
SYMPOSIUM INSIGHTS ON USE OF TDRS

Ian McLean

Ian is a life member and committee member of LWQS, and helped develop this Symposium. He was formerly chair of the society and led the transition to LWQS from the Lakeweed Control Society, as well as the first symposia in 2001. Ian was an MP for Tarawera for 12 years. He has considerable governance experience as former chair of the Earthquake Commission and the Parliamentary Public Expenditure Committee. For over two decades he has worked in earthquake insurance and related emergency management.

On behalf of LakesWater Quality Society I would like to thank Bal for the huge contribution he is making towards the Rotorua lakes district by his participation in this work.

I will start with a brief apology to people who may have been concerned at incomplete proposals. The intention of today's Symposium was not to present a complete picture, a chart of how TDRs should work. For those of you who could not see how it fits together, my apologies. It was never the intention. The intention was to draw you in to help the picture be drawn, rather than to present a complete object.

I grew up in Whakatane, in the Bay of Plenty. A few times every year or two I used to go along the coast to a small fishing village called Tauranga with a beach not half as good as Ohope. But I used to come to Rotorua every 2 or 3 months if I could. What a great place it was. Exciting thermal, great lakes to swim in, bush to walk in. Looking at the two now there is a huge difference. I am not suggesting Rotorua should emulate Tauranga, but I would suggest that the status quo is not an option. The status quo is not an option for the lakes and it is not an option for the district. Doing nothing is not an option.

The question was raised several times asking what the market for TDRs would be. I was thrilled by Dave Umbers' presentation as to the possibility of a spectacular themed development, and to see his picture of what could be built and then sold, not just in New Zealand, but overseas as well. TDRs will not create the market, but TDRs may unlock the possibility of the market being created. It is not possible at the present time for people with the imagination that Dave and other people like John Sax have shown to go out and create the market.

As someone who has lived in the Rotorua district for 30 or 40 years it is easy to get despondent, but one of the things that is most encouraging is the resurgence of Maori economic activity and vitality. It affects not just the land itself but much wider than land alone. I believe that is one of the greatest hopes for the future of our district. If it can be harnessed it will be great.

The question was raised as to whether TDRs should apply to land use or land management. The argument for saying the TDRs should only apply to land management is essentially administrative convenience: it makes it easier in the office. But it is not necessary to restrict that because as Anna Grayling pointed out, with the use of *Overseer* now embedded in what the Regional Council is doing. Hence there is already established a measurement scheme on which TDRs and Regional Council incentives can be based.

On one hand there is land use change, pine trees instead of dairy cows. On the other hand there are possibilities of developing new ways to stop nitrogen seeping into the lakes. Which should we encourage? Which one should we seek public money for? Which one should the authorities encourage? One that is going to be worse for the district or the one that is going to be better? The argument is incontrovertible that TDRs should apply to land management change beyond best practice as well as to land use change.

The word flexibility was used. It is clear that in this scheme - which has to be set up for a long time - lots of changes may occur in the world outside and in the district as well. If there is an attempt to pin down every moving part it will be almost impossible in the future for adaptations to be made. For example, determining the number of TDRs required is a real challenge. A bigger challenge is to have enough flexibility to satisfy the needs of the market so as to get the best value and at the same time give enough certainty so that the players in the market can plan their own activities with certainty.

Somebody suggested that TDRs are not a silver bullet that will fix the lakes or employment in the district. But TDRs are one source of funding. It was suggested as an alternative that a fund should be set up from which money should go to pay farmers to make the change and then over time the fund can be repaid. The question is – ‘Where’s that fund going to come from?’

I am not sure whether the new Chief Executive of the Rotorua District Council has found \$20 million sitting in the bottom drawer. I know that Bill English will not be giving an extra \$20 million here when he has every district in the country facing problems like ours. Even the Bay of Plenty Regional Council would find it difficult to take \$20 million extra and put it in here. It is simply not realistic to say ‘Let’s get the money from somewhere else’, and not know where that somewhere else is.

As far as the lakes are concerned we have to look at realistic sources and ways ahead, Farmers face reality even more so. The situation has now been reached where farmers will carry the residual cost of change. The targets are set in the RPS and have to be met. There is a certain amount of money coming from government, some from the Regional and District Councils and the rest of the cost will fall on farmers. That is the way it is and I do not believe it is fair that we should ignore ways to assist farmers. I do not believe it is in the interests of the district if there are alternative imaginative ways in which funding can be found.

TDRs are one of those ways and I hope as the District Plan goes through its processes that a way will be found to make it workable. I hope that you will all contribute to the further work with the District Council. Today has given me significant confidence that some of the very hard issues can be tackled so that Rotorua is again that exciting, attractive, fascinating wonderful place with a beautiful lake that I remember from my youth.