



Waterfront agency needs re-think

Another essential part of the royal commission's report was dumped

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Among the little-noticed government decisions on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance has been to abandon the four-tiered proposal of a waterfront development agency covering the central business district including Ponsonby, Parnell and Newmarket, a waterfront and city centre committee, a waterfront community board and an urban development agency with land acquisition powers.

Instead, the government is proposing one council-controlled organisation (CCO), a development agency to cover the waterfront and its connections to the central city. What exactly the CCO would do and powers it would have have not yet been decided other than it will "address the fragmented approach to developing the waterfront and central city."

If getting rid of fragmentation is the key aim, however, why have a waterfront development agency at

all, when the area it will look after including the seabed will already be under the control of the new single Auckland council?

If the idea is that the agency will have certain regulatory and/or planning roles, this will inevitably run into conflict and potential duplication with the council's core role to determine a single spatial plan for the whole of Auckland.

If the idea is for the agency to carry out commercial developments in competition with the private sector, while at the same time being financially underwritten by the ratepayer, this also seems unnecessary and an invitation for dysfunction to creep back into Auckland's governance. If the private sector can run core services on the waterfront precinct as some do now, then they should be able to continue to do so reporting directly to the council as landowner.

Rather than establishing a waterfront agency, a more business-like and transparent approach could be for the council to establish its spatial plan for the waterfront (along with the rest of Auckland) listing the key public assets needed such as the Ports of Auckland (the commercial port), convention centre, cruise terminal, marine industry precinct,

fishing fleet facilities, tourism operations, yacht charter businesses etc and then progressively release or lease land on commercial terms?

The government's justification for collapsing the royal commission's multi-tiered proposal to a single agency was explained on the basis that "improving the attractiveness and functionality of the waterfront and important areas will benefit Aucklanders and their quality of life. It will also help attract and retain talented workers." However, there is no empirical research or data to back up these assertions.

Instead, the comments appear to simply echo the smart growth rhetoric and principles in the Royal Commission's *Auckland Governance Report* in respect of the city centre and waterfront. While the commission gives lots of attention to the city centre's location "around a beautiful harbour" and the importance of access for the city centre public to its waterfront, completely ignored is any mention of the vital commercial role and functions performed along the waterfront.

There is no mention, for example, that Ports of Auckland handles 50% of the entire country's imports and 24% of its exports by value, of which



until someone can demonstrate a better place for their location in terms of adding value to Auckland investments, exports and workforce.

The dysfunction arising on vital waterfront activities as a result of the current multi governance arrangements (covering bodies such as ARC, ARH, ACC and a number of central government agencies) is reflected in the decision to convert the Wynyard peninsula area into residential, light commercial/retail, and recreational use. The area includes the vital tank farm facilities on Wynyard Point which are to be relocated.

No one seems to have thought seriously about where the new location should be, what the wider infrastructure, logistics and economic impact of removing these facilities will be, and whether it

will be more costly (or cheaper) to distribute fuel product to customers in Auckland and beyond from a site other than the waterfront.

Auckland's waterfront is pivotal in the New Zealand's economy's engine room; that truism should be the starting point for any waterfront governance reform.

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90% are distributed to or have their origin from destinations within 25 km of the port. The role performed by the commercial port represents around 13% of the nation's GDP.

Neither does the commission mention the critical role of the waterfront for generating and marketing New Zealand's nearly billion dollar marine exports. New Zealand's marine industry success arises from a comparative advantage

enjoyed by Auckland in having one of the world's best sailing environments; the competitive advantage is achieved through the access to deep water the industry enjoys in the viaduct basin for launching marine industry products.

If New Zealand is serious about lifting investments, exports and international competitiveness as spelt out in last week's Budget, then ringfencing the core role of the commercial port and marine industry sector on Auckland's waterfront would seem to be a primary goal. Any change to the waterfront must have as its starting point a goal to strengthen the long-term commercial independence and performance of the Ports of Auckland. Vital marine industry and fishing fleet operations should also be ringfenced, unless or