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## **Report 01.764**

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Report to Wellington Regional Council  
from Stuart Macaskill, Chairman

### **Chairman's Report**

I have mixed thoughts and emotions as I try to express to you all my final contribution as Chairman of the WRC. To help me get a feel of where we have come from in the fifteen years that I have had the privilege of holding this office, I had a look back to my first Annual Report – also the first published by the Council and long before they became mandatory in 1987 – remember the first WRC had been in existence for 6 years under the leadership of my old friend, Mervyn Kemp. I quote my opening and closing paragraphs:

*“The past year has been a year of changing faces and responsibilities, of new methods and structures being adopted and most of all a growing confidence in the need for and the merit of the work of our Council.”*

*“Having held office of Chairman for only a few months, I find it difficult to look back and report on the past events. It is more interesting and challenging to look forward and plan for future needs and developments for our region. It is true to say that substantial achievements occurred in the past years. Critical self-examination is never easy, change is always hard to accept. This was undertaken with an outstanding effort to see that it was well done and the end results is a great foundation for the new Council to build on.”*

You will gather from the comments that we were deeply involved in trying to find better ways to advance the quality of our administration and services to the Region. I was enjoying every moment of the challenge and certainly convinced of the direction we should be taking.

You will all recall the reform of 1989 and a new regional council which expanded our range of responsibilities and coverage into the Kapiti and Wairarapa areas. Howard Stone joined us as our Chief Executive. I quote some extracts from my 1991 report, the first full year after the reforms and you will understand we were having an exciting ride:

*“I am very pleased to report that despite the difficult times your Council has produced an excellent result. In the past year, a net saving of \$4.0m has been achieved on Council expenditure. This is the direct result of genuine productivity gains achieved by the General Manager and his staff.”*

*One of the most frustrating aspects of the year is the uncertainty over the future of regional councils. Continual attacks, unsupported in most cases by up-to-date evidence, have been difficult to understand. Considering the present system is only 18 months old, it seems counter productive to set out to bring about an immediate and major change.*

*More than ever before the country needs a boost in confidence and a greater degree of certainty than that which exists at present. I can accept the Minister's call for greater efficiency in local government but I venture to suggest that this has actually happened in the past 12 months in spite of his constant criticism.*

*In conclusion, I would hope that the uncertainty surrounding the Regional Council is quickly resolved and we are allowed to get on with the job of being good managers. I hope for the total Region's sake, that local government is given time to settle down and prove itself rather than continue to be used by some central government politicians as a diversion to attract attention away from more pressing economic issues. For my part, I can assure you that this Council is fully committed to achieving even greater efficiencies over the next 12 months and I believe that we have the Councillors and staff to achieve this goal."*

The challenges were coming thick and fast and I was enjoying every moment and you can see Howard was starting to get into his stride.

As we move then to my 1994 report, you can see the RMA and Long Term Financial Strategies come into focus:

*"Meeting the exacting demands of the Resource Management Act 1991 and interpreting fairly its wide ranging requirements is a continuing challenge. Councillors and staff approach this challenge positively and professionally. In particular, two key planning documents produced this year, the Regional Policy Statement and the Regional Coastal Plan, are acknowledged as being amongst the best in the country. Helping the public to understand their obligations under the Resource Management Act 1991 has seen the Council produce a series of brochures which set out simply and logically the types of consent, the application process and the ongoing requirements to comply with the consent. This is one example of how this Council is focusing on meeting the needs of its customers.*

*Taking a long-term view of the Council's projects and financial position against the Region's needs is now our top priority. To this end, a 10 year, fully costed, strategic plan is being developed. This will improve our ability to make good decisions which take account of future costs and the priorities which exist between the wide range of functions for which we are responsible. Significant progress was made in this area in 1993/94. In the new financial year the public will be asked to help determine the direction we should take and the funding which will be available."*

Again, long before LTFS was a glint in the Government's eye, we saw the need and were drawing the public into the process and, our people continue to receive national awards for the excellence of their work.

As I move to my final report in 2001, I can say with great confidence that it is the people who I have worked with that have made the difference and have allowed me to have a measure of success in my role as Chairman.

The staff of this Council have always been professional and of the highest calibre. Under Howard's leadership, they have delivered the most wonderful service to me and the regional community.

My elected member colleagues, some seventy of them since the start of the Regional Council in 1980, my Deputy Chairs, Committee Chairs and all the Councillors, have given great service to our Region and personally I have valued your support and friendship.

We have achieved much of merit, but there is still unfinished business, such as Transmission Gully, Tranz Metro purchase etc. I know you have the determination, the skill and the courage to continue to meet the challenges of serving our Regional communities.

Finally, I can do no better than to leave you with an extract from my 2001 Annual Report:

*“Each year that I have spent at the Regional Council has brought a unique mixture of personal satisfaction and challenge but overall I look back at my time with great pride. I consider myself very fortunate to have filled the role that I have.*

*My final annual report would not be complete without thanking the iwi of the region for helping us further develop our special partnership. I would be the first to admit that there remains plenty of work to be done but I can leave the Council safe in the knowledge that together we are heading in the right direction.*

*As I hand over the reins, I am confident that the Council is in good shape and on the right course for the future. Our finances are prudently managed and we seem to be able to keep doing more with less. Even with all the extra work programmes we have been able to put in place, including the new stadium rate, regional rates have reduced by 0.31% in real terms since 1990/91.*

*I will take away fond memories of the people I have had the privilege to work alongside in this region – fellow politicians across local and central government, staff of the Regional Council and people from all walks of life who hold a common interest in the wellbeing of this region and its community.*

*My best wishes to you all for the future.”*

STUART MACASKILL  
Chairman