

**RUSSELL PROTECTION SOCIETY (INC)**  
P O Box 154  
Russell, Bay of Islands

## **SUBMISSION TO DRAFT 2008/2009 ANNUAL PLAN**

**Name:** Russell Protection Society  
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We wish to be heard in support of this submission on 13 May in Kaikohe

### **SUBMISSION:**

#### **Issue – Submission process**

In common with many other groups in the Far North, the Russell Protection Society (RPS) has been frustrated by previous LTCCP and Annual Plan submission processes. For the past several years the RPS has worked closely with other groups in Russell to develop a unified approach to key issues affecting Russell, however the FNDC has largely ignored our collective submissions and has not made any changes in response. This can serve to undermine public faith in what is intended to be a major consultative process and could lead to cynicism about the real intentions of the FNDC.

#### **Issue – Walking and cycling strategy** (Transport: Walking and Cycling Strategy, pp14)

*“Further develop the Walking and Cycling Strategy to feed into the next Far North Future Plan”*

The RPS supports a timely and effective Walking and Cycling Strategy for the Far North. The proposal in the Annual Plan needs to be strengthened by establishing a clear timeline within the year 2008/09.

Desired outcome: That Council commit to producing this important strategy within the 2008/09 planning period.

#### **Issue – Water Schemes, New Works** (Consolidated water, wastewater & refuge Budget; Key capital projects by ward, pp 31)

*“Extension to Paihia and Russell...” “deferred until 2009/2010”*

(Also Proposed Capital Projects, pp 137)

*“Extension to Paihia and Russell... \$225,000 in 2012/2013”*

These items refer to the provision of a communal water supply for Russell. As detailed in our and other groups previous submissions, the community of Russell does not need nor want an expensive FNDC provided water scheme. This matter has never been discussed with our community, despite having been given such an undertaking by the previous Council. The people of Russell have already invested heavily in their own individual water systems, which are generally performing well. If it is demonstrated that there are public health issues arising from this, then there are a number of effective, proprietary water treatment systems that are designed to treat individual water systems. In our view, it is preferable to rely on individual responsibility than to be reliant on a Council

provided system that has been demonstrated to be of questionable quality and reliability. This would also avoid having to debate the divisive issues of fluoridation and chlorination. Individual systems help to promote water conservation and are more environmentally sustainable, while aiding in the reduction of stormwater flows. If a few businesses or developers in Russell wish to have a communal water system in order to facilitate more intensive development of their own properties, then there is no reason why the wider community should be forced to subsidise this.

Desired outcome: Delete this item from the 2008/2009 Annual Plan and commence discussions with the Russell community on the possible provision of a communal water scheme, before making any decisions about whether to plan and budget for it.

**Issue – Broadband** (District Facilities: Broadband, pp 39)

*“Work towards efficient, reliable high speed internet access to all communities in the District”*

The Russell Protection Society supports this initiative because it essential to the economic progression of the District. It will facilitate the setting up of a number of home occupations and other businesses that will provide much needed employment and income to remote communities. The Broadband is also an important educational tool that will help to up skill the workforce and broaden the knowledge base. On another related issue, more care needs to be taken in the siting of cell phone towers in order to avoid irreversible damage to archaeological and historic sites, and to scenic landscapes.

Desired outcome: This policy should be a Council priority that is resourced properly so that the stated goal is given proper traction.

**Issue – RMA processes** (Primary services: Services that support communities, pp 51)

*“Reduce the number of consents going to hearings”*

*“Introduce self certification for...resource consent processing to reduce costs and speed up the issuing of consents”*

*“Improve sewerage systems for new subdivisions”*

*“Improve coastal access on coastal subdivisions”*

The intent of the Resource Management Act (RMA) is not only to enable sustainable development and subdivision, but is also to protect the property rights of other land owners and those of the community generally. The simple and obvious answer is for applicants to comply with the District Plan in order to avoid delays, rather than trying to achieve more intensive subdivision and development than is provided for, in an attempt to maximise the value of their individual land holding. The RMA specifies the consent processes that are required and the roles that the various actors play in these processes. It is only within these constraints that the RMA processes can be sped up. Rather than adopting a policy of simply trying to reduce the number of hearings, the goal should be for Council to improve its RMA processes overall. The public participation processes should be made more effective and efficient and the Council processing of applications can equally be improved. Information and application requirements can be better defined and advice can be tendered in a timely and professional manner. It is also unclear as to whether the RMA would allow for self certification and given the Council's apparent views on the use of consultants, this policy needs to be reconsidered. The proposals to improve sewerage systems for new subdivisions by making the subdivider primarily responsible for providing an approved and sustainable system is supported. Improving coastal access is a laudable goal in many instances, however this needs to be qualified because controlling the level of access can be an important tool in managing the coastal environment. It is noted that the RMA already provides the necessary mechanisms to secure public

access to coastal areas and it is really up to the Council and its officers to exercise these provisions.

Desired outcome: The narrow proposal to reduce the number of consent hearings should be deleted in favour of adopting a more robust policy to improve RMA processes generally. The proposal for self certification should be abandoned because the RMA does not allow Council to abandon its statutory responsibilities. The policy on sewerage schemes for new subdivisions should be strengthened by making clear what the subdivider's responsibilities are in this regard. The policy for access to the coast should be clarified by noting that providing different levels of public access is an important tool in the sustainable management of coastal areas.

**Issue: Stormwater** (Safety and Environment: Stormwater, pp 52)

*“Complete stormwater catchment management plans for...Russell”*

*“Confirm stormwater reticulation and network capacity in order to pinpoint future upgrade requirements and prevent flooding”*

This is a very frustrating issue for Russell. There are already approved, comprehensive stormwater catchment management plans for Russell Central and Matauwhi Bay, however the FNDC has largely chosen not to implement them. These plans are conditions of consent to a previous application for the laying of a stormwater pipeline in Cass Street and therefore Council has a statutory duty to observe them. These existing plans are comprehensive because they recognise that every effort must be made to reduce stormwater runoff rather than trying to simply put more expensive pipes in the ground. The plans require that impermeable surfaces be minimised, that existing grassy berms and water tables be properly maintained, that stormwater overflow areas and detention dams be constructed, that existing sumps/grates/pipes/gutters be cleaned regularly, that subdivisions be “stormwater neutral”, and that development and re-development be required to dispose of stormwater on-site.

Desired outcome: That the FNDC fulfil its statutory responsibilities by fully implementing its existing stormwater catchment management plans for Russell Central and Matauwhi Bay.

**Issue – Tapeka Beach erosion** (Safety & Environment: Drainage and flood protection works, pp 58)

*“Russell ...Tapeka \$300K for 2007/08 and \$0 for 2008/098”*

Recent storms have substantially eroded the sand beach at Tapeka, while sweeping away the launching ramp and swimming platform. Urgent works are required to restore the stream channel, reinstate the link between the grassy reserve and the sandy beach and rebuild the launching ramp. The loss of this ramp is now putting considerable pressure on the Russell ramp.

Desired outcome: The Annual Plan should include capital works provision for an estimated \$70K to reinstate the stream channel, foreshore and launching ramp at Tapeka.

**Issue - District Planning** (Planning and Governance: District Planning, pp 63)

*“Undertake internal review of District Plan”*

*“Implement appropriate changes to the District Plan as a result of the 2007/20087 internal review”*  
(pp 64)

The FNDC District Plan has just gone through an open and transparent review/appeal process and therefore it currently represents the documented aspirations of the people of the Far North. The fact

that there were a large number of submissions and appeals is testimony to the fact that consultants and Council officers had drafted a planning document that was not acceptable to many of the ratepayers in the District. The Local Government Act 2002 and the Resource Management Act require the Council to fully engage the public *from the outset* on matters that directly affect them. Given that the District Plan has only just been reviewed, there does not appear to be any case for conducting another review. More particularly, it is unacceptable to conduct such a review by Council officers behind closed doors. If the Council has a perception that there are issues arising from the newly reviewed District Plan, then it should spell out these issues in the Annual Plan and then seek the response of the public as to whether any fresh review is warranted. Otherwise this proposed “internal review” could raise some questions about Council's intentions, lending weight to a view that Council and its officers apparently think that they know what is best for its constituents, despite the public review process that has just been completed, and therefore they don't need to observe the spirit of the legislation and properly consult with ratepayers.

Desired outcome: The proposal to undertake an internal review should be deleted from the Annual Plan. If Council perceives that there are issues arising from the newly reviewed District Plan, then it should spell these out in a public discussion document and invite submissions as to whether Council should then initiate any subsequent Plan changes.

**Issue - Structure Planning** (As above, pp 66)  
*“Undertake reassessment of priority growth areas”*

The previous structure planning for Russell Peninsula was undertaken by Auckland-based consultants without any public input. As a result, all organisations in Russell submitted against proposals in the LTCCP and the previous Annual Plan which suggested that the Peninsula could become a “priority growth area”. There are a number of physical, environmental, social and particularly servicing constraints that make such an idea untenable. It is noted that the Paihia community is being supported in conducting their own visioning exercise about how they see the future of their area. The Russell and Okiato communities also wish to be supported in the task of preparing a vision for their Peninsula, rather than again being placed in a position of being dictated to by a consultant who is looking to squeeze more growth out of the Bay of Islands on behalf of the District. It is also noted that the Russell community has already prepared some of the groundwork for such a visioning exercise through the work carried out by the widely supported “Russell 2000” group.

Desired outcome: The RPS welcomes a proper reassessment of priority growth areas, and in the case of Russell Peninsula this should be driven by the local community, starting with support by FNDC for a local visioning exercise.

**Issue - Rates discount scheme** (Financial commentary; Other issues for consultation, pp 81)  
*“Intention to discontinue rates discount scheme”*

The RPS challenges the figure that the FNDC has presented in its Annual Plan regarding alleged savings of \$450K to be gained by discontinuing the present rates discount scheme. Council needs to present a proper cost-benefit analysis which acknowledges the savings that are derived from having rates paid from the outset in one lump sum as opposed to the loss incurred through the discounted sum. These savings include the bank interest that can be derived, the quarterly rates notices that are not required, the subsequent accounting processes that are not required and the possible arrears notices and collection processes that are not required. In addition, having a

guaranteed sum at the start of the financial year allows for a degree of certainty in forward planning and reduces the amount of interest that must be paid on Council's day to day borrowing facility. The Russell community has a number of retired people who use the rates discount scheme to simplify budgeting for their rates payments and to ensure that they can travel without the worry of missing a rates instalment. They would like to be confident that there are sound reasons for axing a scheme that particularly meets their needs.

Desired outcome: That the rates discount scheme be continued.

**Issue - Russell sewerage plant upgrade** (Proposed capital projects: Wastewater treatment, pp 132) *“Plant upgrade Russell, \$100K for 2012/13, \$100K for 2013/14, \$2 million for 2014/15 and \$2 million for 2015/16”.*

The ratepayers of Russell have recently paid over 13 million dollars for a “state of the art” sewerage scheme. After a number of problems in properly commissioning and maintaining this scheme, it is now performing satisfactorily and is producing high quality effluent. The Russell community, through its Russell Executive, now has a direct involvement in managing this scheme. It is therefore disconcerting to discover that FNDC is proposing to spend large sums of ratepayers money on renewing this scheme, without ever having discussed the matter with nominated community representatives. Sewerage schemes should have a minimum design life of some 25 years, however the reality is that most schemes preform for many more years than that. It is therefore unclear what exactly Council is proposing in its Annual Plan. If for instance Council is proposing to pipe sewage across the water to Opuia, Paihia or Waitangi, then the groups in Russell are already on record as opposing this (please refer to the RPS and other submissions on the proposed “Bay of Island Mega-sewerage system”). The community does want to ensure that the FNDC properly maintains our existing scheme now and into the future. However, the funds referred to above are for “capital works” and therefore Council needs to fully consult with the Russell community before it throws money at something that may not be appropriate or even required.

Desired outcome: That Council deletes these large capital works proposals for Russell sewerage from the 2008/2009 Annual Plan and then consults with the Russell Executive before determining if or when any future proposals in this regard should be incorporated in subsequent annual plans.

Signed

Date 17 April 2008

On behalf of the Russell Protection Society

Address for Service: As above