

Officer responsible Community Advocate, Beckenham	Writer Oscar Alpers
Corporate Plan Output: N/A	

Oscar Alpers, Sonia Gill and Phil Clearwater attended the National Community Boards Conference at Taupo from 27 to 30 May.

The speaker at the official opening was Sir Michael Hardie-Boys who set the theme “Community Champions” for the Conference, speaking of the need for community cohesion if communities are to survive.

Despite the strong and positive beginning to the Conference, we found ourselves successively uplifted and let down and we had some difficulty identifying with the priorities of the Conference organisers. For example, only ten minutes were allocated to the President of Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ), Kerry Marshall, while one and quarter hours were allocated to Georgina Beyer, the Mayor of Carterton, billed as the world’s first transsexual Mayor. Carterton has no community boards.

Highlights of the Conference included:

- **Kerry Marshall** who spoke of a future stronger role for community boards in advocacy and community leadership.
- **Dick Hubbard**, breakfast cereal manufacturer, who spoke on the theme of social responsibility. He was effectively speaking in opposition to the Business Round Table’s philosophy on the role of Government and the role of business in society. He suggested that this was a purist and theoretical view which was now out of date. He said that over the last 12 to 15 years, Government had given more freedom and power to business and, to a lesser extent, also to local government. Moral responsibility went hand in hand with this devolution and it was not enough for business or local government to take a narrow view of their roles in society. Profit was not the only reason for a company’s existence, and roads and rubbish collection were not the only reason for local government’s existence. Government or business should be measured on their financial performance, environmental performance, and social performance.

- **Pansy Wong**, National List MP, spoke on the theme of community spirit within the growing trends of increased diversity and mobility of local population. In a compelling address to a bicultural audience, she demanded a more realistic approach to a multi-cultural society. She questioned the tendency of many ethnic groups to hold on relentlessly to “familiar protocols” which they regarded as representative of their culture, regardless of changing circumstances. She gave examples of practices still preserved among New Zealand Chinese which had long since been abandoned in China. She saw many of these as inappropriate in a modern, multi-cultural society and doubted whether they served any purpose in preserving a culture. She urged all cultural groups to participate in the community in a variety of ways and to play a fuller part in the community.
- **Judith Tizard MP**, and Labour spokesman on local government, referred to the concept of partnership between central government and local government that had been fundamental to the 1989 Local Government reforms. She said the present Government had ignored that and saw local government as merely part of the problem to be sorted out in reorganising society and the economy to allow market forces to prevail. Ms Tizard predictably promised that Labour would restore the partnership concept and proposed to grant local government a general power of competence.

She indicated that, in her opinion, local government could do more than it actually does, or attempts to do now - local government needed leaders with guts.

- **Greg Innes**, a former Planner, now consultant, spoke on the theme “Organisational Culture and Relationships to Government”. He was the only speaker to have pre-circulated a detailed 11 page paper as part of the registration pack. This was just as well, as the paper and the address covered more complex issues. Basically his message was that boards had to strengthen their integrative culture, try and become more involved with the community and with monitoring the effectiveness of the Council and other community and government agencies in meeting the community needs. It should be proactive on behalf of its community. It should understand and accept its relationship with the community, and be integrally involved with processes involving its community such as the District or City Plan, roading issues etc, and that this culture will need to be further reinforced if, as expected, the further rationalisation of local government takes place.

We felt it would be useful to bring Mr Innes to Christchurch.

Other interesting speakers included:

- **Tony Ryall**, Minister of Justice, who had been invited as the Minister of Local Government, but had lost this role in a recent reshuffling of Cabinet. He spoke of government policies in four areas relating to the issue of community safety from crime:
 1. Early Intervention Programmes, supporting families under pressure.
 2. Crime prevention initiatives such as Safer Community Councils, and gave as an example the Otangarei community where in a comprehensive community initiative, the Council installed traffic calming measures and more street signs, Housing New Zealand fixed up their houses and encouraged a “Great Neighbourhoods” scheme, the whole community took on the task of getting any broken glass or graffiti fixed, and crime rates have now been halved.
 3. Changing policing methods
 4. Penalties, prisons etc.

- **Jonathan Salter**, of the Wellington law firm Simpson Grierson, presented a very dry run down on the history leading up to the 1989 Local Government Reforms and on the purpose of these reforms as set out in the legislation. He predicted a tidy up of the legislation which is extremely untidy and hard to follow - further reform of local government following the present roading reforms and water and waste water reforms and saw an increasing need for community advocacy.

WORKSHOP TOPICS

There were six workshop topics of which we could each attend two. Oscar and Phil both attended the sessions on “Social Responsibility - Defining the Role for Community Boards” and “Organisational Culture and Relationships to Government”. Sonia also attended the Social Responsibility workshop and attended the “Cultural Diversity” workshop. The three we did not attend were Yvonne Palmers workshop on “How to make the most out of becoming a board member”, “Environmental Issues”, and “Delegations and Legislations of Community Boards”. The environmental issues workshop seemed more relevant to those community boards with significant delegated powers in the Resource Management Area, which Christchurch does not have.

The Social Responsibility workshop got off to a bad start with a number of board members saying community boards should “stick to their knitting” and attend to roadworks and other physical works and leave the Government to attend to social issues. However, there was an example of a Southland Community Board which had full delegated responsibility for all physical works in their community but had decided to suspend virtually all other spending for several years while the sewerage treatment plant was upgraded to a standard to handle the effluent from a new major sawmill and timber treatment plant, which would not have located in the town unless these works and some other improvements had been undertaken. As a result of this move, a large number of jobs have been created which were available to the community.

In the end the workshop members were at least agreed that community boards had a role as advocates for their communities and quite a few attitudes were changed as a result of this workshop.

The organisational culture workshop was basically an extension of the paper which had been presented just immediately prior to the workshop and allowed some useful practical discussions on issues arising out of the paper with the author Greg Innes.

Sonia Gill may wish to report in relation to the cultural diversity workshop.

REMITTS

There was a lengthy and not terribly useful report back on resolutions passed at the March 1997 Community Board Conference in Christchurch. The only theme to develop into anything was a 1997 resolution seeking to have community boards accommodated as members of Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ). As a result of a suggestion made by Mike Reid, LGNZ, formerly a CCC officer, Yvonne Palmer and other members of the National Community Board Working Party seized on the idea of community boards being able to attend the zone meetings of LGNZ. This was thought to be a suitable forum for community boards to meet with other organs of local government. This is not a view I share. Phil Clearwater succeeded with a remit asking for consideration to be given to organising meetings of community boards on a regional basis and I hope that the regular meetings of Christchurch board chairpersons might shortly include chairpersons of boards in neighbouring local authorities i.e. Selwyn, Waimakariri and Banks Peninsula.

The programme was very full but morning and afternoon tea breaks and two evening functions afforded good opportunities to speak informally with board members from other areas and to compare notes.

2001 COMMUNITY BOARD CONFERENCE

It has been decided that the next Community Board Conference will be held in approximately two years time, rather than three as earlier planned, this time in Invercargill. Southland District, which is fairly well recognised as the leading local authority so far as successful community boards are concerned, will be the host.

Board delegates felt that despite some shortcomings, the Taupo Conference was well worth attending and the next Conference in Southland should be even better. The Board is urged to send at least the same number of delegates and preferably the Community Advocate as well.

Recommendation: That the information be received.