

STOP THE CUTS

You can stand up for Aotea Great Barrier, our Local Board and the wider conservation and environmental sector, including climate resilience, by giving feedback to the Council about the Mayor's proposal. The proposal is a misinformed assault on council support for the natural environment. Please make a submission on the Have Your Say site – link here:

HAVE YOUR SAY

The hard cut off for submissions is 11pm, Tuesday 28 March.

- You do not have to answer every question in the survey, but you may want to.
- Almost all the questions have some impact on environmental funding. The guidance below may be helpful as you respond.
- You can respond with feedback on anything about the proposal; you are not limited by the questions.

Q1: OPERATING SPENDING REDUCTIONS

What is your preference on the proposed operating cost reductions?

Suggested response from the options given:

- *Do not proceed with some reductions and instead further increase rates and/or debt; or*
- *Other*

Tell us why, and which reduction you would not proceed with, if any:

You could consider including any or all of the following statements:

- Do not proceed with:
 - Reducing regional environmental/biosecurity/biodiversity staffing or service
 - Reducing local board funded activities
 - Reducing regional contestable grants.



- Do NOT proceed with reductions to Local Board budgets - these are local and very targeted – and in particular with the severe reduction in the Aotea Great Barrier Local Board budget and that of other Local Boards with large natural areas in their rohe (e.g. Rodney, Kaipātiki, Waiheke, Waitakere).
 - Do NOT proceed with reductions in headcount/staffing ("Operational Costs") for teams working in the natural environment areas of Council on biodiversity, biosecurity and community conservation. These teams provide expertise and crucial support to communities working to restore the natural environment and increase our climate resilience.
 - Why?
 - The combined effect of the proposed reductions above, along with pausing the Natural Environment Targeted Rate (NETR) will be to gut community conservation on Aotea and across Auckland. No new NETR projects will be funded as the 22/23 budget is all allocated. No allowance has been made for delays to 22/23 projects due to COVID, supply chain issues or a very wet 22/23 season (the unspent portion should be carried forward to be spent as planned).
 - These activities are not “nice-to-haves” or “wasteful” as the Mayor’s introduction suggests. Auckland Council is already behind on its legislative obligations to maintain biodiversity, needing to make catchments and forests more resilient to extremes of heat and wet, when the public have clearly signalled support for natural environment investment in multiple consultations and when mental health researchers show a clear link between wellbeing and connection to nature. The proposal is out of step with all these factors and should not proceed in this form.
 - Environmental projects can’t be turned on or off at will – they require consistency of funding. A reduction of this size will send projects backwards and create dis-benefits as past pest management, planting and weed control efforts can’t be maintained. The knock-on effect of the very sudden withdrawal of council funding could be disproportionately high on some projects, with reputation damage to Auckland Council resulting from wasted investment to date.
 - Auckland Council has acted as a seed funder for many environmental projects at critical times, allowing them to get started and attract volunteers and other private, philanthropic and government funding. This is very effective and efficient use of ratepayers dollars but is not recognised by the proposal at all.
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Q2: AMENDING AUCKLAND AIRPORT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT LIMITED (AIAL) SHAREHOLDING POLICY

What is your preference on this proposal to change the AIAL shareholding policy to enable the sale of all Auckland Council's shares?

This not directly related to environmental or community funding but note that if the shares in Auckland Airport are not sold, then this funding will not be available to meet the budget shortfall and this amount will have to found somewhere else. This would increase pressure to reduce operational costs as noted in Q1 and we therefore suggest agreeing that the shares are sold if you would like to avoid that.

Q3: MANAGING RATES AND DEBT

What is your preference on our proposal to manage rates and debt?

This question asks for your preference on combinations of rates and debt to finance the budget shortfall. Make your selection with the following in mind, there are two problems with this for the natural environment—firstly, the way spending in this area is being characterised and targeted, and secondly the pausing of the Natural Environment Targeted Rate.

Tell us why:

You may wish to consider:

The Mayor’s introduction to the proposal and the commentary are not neutral - steering responders down a particular path which:

- Frames community, arts and environmental spending as “wasteful” and “nice to have”
- Discourages an increase in debt above the proposed recommendation (despite Auckland Council’s very favourable revenue and asset to debt ratios)
- Discourages further increases to rates – bordering on scaremongering by suggesting rates might rise by up to 13,3% if the proposal is not accepted
- Does not provide an option for both increasing rates and increasing debt to cover some of the gap.

The proposal does not supply detail on alternative budget savings or funding options besides rates increases and taking on more debt. Some of these are evident in the supporting material – for example they could include:

- Reducing overall professional services and consulting spend across the group (currently \$45m in Auckland Council, \$35m in Auckland Transport, \$9m in TAU, \$3m in Watercare)
- Reduction of non-urgent roading asset renewals and property renewals in Auckland Transport and Auckland Council, especially those which do not contribute to de-carbonising Auckland (noting that there is not much transparency provided on these amounts at all, other than Auckland Transport’s budget item of \$108m for Contractors and Maintenance)
- Sales of other non-core assets (including the Eke Panuku property portfolio of 1,200 properties)

of which 400 are not currently used to deliver Council Services and includes the three marinas which Council owns. Why?)

The key environmental funding issue here is that the Council propose to not collect the Natural Environment Targeted Rate in 23/24 – we understand because the 22/23 amounts have not all been spent, although allocated to projects. We oppose this proposal because:

- This recommendation fails to take into account the impact of COVID19, supply disruptions and the very wet 2022 and 2023 in the pace delivery of projects
- The proposal also fails to take into account that conservation and environmental projects require consistent delivery and funding – they can't be stopped in the same way that infrastructure or property projects can be stopped, without the gains being eroded (because pests and weeds come back for example)
- The proposal fails to recognise the benefits that investment in the natural environment brings in terms of forest and catchment resilience, carbon capture, and in the mental health and wellbeing of communities
- The proposal to reduce NETR collection and investment is out of step with the policy and climate change shifts which Council must address as the regional authority
 - Council is under the RMA and LGA required to maintain indigenous biodiversity and this was part of the original business case for NETR
 - These obligations have increased with the introduction of the National Policy Statements for Indigenous Biodiversity and Freshwater
 - There are ongoing biodiversity declines in biodiversity – particularly in seabirds, marine ecosystems and species, freshwater species and plant species vulnerable to climate change and pathogens
 - Auckland Council's Biodiversity Strategy is 10 years old and unfit for purpose
- NETR budgets for 22/23 are already allocated and do not provide for any new natural environment expenditure, such as is required by the above. This means the proposal shuts off new investment of NETR money for the 23/24 year.

We therefore recommend that Auckland Council does NOT proceed with pausing the collection of the Natural Environment Targeted rate - this should continue to be collected and the unspent portion should be carried forward to be spent as planned. Now is not the time to be disinvesting in the natural environment.

Q4: STORM RESPONSE

What is your preference on our proposal to manage the impact of future storms?

Suggested response from the options given:

- *Other*

Tell us why:

You may wish to consider:

Given the scrutiny on other spending in the proposal this \$20m item contains very little detail.

- What will this budget be used for? What will the criteria be for spending storm response budget? Who will have oversight of this to ensure equity of allocation?
- Rather than take a reactive approach to Storm Response, the Council should review the impacted areas and identify those where infrastructure, facilities or and housing should no longer be located. Further Council funding should not be used in these areas; instead, managed retreat from those areas should begin now.

Q5: LOCAL BOARD PRIORITIES

Which local board area(s) do you want to give feedback on?

Choose your desired option.

Aotea/Great Barrier Local Board – It is proposed to reduce funding by \$16 million across all local boards which will impact the activities and services delivered by local boards. Given this possible reduction in funding, what do you think of our proposed priorities for services and activities in this local board 2023/2024?

Question 5 provides information on reductions in local board budgets, which will reduce support for a number of community, arts and environmental groups. It asks if you support all the Board’s priorities or not and why. You may wish to use some of the following points in the “Tell us why” box:

- I do not accept that such a sudden and dramatic a reduction in Local Board budgets is necessary. The cut disproportionately affects Aotea and there is no rationale given for this. On Aotea Great Barrier it will result in a reduction in OPEX from \$714k in this current year to \$367k next year – a \$347k reduction overall. This is the highest per capita reduction of any Local Board.
- Aotea communities and our mana whenua Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea are tiaki and kaitiaki for a disproportionately high number of the region’s threatened species and ecosystems (as defined by Auckland Council’s own BFA classifications). These include Black petrel/Tākoketai, 13 species of lizard and the Chevron Skink in particular, multiple freshwater species no longer found on the mainland of Auckland (kākahi/mussels, kōura, kokupu, eels) and many threatened birds (pāteke/brown teal, kākā, NZ dotterel, Australasian bittern, Caspian tern and banded rail).

The marine environment is amongst the highest quality in the region according to Unitary Plan classifications.

- The Aotea community has the lowest per capita income of any in the region and live off grid, which means there is very little volunteer capacity. Nevertheless our community groups do a very significant proportion of the conservation and environmental fieldwork on the island. The Local Board is a key supporter of this activity for that reason.
- Forested pest free catchment are more resilience to heat, fire and flood and absorb more carbon. Multiple plans and studies show that we need to increase investment in our catchments and forests as we enter a period of increased climate disruption. On Aotea this activity occurs largely via community and landowner projects that remove pest species and restore and protect ecosystems. Auckland Council should continue to support this work.
- Combined with the other changes to natural environment rating, regional grants and operational budgets in the proposal, reducing the Aotea Great Barrier Local Board’s budget will gut community restoration and pest management work and the related community education. This work is needed to achieve a predator free Aotea – the vision of Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea and the community, and a huge boost to Auckland’s regional biodiversity (especially seabirds, lizards and freshwater fish).
- Auckland Council should be mindful of its treaty obligations towards mana whenua (Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea) under Article 2 and in the light of legal decisions regarding the role of the crown to support iwi rights and interests in relation to te taiao.
- Conservation and environmental work requires consistent funding, unlike one-off renewal or infrastructure projects. If environmental projects stop or pause, the gains of past years and past council investment will very probably be lost or eroded and biodiversity will be negatively affected as pests and weeds increase and education in the community is cut back.

If funding for local board activities is reduced, which three of our services do you not want to reduce funding for? (i.e. which are the most important to you?)

Choose your desired options (up to three), and if you wish “tell us why these are most important to you”.

Q6: LOCAL BOARD PRIORITIES

Changes to other rates, fees and charges. What do you think of these proposals?

Choose your desired options, if any, and give any feedback required.

Q7: What else is important to you?

Do you have feedback on any other issues? Or is there anything else you would like to give feedback on?

You might want to consider referring to any or all of the following impacts to the multiple funding cuts outlined in the proposal which will de-fund investment in Auckland's natural environment:

- 1. Auckland Council will not meet its legislative obligations to maintain indigenous biodiversity under the RMA and LGA, nor will it be able to implement the NPS Indigenous Biodiversity or Freshwater.*
- 2. There will be a negative impact on mana whenua if community projects fail and groups are not able to support their vision for the restoration of te taiao.*
- 3. Auckland Council will generate dis-benefits if long-term projects suddenly lose funding, wasting previous council investment and leading to biodiversity loss.*
- 4. Auckland Council is disregarding multiple public consultations which supported increased investment in the natural environment over the last 5 years, including the Aotea Great Barrier 3 Year Plans, NETR and the Long-Term Plan, the Auckland Climate Action Plan and Te Mana o Te Taiao (the DOC led National Biodiversity Strategy).*
- 5. The proposal disproportionately reduces budgets in the local board areas with the largest areas of native forest and natural capital in the region. There is no rationale given for this in the proposal. Why have these boards been so targeted for savings?*
- 6. Auckland Council's proposal will have a negative impact on mental health and well-being. Environmental projects are a source of social connection, education and personal growth. They also help people of all ages connect to nature, which is a recognised de-stressor. Cutting funding for the natural environment will negatively impact community well-being after a very difficult 3 years.*

HAVE YOUR SAY

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