

Climate emergency step in right direction

JACK SANTA BARBARA

WHY DECLARE A CLIMATE EMERGENCY?

Nelson City Council declared a Climate Emergency on May 16th, just hours behind Environment Canterbury.

There are many yet unanswered questions about NCC's Declaration of a Climate Emergency, which came after three days of public submissions about the Annual Plan.

Many of these submissions acknowledged that council was already taking action related to climate change, but there were strong concerns expressed to take climate risks seriously and do even more. Joining over 500 municipalities around the world, the declaration of a Climate Emergency was in part a response to these concerns.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

An emergency is something that is seriously threatening our well-being. Some short term emergencies like fires and floods are obvious and procedures are in place to deal with them.

Climate change is different. It is not an obvious, discrete event like a fire but a slow process that has multiple and escalating impacts.

It also has a delayed effect: actions we take now will have significant impacts on whether our future will be manageable. Because we do not have procedures for such unprecedented and unpredictable disas-

ters that climate change will bring, declaring an emergency is an important step in assessing what the risks are, and what actions we can take to minimize those risks.

The full meaning of the Declaration will emerge as we take up this challenge. The Declaration is a prudent and essential step to rethinking much of what each of us now does to make the problem worse, and how we can all help make it better.

WHAT WILL IT COST?

Dealing with emergencies can be costly; the summer's local fires cost millions of dollars and disrupted many people's lives and businesses.

Economists have calculated that the global cost of not addressing climate change will result in trillions of dollars of losses from damaged infrastructures, insurance claims, disaster relief, death and illnesses, and business disruption. Left unchecked, the increased frequency and intensity of climate disasters will bankrupt municipalities and make them unmanageable.

Once we put resources to understanding the local climate risks and develop protective actions we will have a better understanding of the costs of managing climate impacts.

Whatever the financial costs, they will be far less than the costs of business as usual.

Climate action is a major focus for central government; presumably, funds will become available



Councillor Kate Fulton hugged members of Extinction Rebellion after the council voted to declare climate change an emergency. SKARA BOHNY

to assist municipalities make the transition to a safe climate.

WHO WILL BE MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THE TRANSITION?

The very nature of the climate challenge means we will all have to change many of the things we take for granted – how we move people and goods about, how we conduct our businesses, what we eat, where we build, etc. Confronted with an emergency many people are prepared to make the difficult changes to make things safe. Declaring a pub-

lic emergency means we understand that everyone can contribute. Rallying together in the big effort ahead of us is critical to our success.

For a 'long emergency' such as the terrible consequences of global heating, we require the highest levels of democratic functioning and community involvement. Both local councils are already considering the idea of a Climate Forum, bringing together all the groups concerned with responding to climate change. Another possibility is a Citizens' Assembly, bringing

together a randomly selected gathering of citizens, providing science-based input on the issue at hand, and asking them to develop a consensus on priority actions. This level of community involvement will be critical to the success and effectiveness of our response to this emergency.

Congratulations to NCC for showing leadership and stepping up to the greatest challenge humanity faces.

Jack Santa Barbara is a retired lecturer in sustainable business and a member of Zero Carbon Nelson Tasman, zcnt.weebly.com

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