

Hot Wire



Newsletter of
the **Wanganui
Community
Board**

Rates increases.
What role does the
Community
Board play?



Are community
boards under
threat?

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Influencing rates



Board Chair Alan Taylor explains why he believes the Rural Community Board needs to work alongside the Wanganui District Council much earlier in the Annual Plan process to achieve what he believes should be more equitable rates for the farming sector.

Rural, and particularly farming, ratepayers were not clear as to the reasons for the rate increases in their sector this year.

The Wanganui Rural Community Board has been criticised over the increase and challenged over why we have done little about it. In fact, we tried hard to convince the Council through the Annual Plan submission process and in earlier workshops that our district's proposed farming rate increase was unfair and that Wanganui farmers have been unfairly rated for years.

The Community Board demonstrated that we are already significantly out of line compared with other demographically and economically similar territorial authorities in the North Island in the proportion of total rates paid by the farming sector. Additionally, the Board and Federated Farmers pointed to the drastic income drops faced by most farmers this year.

Furthermore, our Board argued for the removal of the community facilities rates on contiguous properties or different blocks farmed as one entity. Horizons Regional Council has seen the inequity of this practice and has removed its rate.

These facts counted for little in the eventual rate outcome.

It is apparent that by the time submissions are made to the Annual Plan in May, it is too late to engineer any significant change to the proposed rate structure. By then the Council has been through its funding and financing review (i.e. what the Council seeks to do, who benefits, and how its activities should be paid for). Essentially, the rates are a 'done deal'; major changes are too late and only small movements happen. This was the case with the lowering of the proposed farming rate increase from 7.9% to 7.5%. We need to be much earlier and more forceful.

To improve upon the past, the Rural Community Board will meet with Councillors and Council officers much earlier in the funding process to put the rural case forward. This will begin in October this year when we will seek a fundamental overhaul in the way in which rates on all rural properties are struck and recognition that the current burden is not sustainable.

The focus of this article has been on farming rates but we are conscious of the position of all other rural residents.

We welcome all viewpoints on this and ask that if you have concerns you contact a Board member immediately so that we can incorporate your arguments into our representations. You can find our details on the back page.

Wyley's Bridge opening

On Friday, August 7, the 'new' Wyley's Bridge, which crosses the Whangaehu River at the beginning of Mangamahu Road, was officially opened. The new bridge (officially called 'Bridge 46') is the main access to the Mangamahu settlement and replaces the 'old' Wyley's Bridge. Whanganui Mayor Annette Main and Rangitikei Mayor Andy Watson led the opening ceremony, joined by Mangamahu residents, the Wanganui Rural Community Board, councillors and council staff, Ngāti Apa iwi representatives and contractors.

Extended members of the Wyley family, after whom the bridge was named, also attended. They included Ken Wyley, grandson of Joseph Wyley who came out from Staffordshire, UK, with his brother Bert to settle in Mangamahu in 1898.

Rural Community Board Member and Mangamahu resident Andy Collins and both mayors spoke about how supportive the Mangamahu community has been toward the project through its \$200,000 contribution.

The original bridge was opened by Governor General Lord Cobham in June 1958, who said at the time: 'a bridge is symbolic, in that it joins people together'.

More than 100,000 sheep, 5000 cattle, 500 tonnes of wool, 600 tonnes of kiwifruit and 1000 tonnes of maize travel over the bridge annually, making it an essential piece of infrastructure for our region.



Top: Members of the Wyley family cross the bridge. Bottom: An aerial shot of the Wyley's Bridge build (May 2015)

The new one-lane bridge, built by Concrete Structures, comprises a steel arch and spokes which distribute the weight of the traffic. The cost of the build was \$2.4 million jointly funded by the Wanganui District Council, which provided two-thirds of the cost, and one-third by the Rangitikei District Council.

Are we under threat?



Darrell Monk writes about the current trend of abolishing community boards around the country and what impact this could have on the local government process.

The news that Ruapehu District Council is thinking about disestablishing its community boards is a concerning trend occurring around the country. District councils are looking at reducing the number of community boards or the total removal of these entities from the local government arena.

As well as Ruapehu District Council, Dunedin City Council is considering reducing its number of boards from six to five and reducing the number of representatives from six to four. Selwyn District Council has suggested the disestablishment of its two community boards, while South Waikato District Council has proposed doing away with the Tirau Community Board. Last year the Rangitikei District Council raised the viability of both the Taihape and Ratana Community Boards.

This is a worrying trend, as scrapping community boards removes a valuable pathway from the local government process which has been in place since local government reforms were made in 1989.

Some 108 community boards currently exist in both urban and rural areas within local authorities throughout New Zealand. Community boards provide a link between local communities and their respective local government authorities. This link can be very effective for unique communities within a district, by giving them a strong voice within council.

The Wanganui Rural Community Board has a strong link with the Wanganui District Council and has achieved some excellent results for the rural community, such as improved rural broadband, the recently opened Wyley's Bridge and support for and input into the Sustainable Land Use Initiative and the Forestry Effects on Rural Roads study.

The success of our Board is in the excellent relationship we have with the district councillors and staff, along with the two appointed councillors, Jenny Duncan and Hamish McDouall, which means the Board can effectively advocate on behalf of the rural community. I don't believe that this level of relationship exists between other boards and their local authorities and this may be the cause of the desire of some authorities to reduce or eliminate them.

The Wanganui Rural Community Board is very concerned about these proposals and will be providing a submission to the Ruapehu District Council and giving our full support to the continuation of the National Park and Waimarino-Waiouru Community Boards, as we believe they are an effective and necessary component within local body politics.

Rural security



Stock theft is becoming more common according to Tex Matthews, who urges people to report any suspicious behaviour to the Police.

Quad bike thefts are not as common as they once were. Everyone who wants one seems to have one, and second hand ones are cheap to buy. We are not writing off as many as Worksafe would like us to believe and there are plenty of bikes in circulation.

Stock theft and poaching, however, does seem to be on the rise, especially in other parts of the country. Poaching is probably not as bad as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, as there is not a ready market for carcasses.

Stock thefts are a different story. Here are a couple of recent cases. A cattle beast with a value of around \$1400 was shot on Fields Track with a .308 rifle. All that was left was the head and guts.

In another incident, the skins, guts and heads of two twin-bearing ewes were found near Hiroti's Bluff. The value of a twin bearing ewe is about \$130. At the moment, ewes with lambs at foot are making \$60 to \$70, putting the value round \$200. Had these stock made it to December they could have been worth \$100 each, making the crime worth \$600.

In some cases these thieves are not only stealing for their own freezers, but on-selling the meat. These perpetrators are hard to catch as they operate at night, they are quick and their use of rifles with suppressors means there is very little sound.

The Police are not going to stake out an area to try and catch them like they might lie in wait to catch a speeding driver or wait outside a pub to catch a driver over the limit. We, the public, need to be vigilant and watch for anything that looks suspicious and take action. Get licence plates and report them to the Police.

The Crimes Act 1961 provides the following maximum penalties depending on the value of item/s being stolen:

Under \$500.00 = one month imprisonment
\$500.00 - \$1000.00 = one year imprisonment
Over \$1000.00 = seven year imprisonment

Just because these are the maximum penalties, doesn't mean a judge will impose them. It is time that stock thieves are made example of to put people off committing these crimes, the same way people are put off speeding or drink driving.



A butchered sheep carcass at the side of the road

Weed control



Andy Collins writes about what you can do to stop the spread of field horsetail and tutsan into the Wanganui District.

For those of you who haven't come across it, field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) is an invasive weed with an intricate and extensive but brittle underground root system which prefers light and sandy soils. Once established it dominates other vegetation.

It is native to Europe, North America and Asia and thought to have been brought to New Zealand from Japan in 1922. It's as old as the dinosaurs, dating back to the Carboniferous age, more than 230 million years ago.

Field horsetail is well established and widespread on the lower Rangitikei floodplain and is spreading into the Wanganui District through the river gravel used for roading aggregate. It can also be spread by vehicles, machinery and stock travelling from one district to the next.

The rhizomes and tubers which make up field horsetail are difficult to control and contaminate the soil. A combination of hand removal and use of chemicals is the best way to stop it from spreading.

Another pest plant tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*), introduced to New Zealand in 1870, grows quickly, is unpalatable to stock and will spread throughout native vegetation, constantly reinvading pasture from areas not suited to control. It has been found growing near the Whanganui River Road, thought to have spread from the Ruapehu District, where it is prolific. Hundreds of hectares of infested hill country have severely reduced production due to tutsan.

Tutsan has pale yellow flowers with red 'fruit' which become black when ripe. Tutsan is easier to control than field horsetail, as chemicals alone can do the trick. The herbicide Tordon 2G, at a rate of 55 grams per square metre of ground covered by the drip line of the shrub, is likely to eradicate the weed. It would be worth familiarising yourself with both these weeds as they are not highly prevalent in our area yet but there are incursions which we need to control before they become endemic.

The best way to stop both field horsetail and tutsan from spreading is to make sure any equipment (trucks, trailers, mowers, hay bailers) which comes into contact with soil and moves from one district to another is clean and be aware of river sourced products which contain silt and sand. Check your road verges especially where repair work has been carried out and remove the weeds before they start spreading.

If you would like more information about either of these weeds, please contact Horizons Regional Council Environmental Management Coordinator Craig Davey on 021 2277 094 or visit the links below for brochures produced by Horizons.

Field horsetail booklet

<http://tinyurl.com/oqheoy4>

Tutsan booklet

<http://tinyurl.com/nbzoqbt>

Want to talk about rural issues?

The Wanganui Rural Community Board represents the interests of our rural sector within the community and at the Wanganui District Council table. The Board members invite you to contact them to discuss matters affecting the rural community.

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Community Board on Facebook



The Wanganui Rural Community Board Facebook page aims to get the rural community engaged in news, events, meetings, sports and more. You can share your posts and photos on the page to inform others about what's going on in your community or email your news and events to erin.reeve@wanganui.govt.nz so she can post them.