

“Cultural well-being, local government and mainstreets”

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10.15-10.35 am

2nd Trans-Tasman Mainstreet and Town Centres Conference

Sharing Information, Inspiration and Innovation

Telstra Clear Pacific Events Centre

Manukau City

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this conference.

“Cultural well-being” is a term that often evokes strong views in people. Some even cringe at the term - thinking that it is just about the arts (and ‘high arts’ like opera, ballet and classical music at that), or just about Maori culture – and it is all those things, but also far more than that.

In your conference packs you will find a copy of a brochure that the Ministry for Culture & Heritage has developed on the term and I will be speaking to that this morning. Please note the website and email on the brochure as the first point of contact if you have any follow up queries. I have another pile of brochures here now that will be passed out if you have mislaid your conference packs.

Of course, while it is a new phrase, “cultural well-being” has always been a part of what local government in New Zealand has been involved with. It can be seen in the halls, the monuments, the street architecture and paving, the festivals, and the enhanced town centres and mainstreets this conference is celebrating.

The formalisation of cultural well-being being entered as a term within the Local Government Act 2002 presents new challenges and opportunities for councils with respect to past, current and future approaches to promoting cultural well-being. And it is a means of thinking more deeply about local, regional and national identity.

As a trans-Tasman conference, the Australians in the audience will be aware that there is not an equivalent requirement in Australian legislation, although the work around “Cultural Vitality” that Port Philip in Greater Melbourne has voluntarily chosen to embrace comes closest to how cultural well-being is being thought of on this side of the ditch.

So what is cultural well-being?

Culture, in its broadest sense, is what makes us come alive. It defines, it connects. It identifies. It brands.

Without a cultural component, communities would have no markers - no defining characteristics – and would probably be unappealing and characterless. Town centres and mainstreets would be cheerless and generic places.

At its core – and you’ll find this in the brochure - cultural well-being, as we see it, is about activities and initiatives such as:

- support for arts and cultural expression;
- protecting cultural associations with our natural environment;
- the provision of museum, library and archival services;
- celebrating the diversity within your communities;
- the provision and maintenance of sports and recreational facilities and events; and
- iconic heritage buildings, urban space and rural landscapes.

Local government supports cultural well-being in a number of ways – through the provision of public infrastructure, places and spaces, through public services and through support of events that bring people together - from the local fair, A&P show, to Guy Fawkes, Diwali, Chinese New Year celebrations. From Otara market to V8 supercars. From local kapa haka competitions to the Wild Food festival. Dragon boating and surf life-saving, and even to the hanging of Christmas lights – these are events that celebrate our uniqueness as New Zealanders as well as our incredible diversity.

In promoting cultural well-being, the role local authorities play in these events can range from organizing street closures, marketing and promotion, to major sponsorship and events management. While many councils will look at events solely from an economic benefit analysis, others will see

supporting a range of events as a way of responding to the cultural needs of parts of their communities, from gardeners to boy racers.

Yet cultural well-being is not just witnessed in the big festivals. Often it occurs because it has to, or because people think it matters; because it has intrinsic values. As an example, in the small towns throughout New Zealand where communities that have often lost schools, banks and post offices will often have a small historical society or museum or pioneer village that is run by volunteers. These places do not expect to get large numbers of visitors through their doors, although many visitors will be intrigued by their collections because they are authentic and not professionally mediated and packaged.

But, in their modest way, such places are repositories of community memory and fulfil a very real social and cultural need. They often get just a few hundred dollars in community grants from a council's annual handout, and do not often feature in grand town planning schemes, but their impact can be far greater than their ostensible museological or economic development importance.

Powerpoint slide: CWB Definition

There is not, and nor should there be, a single definition of cultural well-being. However, as a discussion starter, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage has endeavored to capture a broad understanding of cultural well-being which you will find in the brochure. It is also on the screen now as one of the two slides I have today.

The definition we have come to, and which a number of New Zealand councils have adopted or engaged with is:

The vitality that communities and individuals enjoy through:

- *participation in recreation, creative and cultural activities; and*
- *the freedom to retain, interpret and express their arts, history, heritage and traditions.*

Cultural well-being – The Government’s Approach

In the past year the Ministry has run a number of workshops on how to define, operationalise and measure cultural well-being. I have also met with most council mayors, chairs and chief executives up and down the country. At those meetings, a question that was often alluded to, if not directly asked, has been whether central government is asking more of local government than central government is itself willing itself to commit to in the area of cultural well-being.

I would like to spend a few moments dispelling this myth.

Because, just as councils are coming to terms with cultural well-being at a local level, the Government has identified the importance of understanding and embracing national identity and how this is seen by the rest of the world.

As New Zealanders we are increasingly considering what it means to be a New Zealander and how we give expression to our identity and uniqueness. Just as New Zealanders engage with questions of national identity, a

constitution, the national flag, how Waitangi Day and ANZAC Day are observed, there are a similar set of questions to be addressed at the local and regional level – what makes Taranaki unique, what defines Northland, and ultimately, how do you capture these values, beliefs and identity in action?

In my Ministry there is over \$300million spent on culture, which reflects the interest of Government involving itself in culture and heritage for reasons such as:

- developing a sense of place – a distinct place - promoting national identity (such as the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior);
- stimulating insight and enrichment – past, present and future (such as Te Ara. The Online Encyclopedia of New Zealand);
- building strong communities – current and evolving (such as regional television and radio initiatives); and
- promoting domestic and international economic growth, including opportunities for creative industries (such as cultural diplomacy programme).

The Four Well-beings

The four well-beings in the Local Government Act are as much of an opportunity and responsibility for central as for local government. In the most obvious way, they force us to think outside the silos that, if we are honest about it, most of us are happier working inside– mainly because it is cosier and easier to manage and measure.

Over the past two decades, the important synergies across the well-beings have become recognised. For example, many of the products New Zealand sells overseas, including agricultural and horticultural produce, and even our films and fashion, and most particularly tourism, rely on environmental integrity and awareness of what New Zealand stands for: more than just ‘clean and green’, but New Zealand firstly needs to be clean and green in order to build on that reality or perception.

In the field of cultural tourism, such as the forthcoming Southern Odyssey Cultural Tourism Trail in northern Southland, it will be absolutely the case that, in the encouragement of innovative and entrepreneurial industry there is a mixing of economic, social, environmental and cultural drivers.

Powerpoint slide: Four Well-beings diagram



You will see on the screen the way that the Ministry has depicted the relationship between the four well-beings. In this diagram:

- Well-being is at the centre – that is what we are all trying to enhance; and
- Well-being is enhanced when the four equidistant and interdependent types of well-beings – social, cultural, economic and environmental – move efficiently around the centre.

At the Ministry for Culture and Heritage we have a view that it is at the *intersection* of the well-beings where councils are likely to find the greatest possibilities for innovation and efficiency. Cultural tourism is one such example. Other examples include the use of cultural activities and sport as one means of dealing with a range of social and health issues, through such programmes as SPARC's *Push Play* or the view that 'a child in sport is a child out of Court'

Town centres and mainstreets

Of course, most of the delegates here today are intimately involved with mainstreets and town centres work, which is, by its very nature, holistic in intent – integrating the four well-beings.

Like the sponsorship of this very conference, which has central and local government as well as corporate sponsors, answers to the promotion of cultural well-being may well lie in strategic alliances with business, community and government partners.

The work around the Urban Design Protocol that Lindsay Gow has discussed earlier in this session will have obvious impact on your work on urban design issues.

A lot of councils are thinking about cultural well-being in terms of their town centres. The model of *Puke Ariki* in New Plymouth on the west coast of the North Island is a good one. It is a combination library and museum, and has a mix of central and local funding, including corporate sponsorship. But more than that, it has completely changed the way that Taranaki people have thought about the New Plymouth CBD.

The community and the councils in Taranaki saw *Puke Ariki* as a means of bringing together communities rather than solely as a collection of artifacts and books to protect. Not only are they using the complex in great numbers, but the sense of pride and the way that the accompanying landscaping and walkways have re-oriented New Plymouth to *look towards* rather than turn its back on the Tasman Sea is striking.

It used to be that ambitious councils used to say to me that they wanted a ‘mini-*Te Papa*’ for their towns. Now they all want “mini *Puke Arikis*”!

The Ministry is also noting the retro-fitting of heritage buildings to meet cultural well-being (and other well-beings) purposes, such as the use of historic bank and theatre buildings in Invercargill, or the heritage buildings in mainstreets recently purchased for proposed use as libraries-cum-community arts centres in Greytown and Waimate.

Other communities are taking more of a greenfields approach and building brand new facilities for arts, culture and business, such as the performing

arts venue in Kerikeri, or in this magnificent building here at Manukau City's TelstraClear Pacific Events Centre.

For these and other projects there are existing and new central government funds that councils can bid for, such as the Significant Community-based Projects Fund. Government recognizes that there is often a national interest in many of these developments – in our own case, for instance, we have supported major museum developments in Nelson, Christchurch, Lower Hutt and Auckland.

What the Ministry is doing next

I am committed to the Ministry moving forward in designing practical inputs into helping local and central government think smarter about the promotion of cultural well-being.

Powerpoint slide: CWB website address

www.mch.govt.nz/cwb

You will find what we have done to date on the website on screen – its full of resources that are free to be used in your policy, operations and planning processes.

I believe that with cultural well-being now pretty well understood in terms of its distinct features, it is now time to start promoting integration of the four well-beings more. Specifically, my staff will be working on:

- A review of a sample of Long-Term Council Community Plans (LTCCPs) in order to assess how local authorities are meeting their obligations to promote cultural well-being.
- An evaluation of what we have done so far and lessons learned.
- Case studies and best practice on the website.
- A guide to central government funding sources for cultural well-being related projects that are open to local government.
- A report of the special opportunities relating to cultural well-being that regional councils could be able to respond to.
- Methods for use by the Ministry itself, and by other cultural sector government agencies, for assessing their own contributions to cultural well-being - leading to the realisation of community outcomes.

Conclusion

There is tremendous scope to be innovative and to integrate the promotion of cultural well-being into all council practice. Some councils are already ahead of the game. And New Zealand is boldly embarking on a quadruple bottom line approach which is adding cultural wellbeing to the triple bottom line extensively used in Australia and the United Kingdom.

It is clear to me that those councils that look seriously to address cultural well-being are likely to foster communities which stand out in the future as desirable places to live.

They will have a strong sense of community and connection to space and place.

They are places which will challenge their communities to new heights in innovation and creative endeavour, and which will attract creative talent and creative industries.

They will be places with a wide variety of social and cultural outlets, where people enjoy themselves and their neighbours.

They'll have vibrant town centres and mainstreets.

As a final note, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage will do what it can to assist with the journey. In line with the themes of the conference ('sharing information, inspiration and innovation'), we would also like your comments and reflections. Please note the website and email on the brochure as the first point of contact.

The Ministry does not necessarily have the answers but is willing to work with councils as they find their own answers to the promotion of cultural well-being.

Thank you, and I will be happy to take questions either now or as part of a panel.

