

Submitter No: 329

Submitter Name: GDC

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Summary of evidence of Mayor Tracy Hicks

- 1 My name is Tracy Hicks. I am the elected Mayor of Gore District and have held this public office since 2004.
- 2 My evidence will complement the suite of planning and engineering evidence provided by other experts representing Gore, Southland and Invercargill Territorial Authorities affected by the proposed plan. The scope of my evidence aims to provide a community response to the proposals relating to the economic and social impacts of the proposed water and land plan in the Gore District.

Key concerns

- 3 Gore District's 3 Waters infrastructure has developed over many decades to meet the needs of the community and local environmental conditions. This infrastructure is extensive, complex and aging and the District is approaching an important period to ensure that its infrastructure assets continue to meet the needs of the community in the future.
- 4 The Gore District Council recognises the need to improve water quality across the region and that everyone – both rural and urban users – has a role to play in how this is to be achieved. It is my view that the key to meeting this challenge, will be a combination of innovation, cooperation and flexibility.
- 5 At present I consider the proposed approach of the pSWLP is too restrictive in achieving these aims in an economically and socially sustainable way. The proposed non-complying activities around the 3 Waters consents implies that consents for this critical infrastructure are not anticipated.

Gore District's community

- 6 Gore District's population is currently 12,033. The Council is not expecting population growth in the near future given statistics from the latest census (2013). However demographic profiles show there is still an increasing percentage of elderly in the district, which is likely to lead to a greater number of lower occupancy residential units requiring 3 Waters infrastructure. A large element of the population is in the lower income and spending brackets.
- 7 The Council is in many ways a typical example of the majority of its namesakes as a provider of "core" activities. The Council has consistently regarded the provision of these core infrastructure services as vital to maintaining the community's health and well-being.

Gore District infrastructure – current and future financial implications and community impacts

- 8 Gore District Council is already investing in new infrastructure initiatives to alleviate a range of 3Waters related issues. My evidence provides a full account of the financial impact of these and other potential projects on the Gore District's community over the next 10 years, which in effect provides for over \$16 million of capital expenditure in waste and storm water alone.
- 9 In addition I also provide a future scenario financial model of delivery of the same infrastructure within a shorter time frame based on the approach that appears to evident in the pSWLP. Here I outline the major financial implications for the ratepayer and Council's financial position generally.
- 10 Given Gore District's demographics and the future financial burdens likely to be placed on an aging population with predominantly fixed incomes, I consider a more evolutionary rather than revolutionary approach is needed to address what are long standing issues, developed over a number of decades.

Conclusion

- 11 The community of Gore District, and its Council recognise the water quality situation is not in a satisfactory state. We recognise that both the urban and rural elements of our community need to take action and that investment in our infrastructure is required to meet the challenges around water quality.
- 12 However, I consider that the current pSWLP provisions, and non-complying activity rules specifically, have not taken full account of the full economic and social consequences of their potential impact on large scale infrastructure providers and communities. That such rules will either not provide for infrastructure, or hasten the requirement for infrastructure that outpaces the ability of the community to afford it will result in poor community outcomes.
- 13 I therefore respectfully submit that Environment Southland's approaches such rules in a discretionary fashion, enabling consents to be issued with tight controls and aligned with a long term plan of action that takes into account the effects of the economic and social constraints.