

SUBMISSION

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To: Matamata-Piako District Council
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Submission on: **Consultation Document Long Term Plan 2024-34**

Date: 18th April 2024

Submission by: **WAIKATO FEDERATED FARMERS**

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**SUBMISSION TO MATAMATA-PIAKO DISTRICT COUNCIL
LONG TERM PLAN CONSULATION DOCUMENT 2024-2034**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Waikato Federated Farmers (WFF) and Federated Farmers of New Zealand (FFNZ) welcome the opportunity to submit to Matamata-Piako District Council (MPDC) on its *Long Term Plan Consultation Document 2024-2034*.
- 1.2 FFNZ submits on Annual Plans (**APs**) and Long-term Plans (**LTPs**) throughout New Zealand and make constructive proposals whenever the opportunity is provided.
- 1.3 FFNZ also submit on central government policies that affect local government revenue and spending, with the aim of ensuring that local government has the appropriate resources to carry out their functions.
- 1.4 FFNZ base our arguments on the considerable cost of rates to farm businesses, in terms of the value and relative accessibility of farmers to ratepayer funded services, the rates levels on farms compared to other residents and businesses, and the failure of property value to reflect the incomes of farmers and their relative ability to pay.
- 1.5 WFF's feedback represents the views ~440 farming members and rate payers from the Matamata-Piako District. We gently remind Matamata-Piako District Council of this so that our members' views, expressed here, are weighed appropriately.
- 1.6 Federated Farmers is focused on the transparency of rate setting, rates equity and both the overall and relative cost of local government on rural ratepayers.
- 1.7 FFNZ is conscious that there may be significant 'consultation fatigue' out in the community, following the 18 months' worth of significant central government proposals.
- 1.8 Our members do not want their busy silence to be misconstrued as disinterest in the proposed changes. Given the challenging regulatory and economic environment we are currently in, we acknowledge this may result in a low response rate to the consultation process.
- 1.9 We acknowledge any submissions from individual members of Federated Farmers.
- 1.10 **WFF requests the opportunity to discuss this submission with the Council during the hearing process.**

2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC should fully utilise the UAGC mechanism at 30% of the total rates income, to support equity between ratepayers.**
- 2.2 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC actively promotes central government's rates rebates scheme and actively encourages ratepayers to apply.**
- 2.3 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC 'shelve' the Te Aroha Spa Project.**
- 2.4 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC continue roading renewals at the current level as local roads are the lifeline of the farming community and serve the interests of the whole district and its economy.**
- 2.5 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC stops budgeting for new walking and cycling connections and safety improvements.**
- 2.6 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC prioritise maintenance and renewals of town centre infrastructure and Pride of Place.**
- 2.7 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC limit playground improvements to the planned new playgrounds for Matamata and Te Aroha.**
- 2.8 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC consider the expansion of funding to ensure that playgrounds are partially or fully fenced due to safety concerns.**
- 2.9 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC remove the Matamata civic stage from the work program.**
- 2.10 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC continue with investigating and delivering a suitable building to continue providing library services in Te Aroha.**
- 2.11 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC consider combining the library with other buildings that provide council services (information centre, public meeting spaces, and office space), to form a "Hub" for the Community**
- 2.12 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC continue with the proposed Morrinsville stormwater upgrade.**
- 2.13 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC continue progressing with the Matamata stadium.**
- 2.14 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC should include a rates remission policy to provide relief from the UAGC and targeted rates for non-contiguous land which is farmed as a single entity.**
- 2.15 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC should introduce a new reduced fee category for working dogs to reflect that rural working dogs are low-demand users of Council dog control services.**

3. GENERAL COMMENTS

General Rates

- 3.1 Waikato Federated Farmers would like to congratulate MPDC on the preparation and presentation of their LTP Consultation Document.
- 3.2 WFF agree with the Council's focus on being prudent and affordable.
- 3.3 WFF are also aware of the demands from Central Government and with the tough economic environment we are supportive of MPDC's approach to:
- Looking after what you have got.
 - Delivery of the same services to the same standard.
 - Smoothing costs where you can.
 - Just do the "must do's" and not the "should do's" or "could do's".
- 3.4 WFF advises that some areas of the primary sector are facing difficult economic times at present and supports the MPDC in being prudent and transparent.

Uniform Annual General Charge

- 3.5 WFF commends MPDC for aiming to maintain the Uniform Annual General Charge (UAGC) at or above 22.5% of rate revenue - as a way to mitigate the impact on higher value properties - yet believes that the Council should fully utilise the UAGC mechanism at 30% of the total rates income.
- 3.6 MPDC has said it considered "*the impact that a higher UAGC may have on those with low/fixed incomes and relatively low property values*" during the UAGC deliberations. The majority of Council expenditure benefits the whole district and this should be reflected in the base level of rates contributed by all ratepayers.
- 3.7 WFF does not accept the simplistic assumption that a property's value correlates to income or ability to pay. Central government has better information through the income tax system, and it is best placed to respond through its social support mechanisms. The Government's Rates Rebate Scheme is targeted specifically to provide rates relief to low-income ratepayers. We urge MPDC to promote this scheme and actively encourage ratepayers to apply.
- 3.8 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC should fully utilise the UAGC mechanism at 30% of the total rates income, to support equity between ratepayers.**
- 3.9 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC actively promotes central government's rates rebates scheme and actively encourages ratepayers to apply.**

4. COMMENTS ON KEY ISSUES

This section of the submission provides FFNZ's comments on the 'What We Are Proposing' section of the consultation document.

WHAT WE ARE PROPOSING TO REDUCE

Te Aroha Spa Project

4.1 WFF supports the council's proposed "alternative option" to 'shelve' the Spa Project and look to revisit this option in the future.

4.2 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC 'shelve' the Te Aroha Spa Project

Roading Renewals

4.3 WFF support the "alternative option" of keeping the roading renewals at the current level.

4.4 The district's local roads are the lifeline of the farming community. They are the predominant benefit farmers receive from council's service provision, and, by our calculations, cost farming families thousands of dollars in rates each year. Our local rural roads serve the interests of the whole district and its economy. They need much-deserved attention right now.

4.5 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC continue roading renewals at the current level as local roads are the lifeline of the farming community and serve the interests of the whole district and its economy.

Walking and Cycling Connections

4.6 WFF support the council's proposed option of "stop budgeting for new walking and cycling connections and safety improvements".

4.7 Given the current economic climate council should heavily reduce the funding of cycleways. However, should funding from a third party be made available, then considerations for cycle infrastructure could be re-evaluated in the future.

4.8 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC stop budgeting for new walking and cycling connections and safety improvements.

Town Centre Infrastructure Upgrades

4.9 WFF support the proposed option of "prioritise maintenance and renewals and Pride of Place".

4.10 The three towns are the hubs of our community and MPDC needs to continue maintenance, including regular cleaning of our main streets and surrounds.

4.11 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC prioritise maintenance and renewals of town centre infrastructure and Pride of Place

Playgrounds

4.12 WFF support the proposed option to "limit playground improvements to the planned new playgrounds for Matamata and Te Aroha".

- 4.13 WFF requests that MPDC consider the expansion of funding to ensure that playgrounds are partially or fully fenced due to safety concerns.
- 4.14 **Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC limit playground improvements to the planned new playgrounds for Matamata and Te Aroha.**
- 4.15 **Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC consider the expansion of funding to ensure that playgrounds are partially or fully fenced due to safety concerns.**

Matamata Civic Stage

- 4.16 FFFZ support MPDCs proposed option to “remove this project from the work programme”.
- 4.17 **Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC remove the Matamata civic stage from the work program.**

WHAT WE’RE PROPOSING TO KEEP THE SAME

Te Aroha Library

- 4.18 WFF support the Council’s proposed option of investigating and delivering a suitable building to continue providing library services in Te Aroha. WFF believes that libraries offer an essential service and are an important part of the community.
- 4.19 WFF would like to understand if MPDC has considered combining the library with other buildings that provide council services (information centre, public meeting spaces, and office space), to form a “Hub” for the Community and allow for future growth.
- 4.20 WFF looks forward to the future consultation MPDC will have with the community.
- 4.21 **Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC continue with investigating and delivering a suitable building to continue providing library services in Te Aroha.**
- 4.22 **Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC consider combining the library with other buildings that provide council services (information centre, public meeting spaces, and office space), to form a “Hub” for the Community**

WHAT HAS INCREASED

Morrinsville Storm water Upgrades

- 4.23 WFF supports MPDCs proposed Morrinsville stormwater upgrades and understands that this is work that must be done.
- 4.24 **Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC continue with the proposed Morrinsville stormwater upgrade.**

Matamata Stadium

- 4.25 WFF supports MPDCs proposed stance on the building of a new sports stadium and the \$3m funding.

4.26 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC continue progressing with the Matamata stadium.

5. COMMENTS ON FROM THE REMAINDER OF THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT:

This section of the submission comments on the issues raised throughout the remainder of the consultation document.

Comment on Water Meters/Drinking Water:

5.1 WFF supports the proposed implementation of water meters through a user pays approach and is aware of the implications of the “3 waters” to urban ratepayers.

5.2 As farmers have existing water meters for their farming operations, WFF understands that the installation of water meters in urban areas should lead to a reduction in the consumption of water usage.

Approach to Rates and Debt:

5.3 WFF agrees with the proposed option, realising that with the increased government regulation, growth in our district and the current economic conditions all councils are facing the same or similar challenges.

6. COMMENTS ON RATES REMISSION POLICY CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

This section of the submission comments on the issues raised in the Rates Remission Policy document.

Existing Rate Remissions

6.1 WFF commends MPDC on the inclusion of rates remissions for land protected for conservation purposes, metered water leaks, and the remission and postponement of rates for natural disasters and emergencies.

Policy on Remission of Uniform Charges and Targeted Rates on Non-Contiguous Rating Units

6.2 WFF suggests that MPDC should include a rates remission policy for non-contiguous rating units farmed as a single entity, to ensure relief from the UAGC and targeted rates, similar to South Waikato District Council.

6.3 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC should include a rates remission policy to provide relief from the UAGC and targeted rates for non-contiguous land which is farmed as a single entity.

7. COMMENTS ON SCHEDULE OF FEES AND CHARGES

This section of the submission comments on the issues in the Schedule of Fees and Charges document.

- 7.1 WFF is pleased to see that there is a \$30 rebate per working dog, but this would still have registration fees at \$127 per working dog. This is too expensive once you consider that many farmers need multiple dogs on a property.
- 7.2 WFF suggests that MPDC introduce a new reduced fee category for working dogs to reflect that rural working dogs are low-demand users of Council dog control services, creating significantly lower relative costs for Council. This would be in line with 58 other councils that provide this fee structure.
- 7.3 WFF asks the Council what percentage of animal control costs originate from rural dogs, compared to urban dogs, as council states that fees have been increased to reflect actual cost and recover more from fees. Farmers value and manage dogs well, with their dogs well trained and contained on the property.
- 7.4 Recommendation: WFF recommends that MPDC should introduce a new reduced fee category for working dogs to reflect that rural working dogs are low-demand users of Council dog control services.**

Waikato Federated Farmers thanks Matamata-Piako District Council for considering our submission.

Federated Farmers is a not-for-profit primary sector policy and advocacy organisation that represents the majority of farming businesses in New Zealand. Federated Farmers has a long and proud history of representing the interests of New Zealand's farmers.



The Federation aims to add value to its members' farming businesses. Our key strategic outcomes include the need for New Zealand to provide an economic and social environment within which:

- Our members may operate their business in a fair and flexible commercial environment;
- Our members' families and their staff have access to services essential to the needs of the rural community; and
- Our members adopt responsible management and environmental practices.

This submission is representative of member views and reflect the fact that local government rating and spending policies impact on our member's daily lives as farmers and members of local communities.