

CATHERINE SMITH

INTRODUCTION

My brother asked me to write some articles that might explain how we do things in New Zealand to make environmental gains (or at least mitigate for some of the environmental degradation). There is no doubt being a small country with a well-oiled networking system makes a difference!

For many years I had owned a veterinary practice in Hamilton. I then moved into veterinary politics and standard setting for 10 years (1990-2000) in Wellington and spent much of that time becoming familiar with legislative processes and effective lobbying.

Understanding where influence on decision-making may be productive is essential and necessitates being familiar with New Zealand's three levels of government. Briefly:-

1. Local Government (cities and districts eg Hamilton City, Waitomo District) *apolitical*.

When I first "returned" to Hamilton I was anxious to put in some time into enhancing and protecting the biodiversity of our area. I joined a group called Tui 2000 Inc which had been formed by a group of environmental enthusiasts back in 1989. Their aim was to bring back tuis (a native bird with a beautiful song) into the environmentally degraded city of Hamilton.

This group turned out to be a sensible, reasonable group who rapidly gained the respect of the Hamilton City Council (HCC). They did so by (in this case) making sound submissions, talking with councillors at a personal level, doing the hard work of planting native trees, engaging in public education, commending the HCC when there were good news stories etc.

2. Regional Government (regions eg Waikato, Bay of Plenty) *apolitical*

Also when I returned from Wellington I saw an advertisement in the local paper asking for people to join an Advisory Committee for Regional Environment (ACRE) to act as a public watch dog to the decisions being made by the Waikato Regional Council. This turned out to be a very interesting nine years and once again engendering respect through the same methods as above worked in our favour. It was critical to get to know the regional council staff working behind the scenes in such areas as land use, water quality, policy making etc because that was where the science behind policy making was so strong (and essential to robust

decision making). Councillors often didn't have a science background and many were not convinced that we need a vibrant environment on which to build a strong economy. ACRE members could attend Council meetings but not speak (unless asked to). This gave us an insight into which Councillors needed "more work"! As chair of ACRE I remember delivering a short paper on the value of ecosystem services to Council having been in interesting discussions about this topic with regional council staff beforehand. I was told afterwards that most Councillors had no idea what an ecosystem was so we knew we had a lot of education and lobbying ahead!

3. Central Government

Obviously this is a political environment although behind the scenes there are information officers who continue to gather knowledge for those in government at the time. In NZ we have enjoyed MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) since 1993 so the influence of the Greens and other parties is robust. We have an independent Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment and she (Dr Jan Wright) prepares papers on various subjects such as fracking, the use of 1080 etc to enhance decision making.

Parliament is made up of 120 members (one house) and each piece of legislation has to go through 3 readings in the House. Between the second and third reading the Select Committee system comes into play. There are two levels of influence that I am familiar with... meetings with information officers (eg how to define a dangerous dog?) to ensure they understand the problem before legislation is drafted and the Select Committee system where one can ask to be heard (eg on the dispensing of veterinary prescriptions) . Obviously there are others such as discussions with local MPs, government officials in the various Ministries etc.

Being able and willing to compromise is critical. When lobbying. In the process of getting new animal welfare legislation through Parliament in 1993 compromise made all the difference to getting at least partial success. At the time it was decided that the public was not ready to see tail docking of dogs included in the legislation but many other aspects of the legislation were essential to improving the 'duty of care' towards animals (and deflecting trade barriers!). So the NZ Veterinary Association 'gave in ' (reluctantly) on the dog issue but was delighted to see all the other components passed. Post note as I write: Tail docking of dogs is now back on the legislative agenda.

I should add that the ability to listen and to see where it might be possible to gently change a point of view are essential elements of lobbying. And you win some and lose some and that's life!

Catherine Smith
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