

Moutere Hills Residents Association Submission to the Tasman District Council

Waimea Community Dam Funding and Governance Consultation

About the MHRA

The Moutere Hills Residents Association (MHRA) is an incorporated society with members throughout the wider Moutere Hills area. The association aims to determine the consensual opinion of residents and ratepayers of the Moutere Hills area and to act as a channel of communication between the Tasman District Council and the community.

Submission

On the current consultation regarding funding and governance models of the proposed Waimea Community Dam the MHRA submits as follows.

It is noted that both of the funding options presented for the dam include an 'environmental flow' component of 30% of the construction cost to be funded by the whole district on a fixed rate per property basis, leading to a rates increase projected to be \$97 to \$129 per property per year.

The MHRA submits that there are significant concerns among residents of the Moutere Hills area about either funding model and the projected rates increase implied thereby, as well as about the overall affordability of the dam and what is seen as uneven distribution of benefit.

The MHRA has canvassed its members and local residents and determined that it is considered unacceptable by many to be levied for what is seen as a more or less direct subsidy to Waimea Plains water users without the prospect of any tangible benefits to remaining residents of the district. Common feedback suggests that any financing model of the dam should be using exclusively or a much higher proportion of the 'user pays' principle.

We submit that Council further investigate the level of popular support for the dam project, the ability of the population to afford rates increases, and review the proposed funding models accordingly in order to achieve a proposal with no or significantly reduced general rates impact.

Local Survey Results

The MHRA is currently polling 600 households in the Moutere catchment on the subject of water supply, representing a population of approximately 1,500. At the time of this submission, 11% of households polled have participated in the survey.

Of those replies that have indicated an opinion on the Waimea Dam, **84% do not support the dam project as it is currently proposed** (of total replies received 71% indicated no support, 14% indicated some support, and 15% indicated no opinion on the dam, as the survey also contained questions unrelated to the proposed dam).

Of those replies that indicated support for the dam project many have made this support conditional on the prospect of a tangible benefit to the Moutere Hills area, such as the option to receive water from the dam through a reticulated supply via the Mapua pipeline. This prospect does currently not exist.

The survey result figures are approximate, and might change as more replies are being evaluated. Further results will be published on our website. However, for the purposes of this submission, the figures are substantial enough to indicate a clear trend of public opinion of local residents.

Background

The population of the Moutere Hills area contains two groups: owners of properties on roof, bore, or well water supply (approximately 55% of replies) who have made substantial investments in their own water supply and do not appreciate the prospect of being further levied for a water project with no benefit to them; and residents of properties connected to the Dovedale water scheme (45% of replies).

The Dovedale water scheme suffers chronically from lack of quality (a permanent boil water notice has been in place for years) and lack of capacity (no new connections are possible) with no improvements in sight - TDC has postponed plans to upgrade the scheme to "2026" - while costs for being connected to the scheme are constantly increasing.

Of the households connected to the Dovedale water scheme polled, 93% have indicated that they are unsatisfied with their current water supply. This population group has no understanding for being asked to partly fund a \$70 M water supply project with costs not unlikely to increase well beyond that and no direct benefits to Dovedale scheme users, while at the same time the projected \$1.6 M investment needed to improve the local scheme's source has been considered "too expensive" by Tasman District Council and postponed for another ten to twenty years.

Other Concerns

Other concerns raised during our recent survey of local residents include:

- Continuous increase of general rates burden: many households have indicated that they cannot afford to pay any more on their annual rates than they already are.
- Increasing council debt: there is considerable concern about council amassing additional long-term debts.
- Uneven distribution of benefit: as suggested further above, there is concern that the general population is asked to subsidise a small group of commercial operators.

Conclusion

We ask that Council

- further investigate the level of popular support for the dam project
- investigate the ability and willingness of the population to afford rates increases
- thus determine the overall affordability of the project
- review the proposed funding models accordingly in order to achieve a proposal with no or significantly reduced general rates impact or additional council debts