

Northport Resource Consent Hearing

Proposed presentation – Chris Howell

Thank you for hearing me today.

I'm an architect and I run a small business in Whangārei. I have no affiliations to Northport but in the long-term I intend to settle permanently to our current Marsden cove property – becoming a neighbour of Northport's in the process.

So it may surprise you that I am submitting in support of Northport's proposals. But the reason is very simple – I believe that you are in an incredibly powerful position right now; the decisions you make around this Resource Consent Application will either help Northland achieve the potential that so many of us believe our region has, or they will stifle or even bury that potential for another two or three generations.

When it comes to major employers and drivers of significant economic growth, Northland is not particularly well appointed . Likewise with major hubs of economic activity. You've only got to live in a provincial town like Whangarei for a few years to realise how important the few large employers are when it comes to the economic wellbeing and social diversity of the place.

The shift from oil refining to fuel importation at Northport's industrial neighbour, Channel Infrastructure, has meant that a lot of local people have lost their jobs. These are people who have helped our local economy and communities grow and thrive. Now many of them have or are looking to move away with their impact on that same economy and communities, being massive, but this time the impact will be entirely negative.

These people, their skills and their ~~sense of and~~ contribution to our community, will be lost to us forever unless we can create more local jobs.

This is where Northport comes in – and it goes far beyond the jobs on the port. Simply put, Northport's expansion will create new opportunities for local businesses to flourish, grow and employ local people. No expansion means no opportunity. So it's crucial for our communities that Northport is given the opportunity to expand as it needs to.

This project will inevitably result in both short-term and long-term employment growth through jobs linked directly to construction of the expanded port and its increased freight-handling capacity. It's also likely, in my view, that expansion of the port will result in the establishment of businesses in other sectors at Marsden Point.

This will, in turn, create a collaborative and business environment attractive to a host of smaller businesses and professional service providers. With these will bring even more jobs for locals in areas beyond shipping and marine services. New jobs that would provide opportunities for local people to learn skills and trades that are transferrable, both within NZ and internationally.

I believe we would also see an influx of people coming to live and work in Northland. This, in turn, would lead to an increase in the number of service businesses, more variety and competition, greater employment, a higher rates take and, consequently, enhanced local and central government services.

All of this contributes to one of our region's economic priorities – enhancing our economic diversity beyond primary industry. Attracting people and businesses that can add value in new and increasingly important sectors, and enhance the skills base of Northlanders.

You might be tempted to dismiss all this as wishful thinking. I don't think it is. All of it, and more, can reasonably be expected because of having a modern container port in a naturally deep-water harbour, well connected to the rest of the upper North Island through an upgraded and inter-connected road, rail and coastal shipping network.

For sure, enhanced investment by central government in our road, rail and coastal shipping network is essential if Northport is to be allowed to help Northland realise the potential I describe above. But certainly this investment will not happen as quickly if Northport is denied the ability to expand as it has said it wants to.

So, in conclusion, I think you have the opportunity in front of you to help Northland achieve its potential. Or you could choose to stifle that potential for who knows how long. I ask that you do the right thing by our region and our people. Please grant Northport the Resource Consent it is asking for.

