

Introduction Speech: Hon Dr Nick Smith, MP Nelson

Waimea Water Augmentation Scheme

Tasman District Council Local Bill

19 September 2018

I move, that the Tasman District Council (Waimea Water Augmentation Scheme) Bill be now read a first time. I nominate the Governance and Administration Committee to consider the bill. At the appropriate time I intend to move that the bill be reported to the House by 7 November 2018 and that the committee have authority to meet at any time while the house is sitting (except during oral questions), during any evening on a day which there has been a sitting of the House, on a Friday in a week in which there has been a sitting of the house, and outside the Wellington area, despite standing orders 191,193 and 194 (1) (b) and (c).

Four major issues for Nelson and Tasman, as for New Zealand, are cleaning up our waterways, growing and diversifying our exports, providing more housing and building our resilience to climate change. The easy part is giving speeches about these issues. This Bill is about practical solutions.

It enables the Waimea Community Dam to proceed by granting access to 11 ha of public land. The biggest challenge for the Tasman Council over this scheme is funding the \$100 million cost to be shared between ratepayers, horticulturalists and Government that has caused some toing and froing in recent weeks but is now resolved.

The issue for Parliament with this bill is authorising access to the crown land, and that is a no brainer. The detail is very straight forward. It grants the Tasman District Council an easement over 9.7 ha of the Lee Valley in the Mount Richmond Forest Park for the reservoir and enables Council to purchase at market value 1.3ha of riverbed managed by LINZ for the dam structures.

I wish to make four points about the question of access to this land and then four on the substantive issues over the scheme.

The first is that the land area being acquired from DOC is very small out of the 166,000 ha Mt Richmond Forest Park. It is not 1%, and not even 0.01%. It is just only 1/17,000th of that park.

Secondly, the DOC easement area is only 11% of the reservoir of 87.5 ha. This is not a case of a piece of community infrastructure being put on DOC land as an easy or cheap option. Here the Council has identified the most practical site for water storage for the region, acquired the bulk of the land from private land owners and Parliament is being asked to unblock access to this last small remaining segment.

Thirdly, this is stewardship land, the lowest classification of conservation land. It is not National Park, nor one of the 14 types of reserves, or a special scientific or ecological area. The area is so inaccessible it has negligible recreation use. It is riverbed, vertical bedrock and beech forest. I would take a different view if this were a unique or premium conservation area like Fiordland or the Abel Tasman National Park. I am a practical environmentalist and not an ideological one.

And fourthly, the inundation of this small area of land was approved by the Environment Court in August 2014 with the agreement of DOC, Fish and Game and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society. That consent order included an extensive biodiversity compensation package.

It is disingenuous of individuals or groups who had ample opportunity to submit on the environmental issues during the resource consenting process to now want to re-litigate those issues, particularly those who agreed to the consent orders.

To argue this project is not environmentally sound is to argue that the Environment Court got it wrong. The project also has the strong support of former Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Dr Morgan Williams and the Ministry for the Environment.

Let me also give some detail on the four broader benefits of the Waimea Water Augmentation Scheme.

The Nelson Tasman region has good overall water quality with ratings amongst the best of anywhere in New Zealand, but we have a long standing and significant problem in the Waimea River. Most summers, around February to March, the flows drop to a trickle, the nutrients concentrate and we get ugly algal blooms that are so toxic that dogs regularly die and the Council has to prohibit recreational activity. We also have, in the lower reaches of the river during summer, the serious issue of saltwater intrusion. This is not the clean, green New Zealand we pride ourselves on.

The benefits to the ecological health of the Waimea River from this scheme are enormous. It will enable the minimum flows to be lifted more than fivefold from 200 to 1100 l/sec. That's a healthy river rather than a polluted creek and will provide big gains for fish life and recreation. The increased flows will dilute the nutrients addressing the algae problem. This scheme means a Waimea River which can fully meet the national standards for fresh water quality.

Some critics argue more irrigation means more nutrients but this is too simplistic. Irrigated horticultural crops like apples release less nitrogen than the existing dry land farming. Nutrients will still need managing but this scheme is the only realistic solution to cleaning up the Waimea River.

The alternative of slashing summer water takes for all users would be devastating for the region. It would cost thousands of jobs and millions in exports as well as harsh summer water restrictions for households.

Alongside these environmental benefits of the scheme is the economic gains. The Waimea Plains is an abundant fruit bowl because of its rich fertile soils, high sunshine hours and natural shelter. It already produces \$250 million each year of apples, grapes, hops, kiwifruit and berry fruit as well as a wide assortment of vegetables and tree nursery plants, employing over 3,000 people. The scheme, in providing for additional water for irrigating another 1200 ha, provides the capacity for another \$100 million a year in exports and a further 1,000 jobs. We hear so much talk about diversifying our export base. This is doing it.

The third issue is housing supply and affordability. The population living on the Waimea Plains has doubled from 10,000 to 20,000 in my time as MP. That's amongst the fastest of anywhere in New Zealand and it continues to grow. The big issue is section availability and price. Council cannot allow new residential developments in places like Richmond, Brightwater and Mapua without secure water supplies. This project improves water security for existing households as well as providing for the new.

The fourth benefit is building our community's resilience to climate change. Weather patterns are changing and that makes our water supplies more vulnerable. This scheme will ensure secure water supplies for the next century even in the more extreme climate change scenarios.

Critics of this scheme say there are better alternatives. I am sceptical given the 15 years and millions spent on investigation.

Home storm water storage tanks cost \$250 per cubic metre as compared to this scheme's cost of \$8. Storage ponds leak more, evaporate more, use up productive land and the costs per cubic metre are double. River weirs help farmers up stream but hurt farmers downstream and add to the hazards in a flood.

I do cringe when the Green Party says the answer is for the region to switch to different crops. Hops, grapes, berry fruit and apples are part of Nelson and Tasman's identity as well as the foundations of our economy. I am not prepared to sacrifice them on some sort of ideological green altar. We have an abundance of water and we just need the infrastructure to better manage it through the seasons.

I do get frustrated with the Greens that they demand progress on water quality, housing, and improving our resilience to climate change, but who then oppose the practical measures that will do just that.

The tight timeframe for reporting this bill back to the house is necessary to meet the conditions of financial support for the project and to enable construction to begin this summer. It is not a complex bill and still leaves time for public submissions and proper consideration.

I pay tribute to the community leaders who have for over a decade steered this project forward. Stunning people like Murray King, Julian Raine, the late Nick Patterson, John Palmer, iwi leader Barney Thomas and Fish and Game's Neil Deans. I also commend Tasman Mayor Richard Kempthorne, his deputy Tim King and those Councillors and staff who have been prepared to tackle these long term issues with a practical solution rather than just putting them in the too hard basket.

A vote for this Bill is a vote for a cleaner Waimea River. A vote for this Bill is a vote for more jobs and growing our exports. A vote for this Bill is a vote for increasing the supply and affordability of our region's housing. A vote for this Bill is a vote for a local council that recognises investing in water infrastructure is essential for securing its community's future.

I commend this Bill to every member and party in this House.