 submissions. The next couple of weeks are going to generate some interesting debate around the Council table.

It has been my policy to provide a simple statistical breakdown of how rural ratepayers are treated in the coming budget and the percentages are fairly consistent with past years.

Rural ratepayers pay 73.37% of the General Rate

(General rate accounts for 18% of the Total Rate)

Rural ratepayers pay 73.37% of the Roothing Rate

Rural ratepayers receive 78.9% of the Roothing spend

Rural ratepayers pay 40.20% of the Total Rate

Rural ratepayers pay 23% of the Total Revenue

I am well aware of the argument around who should fund capital projects and the justice of our current funding policy. However I would like to point out that there are proposed changes to Council's Funding Policy and significant among those are ---

	In 2001	Proposed 2009/10
Public Conveniences	100% general rate	80% UAGC 20% CV targeted rate on commercial
Library	100% general rate (after fees and charges)	70% UAC 30% general rate (after fees and charges)
Arts Culture & heritage	65% general rate 35% Commercial	50% general rate 50% UAGC
Community Safety & Wellbeing	65% general rate 35% Commercial	25% general rate 75% UAGC
Community Events	100% general rate	100% general rate
Recreational facilities		43% general rate 42% UAGC 15% targeted rate
This is a new category that would have previously been in Community Events above		
Democracy	95% general rate 5% targeted rate (Methven)	48% general rate 49% UAGC 3% targeted rate (Methven)
Footpaths	40% general rate	30% general rate

It would be remiss of me if I didn't make mention of regional government of Canterbury. The 5 "Southern" Councils received legal advice that under the current law, change would be very difficult, if not impossible to implement.

Also the driving force for that change had to be community led, not politically.

The future direction for local government will undoubtedly change following the Auckland changes, and Wellington and others will probably move to implement change applicable to their circumstances. I believe now is not the appropriate time in Canterbury.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I value the opportunity to talk to you.

Enjoy your conference and the fellowship that goes with such an occasion, and I am delighted to officially declare it open.

BEDE O'MALLEY

Mayor