

How collaboration overcame consternation

Kerry Hudson and Hans van Kregten

Abstract

The story of how Gisborne District Council, together with its community, resolved the impasse over discharge of city wastewater into Poverty Bay

This entry for the Hynds paper of the year will outline how a long-standing, highly adversarial situation in respect of wastewater discharge into Poverty Bay was completely turned around inside a one-year period using a fresh and collaborative approach to bring together individuals and groups with greatly divergent views.

The discharge of raw human sewerage from Gisborne City into Poverty Bay has long been a controversial and emotionally charged issue. Discharge of human waste is culturally offensive to Maori and repugnant to a significant portion of the wider Gisborne community.

The project involved initiating the Wastewater Adjournment Review Group (known as WARG) at the behest of the consent authority (the Environment & Planning Department of the Gisborne District Council). The group comprised a cross section of community interests, along with the resource consent applicant (Engineering and Works Department of the Gisborne District Council).

The group was charged with seeking a resolution to the conflict by investigating the biological trickling filter, and finding a pragmatic way forward, which would open the way to develop sustainable alternatives to marine discharge over the life of the discharge permit.

The result is a proposed solution satisfying to those formerly in opposition to Gisborne's wastewater outfall, to tangata whenua, Council politicians, staff, environmental groups and the wider community of Gisborne. And that's not all – statutory requirements will be met along with achieving significant cost-savings to ratepayers.

The coastal permit was recommended by a group of independent hearing commissioners. Their recommendation was not appealed to the Environment Court. It was subsequently granted by the Conservation Minister Chris Carter, who applauded the consensus solution developed by the Gisborne community.

Council staff believe that the decision was a culmination of a rewarding co-operative process where determination, respect and sense of responsibility have produced a rigorous and sound outcome that illustrates that the Resource Management Act can be made to work.

Bio

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Positions with Groningen City Council (the Netherlands), 1978-1982, Auckland City Council (1982-1983), Rotorua District Council (1983-1996), Upper Hutt City Council (1997-2000), Grontmij (the Netherlands), 2000-2002, Gisborne (2003-now).