



2020 vision of the future - pre-engagement Long Term Plan 2021-2031

Takaka Hill Biodiversity Group Trust response

March 31st, 2020

DRAFT

1 Vision

The major difficulty in responding to this document in relation to its overall Vision, is quite simply *that there isn't one*.

Instead, there is only a 'tweaking the edges' approach, which appears to seek minimal change - anticipating a probable cut-back in services (see especially Sections 5-7.)

This is disappointing - especially given the urgency of the massive social and economic change underway, through firstly the Climate Change debate, and subsequently the shock of COVID 19 and attendant economic crisis.

While TDC policy review could not have been expected to anticipate the latter, it should certainly have included the former - and given that all the research suggests that Climate Emergency includes a scenario of ongoing 'shock' events, that in itself should have called for a far more sustained and thoughtful process of review.

1a Vision

What is TDC's Vision for 2021-2031?

Other than bland statements about 'thriving' and 'resilience', 'healthy environment' and 'strong economy', and 'vibrancy', there is nothing there - no statement of values, to which programmes of action can be attached, and around which structures of services can be arranged.

Tasman already has in place markedly resilient communities. Murchison, which might in many countries have died long ago because of its isolation, instead

proved its capacity to adapt and to develop, confronted by the shock demands of the Kaikoura earthquake transport re-direction. Mapua-Ruby Bay, which lost its industries and was hit by Cyclones Gita and Fehi, burgeoned into a popular dormitory suburb and high-activity retail and recreation zone. Our own small community of Takaka Hill, so small as to be largely discounted as indeed 'a community', is by definition resilient - and has become even more so after its long mobility restrictions caused by Cyclone Fehi road damage.

It is that tendency towards self-sufficiency which drives our values. These derive from a social cohesion attached to the core concept of biodiversity, extending outwards to a social-ecological vision.

It is from that base that we offer the following comments on the TDC 2020 Planning process.

1a Vision

'Thriving and resilient Tasman communities'

Thriving, how? Resilient in the face of what?

Without definition or attached scenarios, this is meaningless, and impossible for communities to affiliate to, or plan around.

Tasman is not one community. Values, and needs, vary.

To indicate that it is serious about community 'resilience' and ways to 'thrive,' Council policy needs to show that it understands, and has ways to incorporate and foster the varying values of varied communities. Wording like this would help:

'Tasman communities will be encouraged to identify those characteristics which make them socially and economically viable, each in their own ways. Council commits to pursuing flexible procedures in relation to its planning and approval processes and regulatory frameworks, to show that it can tailor its service provision, to allow each community to evolve viable and sustainable social and economic activities.'

Further: these sorts of flexibility *across space*, also have to recognise the new reality of a 'shock' environment, subject to Climate Change and global-economic irruption and disruption. This requires flexibility *across time*.

'Together we confront a new social and economic reality, where constant and often precipitate change is going to confront us. TDC commits to a fast-turn-around responsiveness to altered conditions, in both services provision, and policy frameworks. This will mean continued and ongoing review of community demands, and ongoing assessment of TDC service provision, to detect where change is necessary. It will mean 24/7 multi-platform communications and information-

access, and the in-place capacity to use contracted additional service-providers for fast irruptive-change response.'

1b Purpose

'Working together for a healthy environment, strong economy and vibrant communities.'

Again, this fails to explain itself adequately.

Does 'a healthy environment' mean 'a protected and enhanced natural environment', or something more general (e.g., chlorinated water supply; regular garbage collection?)

Is 'a strong economy' one where profits boom and businesses flock to the region - or one where a sustainable approach to use of public resources - water, for instance - is properly regulated and monitored? Put simply, does 'strong' mean *profitable*, or *sustainable* - within its natural-environment resource limits, and able to endure and provide across time?

Is 'a vibrant community' one which has successfully admitted new cultural perspectives, or re-built around Te Ao principles, or fosters creativity and entrepreneurial flair - or all of the above, plus more? Or does it simply mean 'working hard and being productive,' and 'making few demands on Government support,' in a traditional economic model?

If these three 'Vision' dimensions are to be held as being in equal proportions, *how do they link together?*

Without a central value which allows them to interconnect, they are more likely to become - or remain - in uneasy competition for community resources - pressures on the natural environment - and Council services.

1c Community outcomes

While this is a more carefully worked-through list of desiderata, there are again limitations in the approach, brought about by the failure to have a coordinating set of values upon which these principles depend, and against which they can each be assessed.

There is also, as following comments will argue, too much of 'old-school' thinking, limiting the potential for either a cohesive approach, or one able to respond to the urgency and rapid changes coming in this next decade.

2 Strategic priorities

A healthy and sustainable environment

Upfront, this section of TDC Policy needs to acknowledge the shift in thinking, from 'the environment' to 'biodiversity' - a change reflected in all emergent National Policy documents (*Te koiroa o te koiora*, Department of Conservation, 2019; Te Tau Ihu Health Policy, 2020), and one which re-directs thinking into a 'connectionist' rather than a 'siloed' policy culture.

What is under way now is no longer 'special pleading' for a 'natural environment' protection scheme, but recognition that the *biodiversity values which now drive environmental protection planning are in themselves a key social and economic value*: that without integration with and connection between the natural, the social and economic spheres, each will in turn, be lost.

Biodiversity as a value does not just seek to protect nature, or attempt to somehow 'reverse engineer' it, to replicate an indigenous, pre-colonial natural environment. Rather, more like the values within Te Ao Maori, it recognises the natural world as key to our physical and psychological well-being, and so to a sustainably productive economy. It seeks to guarantee our retention of fresh water and a sustainable marine ecosystem, and onward use of lands for primary production and recreation. It is the only feasible foundation for our national identity, and is the core of our international branding.

Biodiversity is not some 'nice to have, if only we had the money,' add-on.

It comes first.

Everything we have, and do, and are, depends upon it.

Strong, resilient communities

What makes a community 'strong,' or 'resilient'?

A social-biodiversity approach tells us that the answer to this rests on acknowledging principles of interconnectedness: a social ecology of 'neighbourliness' and collaboration, which permits and promotes innovation, and is an attractant to incomer ideas and creativity, *because it is clear in its own values.*

At the moment, Tasman District Council policy appears as if markedly *unclear* on what its values are.

In relation to its demographics:

What age profiles does the region contain, and which does it want?
What will attract the desired categories?

For example, in relation to an expansion of housing stock, and associated Planning Approval processes, which Council oversees:

Which does TDC anticipate or want - population stability, or population 'churn?'

Does it expect, or want, a long-term settled community of people born into, schooled in, employed by and retiring within its communities?

Does it intend to allow for - even promote - the sorts of 'high churn' entry and exit of citizens, which attract seasonal workers, young entrepreneurs and creatives, who build a 'start-up' economy and the SMEs which keep township High Streets and online enterprises dynamic?

Without a healthy environment, protected by all policies and all citizen activities - not in some special box called 'the environment' - soon there is no economy, and so a shrinking, poorly serviced and expensive community.

Tasman today is largely a primary-production economy, with a little secondary industry (forest products, food preparation) and tourism.

Even in a post-Covid 19 world, with resistance to and likely collapse of long-haul flights and cruises, the region's variant of the '100% Pure New Zealand' brand remains important. Without it, there is no premium product labeling, and our economy will face 'race to the bottom' price-cutting competition with other primary-production nations.

To date, regional response to old-school environmental protection programmes has been a 'sanctuary' vision: National Parks, and special species-protection reserves.

This is no longer an adequate response.

It fails to acknowledge how environmental health is a social and an economic value - as well as a cause on its own merits. It fails to engage all citizens: to help us all recognise how ecology is an interconnected system, enmeshed in every part of our lives, from production to consumption to waste disposal, and on into to the social and cultural values which form our 'habitus': the *life-habits* we acquire, according to the places we *inhabit*, and therefore how, we live.

In Tasman, our living is shot-through with values connecting us to our environment.

We buy and eat local produce from orchards, vegetable growers, fishing fleets, 'country-kill' butchers, artisan cheese makers, micro-brewers and local wine and cider makers, local fisheries, and farm-gate milk suppliers.

We access local rivers, estuaries, ocean, beaches, mountains and parks for our recreation.

We walk, cycle and drive past home-gardens, long-established hedge-rows, native bush, wetlands, and plantation forests - not all indigenous, but significant natural habitats nonetheless.

This is the new social-ecological connection.

Nature does not exist only in fenced enclosures. It inter-penetrates our living.

Think of Singapore, a small and heavily urbanised location, using new design technologies to inter-weave a natural world within its high-rise housing complexes and retail strips. This is the *new modernity*, which recognises that human health: physical, psychological, spiritual - and economic - depends upon recognising that we are part of, not apart from, nature.

Enabling positive growth and development

This means recognising too that environmental protection and pro-biodiversity consciousness are not *anti*-development.

Biodiversity values do not need - as the current TDC Policy document still suggests - to be 'balanced' against economic expansion. Biodiversity needs, instead, to inform it.

This is not an 'either/or' proposition, but an 'and/and' way of thinking. Biodiversity thinking has moved beyond ideology, and beyond conflict and debate. Biodiversity enhancement - not protection - needs now to be *core to development planning*.

Consider the following cases, part of a Council's planning and approvals work, and a major way of building its values into its processes:

Work on housing and infrastructure, especially in managing Coastal Retreat in response to Climate Change, and the likely post-Covid 19 return of expatriate citizens, seeking quality values in the 'safe havens' of New Zealand's regional locations. (Why go to Auckland, when you have lived and worked in Paris or New York or Tokyo? Areas such as Tasman are likely to experience early-stage post-COVID Recovery demand.)

Housing design

There will be a need to consider in all housing and housing-extension proposals, *a water-management component*.

Why is there no requirement for all building to have rainwater tanks?

This provides an emergency self-supply, and mitigates to some degree storm-water flows.

Why do streetscape designs in larger developments of new housing land not prioritise the use of soaks and wetlands, to help storm-water management?

Where are the 'native corridor' plantings, to encourage indigenous wildlife back into suburbs?

Why is Tasman, a region rich in horticulture and orcharding, not designing edible plantings into its streetscapes?

Where are the in-built cycle-ways and social-mobility strips, allowing children's play, safe pensioner walkways and mobility-scooter tracks?

Multi-use housing blocks

There is a need to move far more quickly, and imaginatively, into *multiple-occupancy dwelling supporting intergenerational living*.

To keep older family members living semi-independently but with family support, 'Tiny House' development should be licensed on existing household blocks.

Upper floors of retail-strips should be licensed for use as apartments for staff - a prime way to recruit quality staff from among those young professionals already identified as likely to be hindered in their career development in the post Covid-19 Recovery (see especially the work of Kiri Allen, March 2020).

At the same time, retail-strip housing allows the development of a flourishing 'night-time economy', which assists the retention of local young adults within the community, further aiding entrepreneurship and 'impresario' business vision, and supporting older family members nearby.

Consider mobile utility connection (connection points external to house units, which permit connection to electricity, internet cabling, water and sewerage). These should be designed into all ordinary housing, so that in emergencies displaced family members can take refuge beside the family home, parking mobile homes and connecting up to water, sewerage and electricity supply. (A good model with over 20-years use exists at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, in Australia, where students live during Term time in caravans, towed from the family farm and parked at the University - the caravans then passed on to successive children in a family, or sold.)

These are matters firmly within the Council remit, which respond to existing and intensifying local demand, and which project out to meet the rapidly emerging 'new modernity' of our future. They build from a 'social ecological' overall Vision, and allow Council to 'brand' itself as responsive, flexible, encouraging diversity with a localised approach, and directed towards resilience.

5/6 Paying for new projects

Rates as an income system cannot expand into infinity.

While some of the proposals outlined here may help recruit energetic and creative businesses and workers into the region, thus increasing the rates take,

other income will also need to be sought, to undertake the work of a 'social-ecological' Council vision.

One way forward is to consider the money *flowing out of a local economy*, for instance, through GST.

In New Zealand, GST is levied on raw foods: directly upon much of Tasman's natural productivity. Other countries (see for instance Australia) do not levy GST upon unprocessed foodstuffs.

A percentage of this GST levied upon food exported outside our region should be reclaimed, to fund measures protecting the natural systems, and the social ecology of the communities, which underlie that productivity.

Costs flowing in:

Waste disposal and recycling costs currently fall upon regional government, and ultimately upon consumers.

These need instead to become a recognised and integrated part of the 'long chain' of resources management:

raw materials>production>transport>consumption>recycling>waste disposal

This chain needs to be unlocked from its 'end-user-pays' model, to assess the value flowing to users at every stage of the life-cycle, and see that costs are equitably levied.

Each phase should include a costing to support the collection, recycling and safe disposal of the final waste.

This should be no longer be a Council service: a one-outlet, old-school social service, but a series of smaller private businesses. If the claim is made that waste management does not offer economic potential to business, then that 'long chain' has not been properly constructed, and the costs of its various phases considered. Why should end users: consumers, who are also rate payers, bear all of these costs?

9 How our community will contribute towards strategic priorities - if directed towards a biodiversity 'social ecology.'

Takaka Hill has a very distinctive 'social ecology,' which recognises its natural environment, and accepts the principle of 'neighbourliness,' collaborating to preserve the world it lives within, and accepting the down-stream consequences of all its actions - across both space, and time.

The Takaka Hill Biodiversity Group Trust allows the landowners on the Takaka Hill to respond to and plan for biodiversity management across a 'land bridge' of

varying natural habitats, between two National Parks, the Abel Tasman and the Kahurangi. This is a unique position.

Decades - in some cases more than a century - of family habitation, and the many inter-generational households on the Hill, makes us intensely aware of our responsibility of stewardship, and the need to conserve habitat and enhance the returning rare native species on our lands.

Together, this builds a vision of a 'flow' or 'interpenetration' zone, where biodiversity work sustains not only the indigenous flora and fauna moving between our lands and our National Park neighbours, but also our own 'healthy' living and economic productivity on the Hill.

Our current projects in response to this model include the following:

predator trapping along the Takaka Hill Walkway, to allow Hills residents and associated groups, such as Cadets undertaking community service, to support the Kahurangi-Takaka Hill interface

habitat enhancement along the Otuwhero River as it flows out of the Abel Tasman National Park, to improve conditions for whio and pateke as they return to its waters after a 40 year absence

wasp baiting and weed control, including native beech seedling transplanting, on the Old Coach Road, to offer improved public recreational access and native species habitat

Each of these projects works across different terrains, and crosses multiple private land-blocks. Each also works with local industry partners, to model the new 'Mountains to the sea' vision for Indigenous Biodiversity, built not on 'lock-down' conservation principles, but around new-school principles of 'access and flow.'

It includes:

three access points for educational curriculum work with High Schools, delivered with partner-group Whenua iti;

three native species protection projects, fostering the survival of *Powelliphanta hochstetteri*, whio and pateke, and the unique Takaka Hill karst kowhai, *Sophora coricanta*.

three new 'eco-gateways' for public access and project support and recognition, promoted through a series of annual 'Waitangi Day Walks.'

This social ecology of openness and inter-connectedness is our community's response to a post-COVID 19 society and economy, where global economic recession will need a creative/collaborative social ecology, new forms of work,

and ways to access the natural world sustainably, for our own mental and spiritual health (see especially recent comments by Nigel Latta, March 2020).

This prepares for an economy where environmental work projects will be vital, as young workers abandon collapsing industries such as tourism, and as returning citizens restore an entrepreneurial edge to smaller regional economies.

This is a '*next-generation/re-generation*' view of a social and economic order, tied to biodiversity values.

It is small scale - but so is our community.

It is, very distinctively, our way forward - and its projects are, in the words of Minister Grant Robertson, 'shovel-ready.'

10 Other comments

These illustrations show just the beginnings of a 'social ecological' modeling, which places biodiversity first, and makes it a part of every planning decision.

Iwi, who have been quietly developing their own long-term and extended generational planning, already understand the need to begin not from 'business as usual' thinking, but from deep values, drawn upon their own cultural traditions.

Many of those values are close to those of biodiversity. Yet with both of these powerful systems to call upon, the TDC policy document has not done any of that work. *And it shows.*

As it stands, this document displays instead an old-school, mid-twentieth-century world view, that takes no account of the new reality: of the Climate Crisis, the powerful return of Te Ao values, the rapid arrival in succession of different forms of emergency conditions (earthquakes, pandemics, associated economic collapse and restructuring,) and the need to consider not the usual neat 'boxes' of Departmental governance, but the inter-connected, social-ecological 'flows' of biodiversity thinking.

There is no vision in TDC's current plan - *because there are no values.*

A way forward for TDC?

- 1 The loss of the community consultation stage of this policy planning process needs to be overcome.

If the review proceeds, communities need to know who responded through the electronic process: a list of response numbers and groups represented, including a profile of respondents by age and gender and, where possible, affiliation to known groups.

- 2 To begin the work of incorporating a biodiversity-founded social-ecological Vision, a small Biodiversity Unit needs to be incorporated into TDC, led by an expert ecologist with a strong background in social theory.

This will require a small funding-line for supporting public information meetings and online information flows, and a connection to local industries and businesses.

- 3 Above all, the work of such Officers needs to be kept fluid and flexible.

This is not the time for constructing systems of 'representative' boards or committee structures. Biodiversity principles, operating through a 'real world' social ecology, represent themselves. They do not need - and will likely resist - traditional models of 'governance.'