



THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

OPINION PIECE – 10 July 2018

Looking to the future, together

The Government announcement of a ban on new mining on conservation land has re-opened old wounds here on the West Coast and, with some other recent events, has again caused residents to question whether they will have any say in the future of this thriving and forward-looking region. It is imperative that we have a say, but there is a real danger of getting so caught up in debate amongst ourselves about what to do that we lose the opportunity to truly influence the larger, national conversation about the future of our West Coast.

The Government will issue a discussion document in September that will form the basis of consultation on its proposal for no new mines on conservation land.

We need to have our own constructive conversations well underway **before** that document lands on us. We have to be realistic. The Government will not consult on whether there is a ban; the consultation is about how the ban might be implemented. We need to present ourselves as a coherent, united community seeking the best ways to move forward. It's only when we do that, and are recognised for doing that, that others will have real confidence in us and support our initiatives for the future wellbeing of our own region.

The future is not as black and white as some suggest. It is not a case of a conservation mining ban closing down the West Coast; or of a Government closing its ears to the needs of a region. There will be a mining ban, but its effect is likely to be moderated by the Department of Conservation's current review of the classification of stewardship land; a discussion we clearly need to be at the centre of.

This requires a change of thinking on the Coast. We must be seen to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. There is nothing to be gained by continuing to look to the battlegrounds of the past. The Government has already presented an outline of the future it sees for the West Coast. We must seize the opportunity to influence that outline, define its boundaries and colour in the final picture. While we must work hard to retain core parts of our key industries, along with Coast values and traditions, we must also demonstrate that we can be progressive thinkers who look forward to where our region might be in five, 10 or 20 years' time.

To achieve this, our leaders on the West Coast (including Mayors, Iwi partners, industry stakeholders and communities), must work together to seize the opportunity to effectively influence the Government. It is an opportunity unlike anything we have ever seen before, and potentially, will ever see again. We must grasp it with both hands.

Each of these groups has its own particular views about the future of the West Coast and needs to have the opportunity to express those in the context of the Government consultation. But we will do our region irreparable harm if we end up with an ad hoc, piecemeal approach that simply makes us easier to ignore. The best interests of the Coast will be served if we work together and put forward a strong, united, voice and message representing all West Coast interests.

This will be a two-pronged approach. On one hand we will have the respectful protests, illustrating the growing frustration of our people wearing their hearts on their sleeves, while on the other we

must be engaging Government in a positive manner to ensure they are making decisions based on sound, robust and rational facts and information.

It is likely that future outcomes will require some compromise from all of us, but this has far more potential to deliver a good result for the West Coast. We must cast aside the classic West Coast victim mentality; acknowledge that the world has changed, and take an active role in helping to define what that might mean for our future on the West Coast.

Change is inevitable and it's important that we react to its challenges and adapt to meet the future. We can't hold onto the past so tightly that we fail to see opportunities for the future. Rather than criticise what has (or hasn't) happened here in the past, we have an opportunity to identify and celebrate regional initiatives that have worked well and to think about how they can be translated into suggestions for the future, working closely with Government Ministers and officials to see these come to fruition.

Regional Economic Development Minister Shane Jones has identified the West Coast as one of a handful of surge regions; regions that require more investment and regions that are an absolute priority for them. Acting Prime Minister Winston Peters also acknowledges that the West Coast is a special case. Working with these Ministers is key to securing the future the West Coast aspires to. Our local Minister, Damien O'Connor is also part of this future picture, and engaging positively with him will only pay dividends to achieving success.

The best hope for an outcome that will provide long term benefits to the Coast is for us to acknowledge our diversity and differences, and to work together on a clear, consistent and forward-looking submission on what we want. That needs to be followed by some solid economic development proposals. Minister Jones has already stated that the quality of Provincial Growth Fund applications from the South Island is not high enough.

I firmly believe that there is a strong and healthy future for the West Coast under a policy of sustainable development. Yes, we are living in a vacuum of uncertainty at the moment but it's our job now to flesh out what our future might look like. I'm up for it and will be encouraging others to be part of these conversations; this new way of doing things.

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