

Making Submissions to Council Planning Processes: Tips from Colleen Sheldon, Horizons Regional Councillor¹

The Environment Network Manawatu thanks Councillor Colleen Sheldon for her willingness to speak at our 23 June 2014 community workshop on making submissions. The following notes are based on her oral presentation to the workshop participants.

Recommendations for submitters to draft annual plans and long-term plans

- **Include what you're happy with in your submission.** Unless you note those programmes you favour, someone who submits against that programme may be the only voice heard.
- **Provide solutions; Share your passions.** Don't just tell councillors what's wrong. Tell them what could be right.
- **Focus on outcomes, not outputs.** For example, say how many wetlands and bush remnants you want to protected, instead of saying how much money you want in the biodiversity budget. Submitters often focus too much on the amount of money.
- **Be clear about what you want and what you mean.** When you submit, don't assume that councillors know the same things you do.
- **Be very specific about what you want.** You can make a value-based submission without drawing on science if that suits you, but you need to find some way to specify what you are seeking. For example, if you are submitting on wanting to swim in the river, be specific about whether you want to be able to swim everywhere or if there are some specific places that matter most to you.
- **Think hard about the status quo.** It's typical to think in terms of the status quo, or to request the status quo plus some new programmes. Also think about why we are doing the status quo in the first place. Is it what's right for us? For example, if we're routinely putting a certain amount of money into stop bank programmes, do stop banks give us the best outcome?
- **Pay particular attention to long-term plans.** The ten-year plans need to be the key focus, moreso than annual plans. In time there may even be thirty-year plans. For Horizons, meetings for long-term planning start getting quite intense in the August prior to the draft's release.

Some context to consider when submitting to Horizons plans

When submitting to the regional council, it's important to recognise that they can't tell the local council what to do, even when issues that the two councils manage are closely interlinked. For example, an integrated approach to flood management might be ideal, but that doesn't give Horizons any authority to tell PNCC what to do. Similarly, storm water linked to PNCC urban planning brings unmanaged pollution into the river, but Horizons doesn't have jurisdiction over this.

Also note that in all the rural districts, the population is decreasing, especially in the young adult bands. Councillors have to think about how to pay for infrastructure, for example for waste water treatment. This is most expensive in small populations because they lack economies of scale. Rural infrastructure, therefore, can be most challenging to fund.

¹ Notes by Sharon Stevens, ENM Project Coordinator. Available online from the ENM web site, <http://enm.org.nz>, under the menu items "resources" on "submissions."