



Report 04.468
Date 10 August 2004
File E/07/07/03

Committee Policy, Finance and Strategy Committee
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LGNZ Annual Conference 2004

1. Purpose

To provide a report back on the *Local Government New Zealand Annual Conference 2004*.

2. Background

The 2004 LGNZ Conference was held at the Aotea Centre, Auckland on 26-28 July. Conference proceedings followed the familiar format of keynote speakers, breakout sessions in which a panel of experts address a subject area, networking, and an AGM. With 500 delegates and 150 observers any interaction at formal sessions was (sensibly) limited, but networking opportunities were immense.

3. Conference

The Prime Minister opened the Conference with a meaty speech, separately circulated to Councillors. It is interesting that the phrase “whole of government” now appears to include local government. This is an activist government and while that brings bonuses in responsiveness (flood relief, LG Commission?), it also brings worries in regulation (drinking water standards). In a neat bookend, Don Brash spoke at the end.

Other speakers were interesting in their variety. I was most impressed by Peter Kenyon (Australian, economic development/community partnership); Moira Rayner (expat, spoke on human rights but ranged much wider); Caroline Saunders (academic entertainer, on economic well-being); and Lindsay Williams (Fulton Hogan – contractor issues). Themes I noted were the insistence on outcomes over process and outputs, a “duty” of leadership, agency partnership as the buzz, the rather neglected potential of youth, local government capability and the lack of it, the extraordinary range of local government activities and environments, the impact of election cycles – everybody in “hold” mode, and a striking concentration on rural affairs amongst Regional Councils.

In terms of substance, I found the session on the RMA easily first, with David Benson-Pope and John Hutchings in particular actually illuminating. John Hutchings presented the work of the LGNZ expert group, and I suggest our Environment Committee get it and read it carefully – I recognise many of Cr Buchanan’s themes. The main point of difference (between presenters, parties and lobbyists) is over how to process national development matters.

Conference organisation was smart in allowing ample opportunity for delegates to network – longer breaks, organised social events, portfolio and geographic breakout groups. Networking is the greatest benefit of these Conferences. Where else can one contact and chat meaningfully with the Mayor (or deputy), Chief Executive and Councillors from every Council in this region, 8 or 9 other Regional Councils, a range of other cities and districts, all Crown transport agencies, several other government agencies, MPs from Green, United, National and Labour, and a few lobbyists and journalists? I also enjoyed a stimulating post-Conference discussion with Jack Rikihana, applying Conference themes to GWRC. I commend this aspect of LGNZ Conference to future delegates.

I found it interesting that we behaved exactly as the Metros on the few contentious remits (for active recycling, for a more rational procurement system for public transport, against local government taking over traffic police duties, and revenues).

4. Recommendation

That the Committee receive this report.

Report prepared by:

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