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The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and some perspectives of the New Zealand Community Boards Conference hosted by the Taupo District Council in Taupo from 27 to 30 May 1999.

THEME

The theme of this second conference was “Community Champions” which was to build on the idea that Community Boards played a vital role within their communities in terms of their work to date and especially in relation to the new millennium.

Some 160 delegates attended from throughout the country.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Delegates were welcomed on the Thursday evening with a moving powhiri and the Conference was officially opened by the Governor General, Sir Michael Hardie-Boys.

On the Friday morning Kerry Marshall, President of Local Government New Zealand spoke to the Conference and he reinforced the valued role and importance of Community Boards in their handling of community governance issues.

Dick Hubbard, the Managing Director of Hubbard Foods Limited followed with a thought provoking address based on the message that corporates had a social responsibility to be close to the communities in which they operated. The address served as a strong counter to the Business Round Table and its premise that “the business of business is business”.

Tony Ryall, Minister of Justice and the National Member of Parliament for Bay of Plenty, spoke on the topic of Safer Community Councils and community involvement.

Pansy Wong, the National list Member of Parliament, gave a buoyant address based on the theme of community spirit which acknowledged the growing trends of increased cultural diversity occurring throughout New Zealand.

A lawyers guide to Community Boards was provided in a paper presented by Jonathan Salter who is the convenor of the public law group in the Wellington office of Simpson Grierson. Jonathan is the legal advisor to Local Government New Zealand and has a particular interest in the strategic issues facing local government such as on-going refinements to local government related legislation, local government reform and community advocacy.

On the Saturday, Georgina Beyer, Mayor of Carterton took to the stage and flamboyantly posed the question “Community Boards – waste of time or vital link?” The conclusion reached was that Community Boards were vital in providing a strong and meaningful linkage between their local communities and the parent Council.

The Labour spokesperson on Local Government, Judith Tizard, Member of Parliament for Auckland Central, spoke in general terms without giving any real insight into Labour's proposed policies on Local Government as a lead-up to the forthcoming general election.

Margaret Underwood who is a motivational speaker and has her own educational consultancy business, provided delegates with some "food for thought" as the theme of her speech.

In evaluating the speakers programme, it would be fair to say that the variety of presenters was wide ranging such that an interesting mixture of issues and topics were offered to delegates.

The one key detraction however, was that the programme timetable allowed only very limited scope for questions and interaction with the presenters. The Conference MC was especially strict on keeping to schedule!

WORKSHOPS

The Saturday afternoon was devoted to the holding of a series of workshops, the topics of which were:

1. How to Make the Most Out of Becoming a Community Board Member
2. Cultural Diversity
3. Environmental Issues (The Community Champions and Their Environment)
4. Social Responsibility – Defining the Role for Community Boards
5. The Delegations and Legislation of Community Boards
6. Organisational Culture and Relationship to Governance

The outcomes of the various workshops were reported back to delegates on the Sunday morning.

As was evident at the 1997 Conference, scope continued to exist for much more delegation to be given to Boards by their parent Councils including appropriate funding provision. More devolution of functions was again highlighted as was the need to develop good working relationships and trust between Boards and their Councils. The provision of appropriate training and the development of good and effective working relationships with staff in particular were other aspects highlighted during the various workshops.

Community Boards continued to play an important role as the interface between their communities and the Council and acted as the 'eyes and ears' when it came to initially dealing with contentious and important community based issues.

CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS

At the concluding session on the Sunday morning, the Working Party established to further the resolutions arising from the 1997 Conference reported back to delegates. This took the form of a précis of the work undertaken by the team and reflected the outcome of various discussions with individuals and organisations involved with local government throughout the country.

Rather than moving to form a national association of Community Boards as proposed at the last Conference, the Working Party proposed that one Community Board representative from each of the six Local Government New Zealand zones be invited to zone meetings in order that information be shared and input from Community Boards be established. Local Government New Zealand clearly recognises the value of Boards and the assistance they provide to their respective Councils and were therefore happy to support this initial linkage with a view to a more formal relationship in the future. Delegates confirmed their acceptance of this arrangement.

Several other general type resolutions were carried by the Conference, details of which are available on request.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Conference was well organised and hosted by the Taupo District Council. The modern and impressive venues used being the Great Lake Centre and the recently opened Taupo Events Centre were testimony to a progressive local authority. The rigidity of the presenters programme and the lack of quality time for questions was the only detraction to a successful conference.

The Invercargill City Council took the honours over New Plymouth and will host the next Conference in 2001.

The opportunity to attend the Conference and share with other delegates the acknowledged success of Christchurch's Community Boards was very much appreciated.

Recommendation: That the report be received.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the foregoing recommendation be adopted.