

# Taranaki Regional Council Draft Long-Term Plan 2018/2028

## Submission by Climate Justice Taranaki Inc., 6 April 2018

### Introduction

1. Climate Justice Taranaki Inc. (CJT) is a community group dedicated to environmental sustainability and social justice. This includes issues of inter-generational equity, notably in relation to climate change, which will impact future generations' inalienable rights to safe water, air and soil, crucial to sustaining livelihoods and quality of life. CJT has been incorporated under the Incorporated Societies Act 1908 since 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015.
2. CJT welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Taranaki Regional Council's Draft Long-Term Plan 2018/2028. This submission goes beyond the two key proposals on which Council is seeking feedback. It also bears relevance to the Proposed Taranaki Coastal Plan.
3. CJT sees both the Consultation document and Draft Long-term Plan as highly aspirational, and if these aspirations are achieved, Taranaki's environment and community will be the better for it.

### Towards predator-free Taranaki

4. CJT supports the principle of a predator-free Taranaki. Indeed, some of our members are active in voluntary pest trapping programs, with various organizations focused on this goal.
5. We believe that predator control and eradication strategies should focus on a major increase in targeted trapping, potentially incorporating more efficient trapping technology. Trapping should be undertaken by trained professionals including DoC and Council staff, contractors and members from NGOs. It needs to be adequately funded by regional and central governments and be much less reliant on volunteers.
6. We do however urge caution in considering other strategies, some of which, notably genetic manipulation of species, are unproven and may have significant side-effects or unforeseen and even irreversible consequences. Some of our members also hold strong reservations over large-scale application of poisons. While predator eradication is not CJT's core goal or purpose, we stand alongside other groups that are more focussed on these issues.

### Pukeiti / Taranaki Crossing and funding alternatives

7. We note the remarks, *"This opportunity to expand the tourism offering comes in the wake of sharp reminders that Taranaki's core businesses of dairying and hydrocarbons are subject to fluctuating international pressures that are beyond the region's control"* (p.4 of Draft LTP), and:
8. *"Port Taranaki Ltd operates in a highly competitive trading environment and there are no guarantees that it will be able to continue to deliver forecast dividend levels... This is the biggest risk to the delivery of the Council's proposed programmes"* (p.6 of Draft LTP). Heavy reliance on the petrochemical industry for Port revenue as a major Council income earner is a real concern and must be addressed.
9. CJT also notes that tourism is subject to pressures beyond the region's control, especially international tourism. It is important to recognise that NZ's tourism is, and will likely remain, largely nature-based and is therefore incompatible with industrial dairying and hydrocarbon mining. Reducing the impacts of these two incompatible sectors and restoring damaged land and

waterways could be the best investment to support tourism that is dependent on the 'clean, green' image of New Zealand, which is, unfortunately, fast-eroding.

10. One of the constraints to tourism development, especially international tourism, is the likely increase in fuel prices leading to unaffordable airfares, as countries step up to greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction and climate change commitments as per the Paris Agreement<sup>1</sup>. International tourism is not sustainable for as long as it is heavily dependent on fossil fuels or biofuels, the large-scale production of which would potentially outcompete food crops.
11. CJT recommends sustainable tourism that is less dependent on fossil fuels and built structures, and more sensitive to the natural environment and carrying capacity of the sites. E.g. The tarns on the Pouakai Crossing are extremely sensitive and fragile to disturbance. Any increase in infrastructure and services that increases visitation has the potential to damage the tarns and nearby ecosystems. Careful control and management measures by relevant authorities, as well as education, are needed to avoid environmental impacts.
12. The access roads to Pukeiti are narrow and blend well with the natural landscapes and should be kept as such. If tourist numbers increase significantly, traffic congestion and impacts may be avoided by the introduction of a 'park and ride' scheme supported by a shuttle bus service, preferably electric.
13. In terms of alternative income generation and livelihoods, bearing in mind the volatility and environmental impacts of industrial dairying, fossil fuel mining and international tourism. CJT is of the opinion that Taranaki should be more proactively developing sustainable agriculture. There is a growing market for organic produce, locally and internationally, with demonstrable health benefits. We suggest that expanded focus and support for well planned, ecologically sustainable forestry projects, as part of a more diversified agricultural base for the region, are urgently required. Focussing on crop diversity, regeneration of soil health and local foods, and linking with local networks, will help ensure nutrition, well-being and resilience in our communities. These are becoming ever more important with increasing climate disruptions.
14. CJT recommends that the substantial financial commitments proposed in the LTP, especially for options 2 and 3, should be spent elsewhere, such as supporting sustainable agriculture which produces positive environmental outcomes, public transport, hazard management, just transition (See points 20-22), and improving environmental management and compliance monitoring (See points 51-52).
15. If either option 2 or 3 is adopted, we ask that Council ensures that local iwi are actively involved in the planning, decision-making and management of the programme. We do not recommend acceptance of corporate funding from the fossil fuel and petrochemical industry. If such funding is accepted by Council, we ask that no advertising of the funding source is made. Industry has used this ploy repeatedly to buy their social license to operate, a deliberate tactic to delay the urgent transition to renewable energy.

## **Public Transport**

16. CJT submits that far greater efforts and investments are needed to support public transport and electrification of transport, to reduce greenhouse gas emission, better meet public demand and respond to central government's recent draft Policy Statement on Land Transport<sup>2,3</sup>.
17. CJT reminds Council that WITT has submitted a request to consider a daily coastal bus service from Hawera to New Plymouth along SH45, to ensure that the lack of public transport is not a barrier to tertiary education and accessibility to essential services. This request is supported by coastal

communities like Opunake and Okato<sup>4</sup>. With central government's proposed funding expansion for public transport, there is good reason to seriously consider this request.

18. CJT also ask that Council incorporates some level of support to facilitate the uptake of electric vehicles and community EVs, in line with central government priorities<sup>5</sup>.

## **Hazard Management, Infrastructure Strategy & Just Transition**

19. CJT strongly supports considerations of climate change in the Hazard Management section of the Draft LTP. However, use of the 1 % annual exceedance probability (1-in-100-year event scenario) as a baseline needs to be placed in the context that historical frequencies and intensities of extreme events (rainfall, flooding, droughts etc.) no longer apply, the result of climate disruption<sup>6</sup>. The frequency and intensity of extreme events will continue to increase in coming decades<sup>7</sup>.
20. In this overarching respect, CJT does not accept the statement in the Consultation document that: *"There is no planned upgrade to the level of service provided by the Schemes before 2060. The risk to the Schemes' infrastructure arising from natural disasters is low."* Flexibility and preparedness are key to dealing with unpredictable and increasingly frequent, extreme weather events causing dangerous hazards to people and infrastructure.
21. In addition to river and flood control, hazards due to coastal erosion and storm surge, exacerbated by sea level rise<sup>8</sup> associated with climate change, must also be addressed. By way of an example from other NZ regions, *"If there were to be a 30cm sea level rise between now and 2065 – a relatively conservative possibility – what are today considered extreme, 1-in-100-year high water levels will occur annually in both Wellington and Christchurch. There are 32,000 homes within 1.5m of the current mean high tide level,"* warned Tim Grafton, CEO of Insurance Council of NZ<sup>9</sup>.
22. In relation to infrastructure strategy and financing, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern recently stated<sup>10</sup>, *"Essential part of our transition plan are the governments' Provision Growth Fund and Green Investment Fund, which will invest in billions of dollars in local infrastructure and clean energy projects in areas that currently have a lot of jobs that rely on the fossil fuel sector."* CJT strongly urges Council to actively engage in and support this crucial transition.

## **Resource Management**

23. Page 40 of the Draft LTP states that: *"Resource management activities will contribute primarily to the outcome of a Sustainable Taranaki. They will also assist in the achievement of a Prosperous Taranaki by enhancing Taranaki's clean, green image and ensuring it remains a reality in overseas markets as well as emphasising Taranaki as an attractive place to work, do business and visit."*

### **How clean and green is Taranaki?**

24. Unfortunately, Taranaki does not have a 'clean, green' environment outside of the Egmont National Park, and if such an image exists in overseas markets, it is based on PR rather than reality.
25. Taranaki's economic base has been built largely on industrial dairying and mining of fossil fuels, both of which have been operating in the region for more than a century. At present these industries are major contributors to New Zealand's economy and greenhouse gas emissions (See point 49 below), which on a per capita basis are high globally. CJT recognize that the RMA presently precludes considerations of emissions per se, but nevertheless we urge Council to consider the implications carefully, for the future of our region, as indeed NZ more generally, depends on decisions made now. We simply have no more time for prevarication. Just as extreme weather events, floods and droughts will gain strength over coming decades, so too will rising sea level increasingly claim coastal land and infrastructure.

26. In addition to the large emissions of greenhouse gases, these industries use the environment as a dumping ground for other forms of pollution, largely with no charge, some, but not all of which is permitted by Council under numerous resource consents. Implicit, but unsaid, in these consents is the outdated notion that 'dilution is the solution to pollution'. CJT proposes that 'polluter pays' is a more equitable approach economically, although we should be transitioning rapidly away from highly polluting, unsustainable forms of industry (See point 22). While Council claims that most of the costs associated with agriculture and the oil and gas industry are covered by "user-pays direct charges" (p.80 of Draft LTP), we understand that such charges merely cover the administrative costs of consent processing and monitoring, not the actual environmental or remediation costs.
27. At present, the consent system allows the more or less regulated discharge of thousands of tonnes of waste water, soils, drilling muds and fracking chemicals, and gases each year into Taranaki's receiving environment.
28. By way of example: *"Methanex holds two consents to allow it to take and use water from two abstraction points on the Waitara River. Six consents allow the discharge of effluent /stormwater into the Manu and Waihi Streams and the Tasman Sea via the Waitara marine outfall. Methanex also holds two consents to discharge emissions into the air at its sites."*

### **Pollution levels and extent**

29. Although some of the discharged wastes from industry (mainly from dairying and fossil fuels) are considered 'benign' eco-toxically and environmentally, having been treated to greater or lesser degree to reduce impacts; others are not so benign. The latter pose a range of issues for land use, agriculture and human health, among other aspects, and leave a toxic legacy for future generations.
30. At present, despite concerted efforts towards ecological and economic sustainability by some local farmers, most dairying here operates on a high input industrial model heavily reliant on application of large quantities of urea and other fertilizers. Being derived locally from fossil-fuel, urea has been both readily available and affordable, and has enabled high stocking rates and enhanced production. Unfortunately, the resulting environmental impacts are widespread, indeed near-ubiquitous, around the Mount Taranaki ring-plain.

### **Air pollution**

31. Taranaki's air quality is considered to be good by national standards, in large degree because of the prevalence of strong winds dispersing pollution. Nevertheless, chronic air polluting emissions are readily apparent from the aging industrial plants (Methanex, Ballance, Maui Production Station...), all of which are now decades old.
32. Venting and flaring of 'excess' gas in fossil fuel production are widespread across Taranaki, with episodic major releases raising significant concern among local residents and fire services<sup>11</sup>. The large amount of GHG, volatile organic compounds and other emissions that are produced via venting and flaring contribute to air pollution and pose a significant health risk to local people<sup>12</sup>.
33. Workers at the Fonterra plant at Pahiatua contracted Legionella disease, presumably in water droplets from the cooling tower<sup>13</sup> and CJT understands that the coastal Methanex plant uses toxic biocides to control aerial release of *Legionella*.
34. Air pollution and associated hazards arising from fossil fuel mining and production are at the centre of Taranaki Energy Watch's (TEW, Dec 2016) challenge to South Taranaki District Council in response to what TEW consider to be inadequate setback distances, among other aspects of air emissions, in the Environment Court, with a decision expected mid-2018.

## Soil pollution

35. Across the region, soil pollution is caused primarily by industrial dairying, with more localized contributions from fossil fuel processing and waste disposal, and other industries. The Taranaki dairy herd, estimated by the Agricultural Production Census (APS) and Agricultural Production Survey (Stats NZ with the Ministry for Primary Industries) at more than half a million cows (541,931 in 2015), has been supported by unsustainable application of urea fertilizer derived from fossil fuels, and through importation of palm kernel from palm oil plantations. As noted by the central government<sup>14</sup>:
36. *“High livestock numbers can affect native biodiversity and soil health. High livestock numbers can also impact on water quality because nitrogen and bacteria from urine and faeces can leach into groundwater or run off the land into rivers and lakes.”*
37. Notably Taranaki has the highest levels of Cadmium in soils of any region in New Zealand, associated with dairying and derived from high levels of fertilizer application (Taylor et al. 2007 Soil maps of Cadmium in New Zealand). Landcare Research Report for Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry). Although Taranaki’s cattle population has not risen in decades (actually showing a small decline), it is unsustainable without these high levels of inputs. This is not wise management practice, as was apparent during the prolonged drought of November 2017 – March 2018.
38. Landfarming – the practice of disposing drilling wastes on farms, remains a serious threat to soil health. There have been documented cases of breaches of consent conditions<sup>15</sup> and groundwater contamination<sup>16</sup>. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment highlighted the issue of stock grazing on landfarmed areas before targets for persistent contaminants are met<sup>17</sup>. It is unclear whether the issue has been resolved. CJT is also gravely concerned about the variation of consent conditions over time, generally weakening environmental protection. E.g. The consent 7559-1 (20/11/2009)<sup>18</sup> to discharge drilling wastes (including water based and synthetic based drilling muds) via landfarming at the Surrey Road site held by C. Boyd included these conditions: “7. The exercise of this consent is limited to wastes generated within the Taranaki region”; “10. An area of land used for the landfarming... shall not be used for any subsequent discharges of drilling waste”; and “15. No discharge shall take place within 25 metres of a water body [including farm drains], or property boundary”. Consent 7559-1.3 (25/02/2016)<sup>19</sup> for the same site now allows for: “8. ...waste generated in the Taranaki region, including from outside the 12 nautical mile maritime limit within the Taranaki Basin”; “11... further applications of material...”; and “16. No drilling waste shall be discharged within: a) 12 metres of property boundaries; or b) 12 metres of the Mangamawhete, Mangatengehu and Waipuku Streams; or c) 6 metres of any other surface water course (including farm drains)...”

## Coastal pollution

39. This is also increasing rapidly along sections of the Taranaki coast, from both diffuse and point sources, most of which are difficult to pin-point. Recent king-tides associated with the passing of tropical storms deposited large amounts of plastic and other litter along roadsides (eg. Komene Beach and S of Bayly Rd approaching Cape Egmont). Local people attempted clean-ups in some places, but the scale of the problem is too great for individual volunteers.
40. As this is an obvious example of the declining state of Taranaki’s environment, it is strongly recommended that Council take a leading role in its appropriate removal and disposal. This could potentially be achieved through liaison with the Ministry of Justice and the Community Service system, or NGOs.

## Water pollution

41. Taranaki closely follows Waikato (largest regional dairy herd) in having the highest levels of Nitrate leaching, most of which derives from dairying<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, most rivers and streams running across the ring-plain carry episodically high loads of dairy-associated pollution following heavy rain (including nitrogen and phosphorous)<sup>21</sup>. This is obvious to people along the coast – fishers, swimmers, surfers, beachcombers and others – in the highly discoloured waters emanating from streams and rivers into coastal waters.
42. Council, to its credit, has initiated a riparian planting program, which will provide some uptake and impedance of runoff, although it cannot adequately address subsurface flow of the main water-eutrophying nutrients, and hence will not solve the problem.
43. The Ministry for the Environment now requires Regional councils to specify the nutrient levels they are aiming for in their regional plans<sup>22</sup>.
44. In the section 'Levels of Service' from page 45 of the Draft Plan:

*3. Maintenance and enhancement of overall water quality in our rivers and lakes, groundwater and coastal waters*

*Measure: Parameters that characterise the physical, bacteriological, biological and chemical quality of surface water.*

*Target (Years 1-10): Improvements in nutrient levels (ammonia, nitrate, total nitrogen, and dissolved reactive and total phosphorus), appearance (turbidity, clarity, absorbance, suspended solids), organic contamination (biochemical oxygen demand), bacterial levels (faecal coliform and enterococci bacteria), temperature, and algal cover, against a baseline of 1995 water quality, as applicable, at 11 representative sites.*
45. CJT notes that at present Council monitors only a small number of sampling sites (11 sites) and questions their adequacy to provide a comprehensive assessment of the biochemical condition of Taranaki's waterways. We could not find any pilot studies by Council to assess the number of sampling sites and times most appropriate for this important task. These should be based on analysis of the statistical power to detect change, in consultation with independent water quality specialists (see Monitoring below). CJT also question whether the MCI method used by Council for stream fauna assessment is the same as, and hence directly comparable with, the indices used by other Councils and central government? If not, then this needs to be rectified, to enable a fair national assessment to be made.

## Compliance Monitoring

46. Council has a significant monitoring program of discharges, as required under the RMA and other legislation. The program produces regular reports, many of which are accessible to the public. CJT has previously raised various issues regarding the design, methodology and results of certain past studies. Here, we express continuing concern about the level of 'self-assessment' in environmental monitoring that is conducted by the fossil fuel and related industries.
47. CJT stresses that this 'trust us' approach to industry in permitting self-assessment is not indicative of a fully independent approach by Council, the environmental 'watchdog', from those who are polluting the environment. One example of many: *"The Council's monitoring programme for the year under review at each site included four inspections, continuous self monitoring by Methanex<sup>23</sup> ..."*
48. CJT notes that in the Methanex Air Monitoring report for 2014-15, quantitative sampling of ambient air quality, conducted by a third party, occurred on just 2 days in 2014 and one day in

2015. This could not be considered as 'continuous self-monitoring'. No measurements were made of Carbon Dioxide emissions, following a 'minor variation' by Council to the resource consent in 2005, itself following changes to the RMA<sup>24</sup>.

49. However, earlier measurements (made before the amendment to the RMA) at the Ballance Kapuni urea plant, under special condition 5 of the now expired resource consent 4046-2, revealed that from July 2012 – June 2013, 170,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> were emitted to the air from the plant. Current resource consent 4046-3 no longer requires monitoring of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Both consent variations followed the 2004 amendment of the RMA which precluded regional councils from considering the effects of discharge of GHG on climate change when making a rule. However, the amendment did not preclude councils from monitoring GHG emissions; and as a matter of principle, we do not agree with the RMA amendment, as climate change must be at the core of all resource management decision making.
50. Notably, the 2016 National GHG Emission Inventory revealed the need for greater transparency of data, especially concerning the reporting of non-energy uses of fuels (e.g. by Methanex), as well as fugitive Methane emissions from natural gas processing<sup>25</sup>. CJT notes that regional councils have a role to play here, in ensuring that monitoring and reporting of GHG and other emissions are transparent and comprehensive.
51. CJT strongly recommends that Council undertakes the physico-chemical monitoring itself, rather than being focused mainly on observational visits. We ask that greater allocation of funding is made available from industry for more robust and independent compliance monitoring.
52. CJT calls for an independent technical review of the current discharge consent conditions and compliance monitoring programme, especially concerning the petrochemical industry.

## The decades ahead

53. Climate science indicates that adverse climatic conditions will become more frequent and intense in future. Unsustainable forms of resource exploitation are not inter-generationally equitable, and their economic viability is reliant on continued mining of fossil fuels, which must end within decades, from exhaustion of reserves, increasing costs, and/or more enlightened regulation. CJT urges Council to work effectively towards the latter.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Documents/ICAO%20Environmental%20Report%202016.pdf#search=Search%2E%2E%2Ecarbon%20neutral>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.transport.govt.nz/ourwork/keystrategiesandplans/gpsonlandtransportfunding/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/morningreport/audio/2018638944/transport-funding-shake-up-a-win-for-the-greens>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.newplymouthnz.com/-/media/NPDC/Documents/Council%20Documents/Plans%20and%20Strategies/Community%20Board%20Plan%20-%20Okato.ashx>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.eeca.govt.nz/funding-and-support/low-emission-vehicles-contestable-fund/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.climsystems.com/blog/post/when-a-1-in-500-year-event-is-not-as-it-appears-the-edgcombe-flood-of-april-2017>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.niwa.co.nz/files/Climate\\_Summary\\_March\\_2017.pdf](https://www.niwa.co.nz/files/Climate_Summary_March_2017.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pce.parliament.nz/publications/preparing-new-zealand-for-rising-seas-certainty-and-uncertainty>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.interest.co.nz/insurance/92506/having-forked-out-240m-damage-caused-extreme-weather-events-last-year-insurers-call>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/102498682/Jacinda-Ardern-We-re-already-planning-for-fossil-fuels-transition>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/91620588/Flare-off-sends-fireball-into-Taranaki-skies-prompts-fears-of-oil-and-gas-installation-fire>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00207233.2017.1413221>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/74377129/legionella-disease-contracted-at-fonterras-pahiatua-plant>

<sup>14</sup> [http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/environment/environmental-reporting-series/environmental-indicators/Home/Land/livestock-numbers.aspx](http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/environment/environmental-reporting-series/environmental-indicators/Home/Land/livestock-numbers.aspx)

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- <sup>15</sup> <https://trc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Environment/Monitoring-OGwaste/MR2017-CBoyd.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://trc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Environment/Monitoring-OGwaste/MR2017-BTWWellingtonLandfarm.pdf>
- <sup>17</sup> <http://www.pce.parliament.nz/publications/drilling-for-oil-and-gas-in-new-zealand-environmental-oversight-and-regulation>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://trc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Environment/Monitoring-OGwaste/MR2015-CBoydDrillingWaste.pdf>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://trc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Environment/Monitoring-OGwaste/MR2017-CBoyd.pdf>
- <sup>20</sup> [http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/environment/environmental-reporting-series/environmental-indicators/Home/Fresh%20water/geographic-pattern-agricultural-nitrate-leaching.aspx](http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/environment/environmental-reporting-series/environmental-indicators/Home/Fresh%20water/geographic-pattern-agricultural-nitrate-leaching.aspx)
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.lawa.org.nz/explore-data/taranaki-region/river-quality/>
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/fresh-water/regulations/national-policy-statement-freshwater-management/2017-changes>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.trc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Environment/Monitoring-Industry/MR2016-Methanex.pdf>
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.trc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Environment/Monitoring-Industry/MR2016-Methanex.pdf>
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/climate-change/new-zealand-greenhouse-gas-inventory-1990-2014>