

11. REPORT ON THE IMPACTS AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND PLANNING CONGRESS
WELLINGTON, APRIL 2002

Officer responsible	Author Councillor Sue Wells
---------------------	--------------------------------

In April, Councillors Cox, Sheriff and I attended the Impacts Planning Congress held in Wellington, as did a number of Council officers. The purpose of this report is to share some of the things we learnt with the Committee, so that the Committee can evaluate the benefit of having sent three elected members on the Council's behalf.

This was the first trans-Tasman planning congress. In welcoming us, the Minister for the Environment described the event as 'heralding a new era in co-operation between planners on both sides of the Tasman'. It was certainly a very large occasion – over 730 delegates more than filled the Wellington Convention Centre, and turnouts at plenary sessions and workshops were exceptionally good.

We were disappointed that the rescheduled Annual Plan meeting on Monday 8 April meant we were unable to attend the special seminar designed for Councillor practitioners. In the past that session has proven to be of great benefit, and discussions with other delegates afterwards indicated to us that this was again the case.

We benefited from an exceptional lineup of speakers, including the Minister for the Environment, Principal Environment Court Judge Joan Allin, and her New South Wales counterpart, the Honourable Justice Mahla Pearlman, Chief Judge of the Land and Environment Court. That was an excellent opportunity for a 'compare and contrast' session, which was far and away the biggest strength of the congress. To have the chance to discuss comparable difficulties and opportunities with counterparts running under such a different system as they do in Australia was excellent. It was refreshing and eye opening, and the biggest disappointment for me was that those who criticise the RMA would no doubt have shivered in horror at what was presented as a far less efficient system across the Tasman. The 'elected member's call-up system' as outlined to us by one Australian mayor would, I suspect, have some of our development community turning purple.

Judge Allin also offered some insights on the latest twists to Bayley and Smith-Chilcott, in terms of whether controlled activities constitute the existing environment as well an update on changes to the Court.

Jargon fans will enjoy the two new Ozzie buzz phrases: DECO – (Development, Environment, Communities and Organisations) and ESD (Ecologically Sustainable Development). Some of our elected members would not have enjoyed in the least the speech from Australian architect Graham Jahns, who mooted that in certain Australian heritage precincts, 'Conservation is being abused to resist change, or control who lives there'. He said we should "leave form alone and plan only for ecology".

One concept he shaped very nicely was one I doubt any of us would argue over much – that "the price the individual pays for personal freedom is collective uncertainty".

Dr Mark Wade, the Sustainable Development Manager from Shell Oil in the UK, was definitely a conference highlight. He launched Shell's Annual Report at the Congress, and discussed triple bottom line reporting which Shell is moving into. "We are moving from the 'trust me' to the 'show me' world ... the CNN world."

He talked about a rise in the ethical agenda, "how, not just how much" now being relevant on a balance sheet, and made these key points which I know will interest the Council enormously.

"Triple bottom line reporting should be aspiration – not desperation."

"It should be a catalyst for change *within* the organisation, not just outside."

"It must be *good and bad news, warts and all*, so that we can benchmark against other companies."

"TBL reporting must be clear, direct and measurable, under the control of those measuring and able to be verified."

Paul Farmer of the American Planning Institute was one of the highlight contributors for me. He spoke about supposed 'smart growth', and about the drivers for urban sprawl in America, the "starter castle syndrome" as he called it. Interestingly, he pinned the blame squarely on the American subsidy system which provides for massive rebates on mortgage interest and enormous development contribution. Various other speakers argued that, citing other drivers for similar outcomes in their home countries.

There was discussion on the day about the shortage of competent, professional planners on both sides of the Tasman, and mention of the formation of a new Planners' Association of Pacific Rim countries. Each plenary session offered truly first class speakers, and the three of us found that we were able to cover all the workshops and learn a lot.

Anyone wishing to see the conference notes should have a look at www.nzplanning.co.nz - well worth a tour.

**Recommendation
from the Chair:**

That the information be received.