

CR LANI KEREOPA
REPORT BACK ON
2023 LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE
'SUPERLOCAL 23 – LOUDER LOCAL LEADERSHIP'

Ōtautahi Christchurch

26-28 July 2023

I was in attendance at the 2023 LGNZ Conference in Ōtautahi Christchurch from Te Maruata on the morning of Wednesday 26 July through to the Conference Dinner and LGNZ SuperLocal Awards on Friday 22 July. The full conference programme can be viewed here: <https://www.lgnzconference.co.nz/programme>.

Day 1 – 26 July

Te Maruata Hui (8.30am-2pm)

Te Maruata is the Māori committee of LGNZ and the *Te Maruata Hui* is a gathering for Māori elected and appointed members on councils and community boards.

Two *Te Tatau o Te Arawa* representatives attended this gathering alongside myself, as well as three representatives of the new iwi-Māori partnership board *Te Taura Ora o Waiariki (Te Arawa)* - established as part of 2022 reforms to provide a primary source of Te Arawa whānau voice in the national health system and influence regional strategies.

Following welcoming speeches, we broke into representative groups – Māori Ward councillors, regional councillors, community representatives, iwi partnerships etc, and discussed the types of support we are needing in our roles as Māori elected/appointed members.

One of the main points raised that resonated with me was the dearth of Māori data available to support Māori Ward representatives e.g.:

- How many iwi and mātāwaka ratepayers do I actually represent?
- What information does RLC hold about where our hapū/ iwi and mātāwaka communities are living?
- What is the current state of housing within our iwi and mātāwaka communities?
- What are the particular needs of our communities?

The point was raised that the lack of Māori data across councils means we are “invisibilised” within local and central government decision-making.

We then discussed our expectations of the *Te Maruata Rōpū Whakahaere* and what we want the committee to prioritise its work and efforts on during this triennium.

Currently the working group runs monthly online wananga; a Facebook group to help connect members; and they are working on a tuakana/teina programme to support representatives to be able to connect with others who have particular skills and experience.

Next, the Keynote Speaker for the day was former Mayor of Ngāmotu Andrew Judd. Some of the key points Andrew made included that:

- Our collective aim must be for a Te Tiriti-focused Aotearoa - the re-indigenisation of how we do these things in this country.
- To get to a mature place as a nation, we need to acknowledge our history while being forward thinking.
- Māori Wards are part of the answer however Māori Wards are not Te Tiriti-based.
- Representation Reviews need to be taken off the table completely - Why divide the country every six years?
- Treaty Settlements of a few cents in the dollar – that’s not reparation.
- Iwi and Māori Ward representatives need to be resourced and supported to be able to access the information they need to be able to bring Māori issues and solutions to councils.
- The line between governance and operations can be difficult for Māori to navigate coming from a largely operational background.
- KPI reports for all council CEs needs to cover what they are doing to ensure Māori have input into council policy writing.
- The longer discussion needs deeper conversations that will transform our systems from simply imported British colonial systems to something uniquely Te Tiriti-based.
- The grip of Pākehā on the steering wheel of politics must be loosened and this can only be achieved through legislation.
- Until that happens, advocates for change are just working on the fringes.
- Pākehā need to ask themselves why they go from zero to rage when it comes to anything Māori.
- Government ministers and staff will acknowledge the current systems are wrong yet choose to blame “the politics” for inaction.
- Where are LGNZ and our political leaders in regard to the anti-co-governance roadshow?
- Pākehā New Zealanders need to recognise and accept that our culture in this country is Te Tiriti.

Andrew’s sacrifices, advocacy and work for systems change in support of hapū and iwi was acknowledged by all present, and a request came from the floor that - rather than coming from a place of deficit and calling himself a recovering racist, Andrew now refer to himself as a staunch Tangata Tiriti partner of te iwi Māori moving forward.

Day 2 – 27 July

Breakfast – Through the looking glass – a glimpse into the future with Frances Valintine (7.30am)

During this session, Frances shared eye-opening data on climate breakdown worldwide and highlighted the unacceptable situation being faced by the people of Tuvalu who have been forced to begin the ‘digitisation’ of their islands and culture in the knowledge that theirs will be one of the first countries likely to be significantly impacted by rising sea levels due to global climate change. According to some estimates, the highest tides could regularly flood half the land area of national capital Funafuti by the mid-21st Century, and 95% by 2100.

My observation of her kōrero was that the very real impacts on the whānau, hapū and iwi of Tuvalu needed to be the focus.

Frances also shared deeply concerning AI technologies that Aotearoa needs to prepare for, as well as anticipated issues of an aging workforce.

I did not agree with her views that mass immigration is the solution to ensure a youthful working population to fill the gap left by a top-heavy nation of retirees.

Māori and Pacific Island whānau have been identified as having the highest birthrates and youngest populations in Aotearoa and in the first instance, our kura kaupapa Māori and Polynesian education systems need to be properly resourced and supported to ensure our current and future generations have the ability to step into the upcoming employment gaps at all levels.

President's Address (9.10am)

Newly elected LGNZ president Selwyn District Council Mayor Sam Broughton spoke about his priorities and interests.

He spoke about the rainbow of competency of elected members across councils and highlighted that the *Ākonga* app developed by LGNZ is useful for considering our strengths and weaknesses.

Te Maruata Address (9.25am)

Te Maruata co-chair Bonita Bigham shared the success to date of Māori Wards:

- Nearly half of councils in Aotearoa now have Māori Ward representatives.
- An overwhelming majority of those councils established one Māori ward with one or two members.
- Māori representation went from 5% to now 22%.
- There are now 55 Māori Ward councillors for this triennium.

She added that:

- There are now six Māori mayors for this triennium.
- There are two Māori chairs for this triennium.
- More Māori candidates per head of population stood for election than non-Māori.
- The remit with the least support at the LGNZ AGM was for Te-Tiriti based co-chairing.
- Despite more Māori candidates standing for positions than non-Māori, mainstream news focused on low Māori voter turnout.
- The status quo does not serve us.
- Change needs to be transformative.

Decision making for the future – Lessons from Sophie Howe (9.40am)

Sophie shared learnings from Wales which was the first country in the world to legislate to protect the wellbeing of future generations (defined in Wales as the next generation and the one after).

The *Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act* is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

The Act gives a legally-binding common purpose – the seven well-being goals – for national government, local government, local health boards and other specified public bodies.

It seeks to ensure that future generations have at least the same quality of life as current generations do now.

The Act provides for better decision-making by ensuring public bodies take account of the long-term and help to prevent problems occurring or getting worse.

The duties on all public bodies in Wales mean they have to deliver collectively but appropriate to local communities.

Sophie reminded LGNZ representatives that we are on the way to planetary destruction and yet we continue to support an unsustainable, polluting economic system.

She said prosperity needs to be about prioritising human and planetary health, not about economic growth or GDP.

Other points she made include that:

- In a study, American children could identify up to 1000 corporate logos but couldn't identify 10 indigenous plants or animals.
- "Never has so much been lost by so many because of the inaction of so few."

- When are we going to shift our investment towards things that are better for our wellbeing?
- We need an education system that is fit for the future, and results in ethical and informed citizens.
- We need circular economic initiatives such as 'Borrowing Libraries' where people can borrow things they need e.g. anything from power tools to tents.

- How much of our transport budget is being spent on roads?
- The Netherlands Transport Policy demands that everyone in the Netherlands has to be able to travel by public transport in a fast, comfortable, reliable and affordable way. The ambition for 2040 is to offer travellers a door-to-door travel time of under one hour between any of the four major cities in the Randstad region.
- The Dutch system is highly integrated with the public transport network, so that people who cycle to the station in their place of origin can continue traveling by bike from the station of their destination. The policy has resulted in 125k cycles per day.
- When you apply a wellbeing approach, you get a completely different set of solutions e.g. planning communities for people, not for cars.

- How effective is our system in dealing with climate change & an aging population?
- We need to create new ways of working such as where employees can work four hours a day, four days a week and spend the rest of the time caring for our aging populations and wider communities.

- We need to follow the wisdom that is available relating to long term intergenerational wellbeing. You have that wisdom here within your Māori communities.

- Local government needs to understand that it is a public health agency.
- Its job is to do things like reduce air pollution, address inequities and inequalities, and create connected, cohesive communities to improve community health.

- Our laws need to require government agencies and councils to collaborate.
- We need collaboration rather than competition for funding.

- Where and WHEN you are born should not determine where you will end up in life.

Young Elected Member Address (10.30am)

Young Elected Members (YEM) is a collective of elected members under the age of 40. Intergenerational Justice was a theme of Young Elected Member Bridget Bell's speech, and she acknowledged Kahika Moko Tepania for being the first recipient from Aotearoa to win the *One Young World Politician of the Year Award*.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, only 2% of parliamentarians globally are under the age of 30 and just 14% are under 40. The issue is exacerbated by policies in 73% of countries which restrict young people of voting age from running for office. Lack of representation raises the substantial risk of disconnecting an entire generation from their nations' political processes.

The *One Young World Politician of the Year Award* was created in 2018 to recognise the most promising young politicians between the ages of 18-35 from around the world. The winners are selected based on the impact they are having in their home countries and how they have used their position to benefit young people specifically. It is the first global award recognising the work of young politicians and was launched to counter the low level of youth engagement in politics.

Sponsored Charity Address: Craig Burston, Will & Able (10.55am)

The founder of Will & Able gave the background story to his business and sought the support of LGNZ to "make a change to using products that make a difference."

He highlighted that:

- Will & Able provides jobs for people with disabilities;
- The importance of jobs for people with disabilities include increased independence, sense of community, opportunity and hope;
- Will & Able products are plant based;
- Will & Able containers and bottles are made from recycled plastic; and
- Will & Able recycles its bottles for reuse.

Breakout Session: Solutions for the new reality of climate impacts. Better Informed, Better Decisions – A learning session with case studies sponsored by Aon (12pm)

This session was sponsored by Aon NZ (an insurance broker) so the focus was on issues of insurance in this time of climate breakdown, and asking elected members to consider the role of councils e.g.:

- Is it sufficient for councils to solely focus on their own assets?
- How should large scale un-insurability of assets be considered within LTPs?
- How are un-insured assets such as paths, roads, land and bridges catered for within budgets?

Advice given by Aon included:

- Investments and spending must align with climate plans.
- Mandatory Climate Related Reporting – a potential expansion to local councils.

- Understanding the risks from the perspectives and experiences of tangata whenua is crucial to building equitable processes and capability.

It was surprising to me that a poll taken during the session showed a majority of those present believed that climate risk was a priority in their council.

It came as a shock to me because I don't see that it is a priority or even a consideration within the decision-making of Rotorua Lakes Council.

Breakout Session: Implementing the new Resource Management reforms successfully brought to you by Ministry for the Environment (1pm)

The government is currently repealing the *Resource Management Act 1991* and replacing it with both the *Natural & Built Environment Act* and *Spatial Planning Act*.

The reform of the resource management system will result in key shifts in the ways councils plan for and manage resources including:

- A new framework for decision-making
- A more cohesive national direction
- Regionalising plan making
- Opportunity to voice local issues and desires
- Introducing mandatory spatial planning
- Recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Councils' role in the new system

Of particular interest to me is that decision-makers must now "give effect" to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and Regional Planning Committees (RPC) must have "particular regard to" iwi planning documents and statements on how to give effect to *Oranga o te Taiao*.

I have ongoing concerns around how effective and appropriate iwi representation can be facilitated without the continued influence of government and council appointments to iwi leadership positions and/or corporate post-settlement governance entities - often with agendas at odds with the needs and aspirations of hapū and iwi.

This session was a workshop to hear from participants about:

1. What these changes mean for our areas
2. What our councils can be doing now to get ready for transition/implementation i.e.
 - Building relationships with other councils, mana whenua etc
 - Building capacity and capability e.g. elected members, council staff, iwi, the community
 - Funding of the Regional Planning Committee and consideration in relevant council documents e.g. LTP
3. What additional resources / support / planning will be needed to do the above.

In a nutshell, the reforms are asking regions to look at what needs to occur catchment wide in the management of resources to restore and protect the nation's waters, natural environments and collective resources while also identifying bespoke sets of arrangements for unique areas and landscapes.

I found this session unhelpful as it was nothing more than an information collecting opportunity for MfE.

Our Journey to Balance – Ōtautahi Christchurch (3.15pm)

During this session, Christchurch City Counsellor Tyler Hunt highlighted some of the positive initiatives happening in Ōtautahi including:

1. The journey of Takapūneke reserve from British confiscation and desecration to wāhi tapū:

The hapū of Ngāi Tārewa and Ngāti Irakehu once utilised their lands to run a vibrant economy trading flax internationally. Following confiscation, colonists dumped a landfill and sewerage treatment plant in the reserve, and enacted policies to prevent mana whenua from building homes for their people in the area while allowing other non-Māori developments.

In 2018, with the adoption of the Takapūneke Reserve Management Plan, mana whenua represented by Ōnuku Runanga formed the Takapūneke Co-Governance Group in partnership with Christchurch City Council to:

- Share the story of this ancestral landscape with all people of Aotearoa
- Safeguard and grow mātauranga Māori
- Restore the mauri and mana of the land and people
- Bring back the traditional practices of raranga and other mahi toi to Takapūneke

2. He Puna Taimoana – hot pools by the sea:

The He Puna Taimoana tourist attraction featuring heated saltwater pools on the New Brighton beachfront has been a huge success in regenerating the community following the Christchurch earthquakes. The development features five pools with different temperatures, a plunge pool and on-site café. Four two-hour sessions are offered throughout the day and an initiative where locals are able to turn up without needing to book has driven Christchurch resident registrations up to over 2000.

3. Tāwhaki Joint Venture:

Kaitorete was known as a travelling route for hapū and iwi along the east coast of Te Waipounamu. Located 50-minutes' drive from Ōtautahi, Kaitorete sustained ancestors for generations as a site of rest during travels, as well as a tool making site where many famous pounamu were manufactured. It was a place of abundant kai (tuna, pātiki) and home to native plants and wildlife.

The Tāwhaki Joint Venture was established in May 2021 as a partnership between mana whenua, represented by Wairewa Rūnanga and Te Taumutu Rūnanga, and the New Zealand government. Part of the deal included ownership of the land being revested in mana whenua.

At the heart of Tāwhaki are two kaupapa: to heal and rejuvenate the unique whenua and degraded lake (due to intensive farming) at Kaitorete, and advance Aotearoa's aerospace industry.

“We can rejuvenate our communities, both at Taumutu and Wairewa, and provide an opportunity for whānau to come back to their kāinga through employment and education, and be more connected to Kaitorete. With our combined effort we will ensure Tāwhaki becomes a positive legacy for our children and our children's children.”

Inaugural SuperLocal Political Debate sponsored by Newsroom (4pm)

While amusing, the only useful piece of information I took from this debate was the following suggestion from Green Party MP Eugenie Sage who said:

“Having a central government representative on regional committees will support funding of local infrastructure.”

Day 3 – 28 July

Fireside chat on Managed Retreat in Practice (9.30am)

Relocating flood-prone communities is complex and for too long ‘Managed Retreat’ has been a theoretical conversation. So how do you transition from talking about managed retreat to actually relocating a flood-prone town in a way that doesn't reduce the community's trust in its council? This session featured Jamie Simmonds, an engineer who is helping move communities in Australia, and shared his experiences in relocating the township of Grantham.

In 2011, the Australian town of Grantham in Queensland was severely damaged by flash flooding that left 12 people dead and houses and buildings destroyed. In the aftermath, half of the Grantham community wanted to be paid out so they could leave and half wanted the town rebuilt.

Within two years of the floods, a majority of people took up the opportunity for voluntary relocation to a newly built estate on higher ground funded by a mix of insurance companies and international emergency funds. There were 120 allotments built in the new estate and all were taken up by residents. People built their homes in their own time, but most were completed within two years.

“Nobody had to do it, but the vast majority took up the land swap and if you go out to Grantham today, it's a quiet little town safe from flooding. There are still people that live in the floodplain, and I think they've suffered a number of floods since then, but the damage has been minimal because people just aren't there.”

“The key to getting people onboard was making a decision quickly, so the flooding was still fresh in people's minds. You also can't offer people rubbish. We had to make people think they were moving somewhere good.”

The cost to build roads, parks, install pipes and for environmental and spatial planning consultants (so people know what the future looks like) was approx. \$18 million.

The Big Question – What is SuperLocal? A Panel on Reimagining Local Government (12pm)

Points of interest shared by panel members included:

- We have an infrastructure deficit, and the scale of the deficit is catastrophic.
- It has been estimated it will cost approximately \$185 billion just to upgrade three waters infrastructure across Aotearoa.
- We can't just build back what we've lost, we must build resilience to natural disasters and extreme weather events.
- Another problem - there is low domestic industry diversification in this country and primary industry is dominant.
- We need urban regeneration to ensure we're fit for purpose to deal with the impacts of climate events.

- We need to take note of the place and role creativity and arts played in the ChCh rebuild – how do we create that space in our climate resilience building elsewhere?
- We need to act intentionally locally.
- How do we create permanent community ties within our communities?
- We have a machinery of government that is not designed to deliver universal anything except for the vaccine. And the success of that relied heavily on iwi networks to achieve.
- Only those who have intact social infrastructure, such as iwi, are in a position to deliver anything large scale across communities.
- The way power is distributed and applied is the problem.
- The power shifted very quickly that one time during covid to help government figure out a way to successfully lockdown and vaccinate the masses.
- How much is local government prepared to share the power in your communities with groups such as iwi and creatives?
- This means putting them into the decision-making positions that we have.
- It also means allocating participatory budgets.
- Nobody relinquishes power willingly.
- The largest employer in Aotearoa is central and local government so it's no surprise the majority of voices given credence in this country support systems to remain the same. The second largest employer are the self-employed.
- We need to be putting the most silenced voices at the front of our decisions.
- In Porirua, they are developing a Te Tiriti-based version of a citizen's assembly.

Transporting our communities in the future panel (1pm)

Points of interest shared by panel members included:

- We need to rethink how we fund new infrastructure.
- The problem is bad short-term decision-making.
- It's also the inability to fund community aspirations.
- The focus of funding needs to be on biodiversity credits rather than roads.
- Unfunded aspirations are just rhetoric.
- We need a willingness to fund and the ability to fund.

Conference Dinner and LGNZ SuperLocal Awards (6.30pm)

Rotorua Lakes Council did well to be named finalists in two categories within the LGNZ SuperLocal Awards. While we were unsuccessful in taking out either award, our Mayor, Deputy and two councillors found the experience extremely motivating to work towards being able to submit nominations and achieve placings in every category next year!

With the support of Te Paepae Tapū o Ngāti Whakaue and Te Runanga o Ngāti Kea Ngāti Tuarā, I nominated Rotorua Lakes Council in the Super Engaged Category for the iwi engagement undertaken during the drafting of the Pukehangi Stormwater Management Plan.

Mana whenua have indicated they are open to RLC potentially nominating this particular work of council in partnership with iwi in any other suitable awards that may arise as long as the over-riding context of the work is also acknowledged alongside the positives to be highlighted re the engagement processes taken.

Mana whenua are keen to draw attention to the approach taken by RLC in this instance because although they consider that this should be the absolute minimum engagement support provided by councils to their Te Tiriti partner, the reality is, it is not common practice for councils to resource iwi engagement outside of meeting fees; or engage in co-development/co-writing of management plans with iwi; or be open to using Māori frameworks as a starting point for management plans. Specifically, our mana whenua representatives believe that using awards platforms to showcase and socialise this type of resourced engagement and support of mātauranga Māori is helpful in encouraging local and nationwide adoption of this approach as a steppingstone for councils to do more and better.

A resourced co-design process however will not always guarantee iwi endorsement, and our mana whenua representatives insist that any nomination and/or accepting of awards for this work must acknowledge the fact that this engagement took place within a context of mana whenua safety, values and mātauranga still being placed secondary to that of development; and that our whānau and hapū looking at a potential need for managed retreat, adamantly opposed upstream development from the outset.

Final reflections

I really appreciated the opportunity to represent Rotorua Lakes Council at the LGNZ Conference this year and think it's unfortunate that due to costs to ratepayers, all councillors are unable to attend each year. I found most of the sessions very beneficial and hope that the notes I have taken and shared will be of interest and use to my fellow councillors, council staff and anyone else who is interested in what I learned.

Ngā mihi mahana,



Lani Kereopa
Māori Ward Councillor
Rotorua Lakes Council