

14. 2003 LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE

Officer responsible Chief Executive Officer	Author Councillor Oscar Alpers
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The Conference was held in Queenstown from 27-30 July and attended by the Mayor, Chief Executive Officer and Councillors Alpers, Broughton and Sheriff, together with Mrs Yvonne Palmer, Peter Dow and Peter Mitchell. Councillor Anderton was also present for a time, as Jim Anderton delivered a speech as the Minister of Economic Development, Councillor Austin was one of the presenters for a "Creative New Zealand" presentation to a Workshop on cultural issues and Rex Harrison and Peter Mitchell made a presentation to a workshop on Community Boards.

Many of the speeches and papers are available on the LGNZ web site and this report is intended to serve as a pointer to those who wish to look further. Only the slide presentations are available for some presenters and will be slow to download.

The overall theme was implementing the Local Government Act 2002, which the President Basil Morrison referred to in his opening speech as the "Carter Act" – a reference to the present Minister of Local Government, which seemed unfair given the substantial contribution to it by the previous Minister, Sandra Lee.

Hon Paul Keating, former Prime Minister of Australia, delivered the first speech. He made a number of interesting points but his major one was his view of a series of waves of world economic activity over the last century, the most recent being since 1982 and of cycles within that wave. He predicted a third cycle was about to begin, which was not going to be as rich as the last one from 1992 to 2000, but would last for perhaps 5-6 years and see a pick-up in real wages. He also referred to the dangers for Australia and New Zealand in present US international policy in which the US is acting unilaterally in its own interests when there is a clear need for the world to be run co-operatively. His speech contained some interesting observations on nationalism.

Dr Alan Bollard, the Governor of the Reserve Bank, on the other hand, predicted slowing economic growth and pointed to a 10% reduction in export sector incomes, high home grown inflation dampened only by negative imported inflation. He attributed a lot of the present strength in the economy to the strength of the housing and property sectors.

He made some projections for regional economies and his best projections were for Auckland, Bay of Plenty and Nelson/Marlborough. Canterbury was not far behind. He expressed concern at the rapid increases in both operating expenditure and capital expenditure by the local government sector with average increases in rating significantly above the inflation rate. His prediction is that the economy is bottoming out for a soft landing. His speech was given in closed meeting and is not available on the web site.

Professor Ian Pool, the Professor of Demography at Waikato University, spoke of a shift from growth driven changes to structure driven changes. He predicted that future growth would be low. He emphasised the need for local government to use demography to see needs 5-10 years ahead and adjust its services to meet changing needs. He predicted that migration would fluctuate widely and that we cannot rely on immigration to balance out trends in our population. Some interesting statistics were that 65% of full time professional women aged 30-34 are now childless and 53% of all full time women are childless.

Prof David Bellamy delivered a series of ecological warnings and identified safe water as now the most endangered resource. He also referred to the pressure placed on natural habitats including marine habitats, fish resources, the atmosphere, non-renewable resources, particularly in the energy field, expressed concern over trends in human nutrition and urged New Zealand to be in a position to sustain itself if world trade stopped.

Hon Steve Maharey, the Minister for Social Development and Employment, presented a paper headed "Social Development in the Knowledge Society". Both his speech and his power point slides are available on the web site. He spoke of the need for us to invest in knowledge from building literary skills through to facilitating access, sharing knowledge and developing the skills to understand and apply knowledge. He also spoke at some length about the need to foster social participation and involvement in order to develop a society that is rich in a social sense. People need a sense of security, sense of identity and belonging to fully participate in the knowledge society and he spoke of the need for us to value and respect diversity. He also spoke of the fundamental importance of central and local government partnership in this area.

Hon Jim Anderton, the Minister of Economic Development, urged us to take some risks in the interests of regional development. The traditional view was that government and central government did not take risks but Mr Anderton said they could afford to take more risks than private enterprise could afford to take. He saw regional development as having helped arrest the decline of many parts of New Zealand. Mr Anderton reflected on the change in recent years in the relationship between central government and local government and how rare it was these days to see either partner attacking the other.

Peter Winder, the retiring Chief Executive of Local Government New Zealand, spoke of the change in mind-set being more important than the change in the law with the introduction of the Local Government Act 2002. He reflected on the change in emphasis from the 1988 Local Government Reforms which were based on market principles, with a focus on outputs as well as overall wellbeing and sustainability, compared with the 2002 reforms now focusing on economic, environmental, social and cultural wellbeing. 1989 was based in representative democracy, 2002 is firmly rooted in participatory democracy. He predicted that Councillors who do not get it right will be marginalised or completely frustrated. In a speech which only a retiring Chief Executive could make, he asked these questions and provided the answers:

1. Q. What does effective local governance now look like?
 - A.
 - It shares the provision of services with its neighbours;
 - It champions its community;
 - It is an effective partner with central government delivering “joined up” government;
 - It is focused on outcomes;
 - It recognises local and regional variations;
 - It is innovative with funding; and
 - It re-integrates policy and service delivery.

2. Q. What will elected members need to be effective?
 - A.
 - Effective leadership skills;
 - A shared vision of the future of their community;
 - Communication skills;
 - Consensus building skills;
 - Collaborative and partnership skills;
 - An ability to deal with very complex issues;
 - An ability to deal with a growing workload;
 - A supportive and communicative staff;
 - Staff who are focused on keeping it simple; and
 - An ability to manage the “stop the world” constituency.

Workshops

Oscar Alpers was disappointed with the Workshop on **Consultation and Communication** where the presenters were Geoff Henley, the Director of Network PR which sponsored the workshop; Kerry Prendergast, the Mayor of Wellington; Mary Bourke, the Mayor of South Taranaki District and Helen Morgan-Banda, the Communications Manager for Local Government New Zealand. The consultation part of the presentation was almost entirely focused on the Wellington waterfront redevelopment and was, therefore, to do with consultation under the Resource Management Act rather than consultation under the Local Government Act. The presentation got into great detail about the Wellington waterfront and it was hard to distil principles. The communication aspect was influenced by the main presenter being from a public relations firm and Councillor Alpers found it hard to tell whether the presenters could distinguish between communication and marketing. Network PR distributed a New South Wales document on consultation, which was difficult to reconcile with the requirements of our Local Government Act.

In relation to communication, it said that in the UK Councils were poorly perceived and their communications were not well perceived and although 74% of Councils agreed communication was a major function, only 32% resourced it adequately. It was said that in the present age, citizens are more concerned than they used to be about the look and feel of their community leading to tensions between priorities, increasing complexity and more effective pressure and interest groups and a more active media sector, all leading to the need for better communication.

Oscar Alpers also attended a Workshop on **Cultural Wellbeing**. The first presentation was from Creative New Zealand and was presented by their Chief Executive, Elizabeth Kerr; their Maori Arts Manager, Muriwai Ihakara and our own Paddy Austin. The whole thrust was that cultural wellbeing was an integral part of a sustainable and healthy community, equally important and inexorably bound up with social, economic and environmental wellbeing. Elements might include upholding community and individual identity, language, place, spirit, stories, symbols and the land. Cultural dimensions must therefore be addressed in all the work of the Council rather than as a separate activity or series of initiatives. They presented a number of examples of commendable efforts that had been made in different communities and outlined the assistance and information that Creative New Zealand can provide including a planning tool to assist with community consultation, funding programmes etc.

On day three of the conference, Creative NZ presented their Creative Places Awards to a number of cities and districts for innovative arts projects.

The second part of the Cultural Workshop was a presentation by Joris de Bres, the Race Relations Conciliator. His presentation was entitled "Population and Sustainable Development in New Zealand" and was essentially about promoting social cohesion in a diverse community. He encouraged us to recognise people's origins, how and why they came to be here, make all people feel safe, respected and valued, foster the Maori language, build relationships, promote tolerance, have a process for assimilating new migrants into communities etc. He reminded us that by 2051, only half the New Zealand population will be European.

Oscar Alpers and the Chief Executive Officer also attended the **Metropolitan Sector Group meeting** chaired by Mayor Garry Moore, which commenced with the annual meeting of the Group and received an annual report of the activities of the Group.

We then received a presentation from Housing New Zealand on its programmes and the announcement of a new social housing programme in partnership with Local Government, an interesting series of presentations from:

- Jo Hume of the NZ Business Council for Sustainable Development,

and then a group presentation from

- Alison Dalziel of the Prime Minister's Department on a programme of action across all Government Ministries for sustainable development, which will initially focus on water quality, energy, child and youth development and sustainable cities;
- Barry Carbon of the Ministry for the Environment on Urban Affairs; and
- Geoff Dangerfield of the Ministry of Economic Development on Sustainable Cities

which concluded with a panel discussion. The main thrust of the Government's sustainable cities program initially will be in Auckland.

This was really important and interesting stuff, presented in far too much haste to really absorb it properly, to a large group in a small room which quickly became stifling!

Because of a misunderstanding Oscar Alpers did not attend the LGNZ AGM and Garry Moore did not attend because of another commitment, leaving Gail Sheriff the only validly appointed delegate able to vote.

Deputy Chairman's

Recommendation:

That the information be received and Councillor Alpers be thanked for his report.