



[News](#)

[Reports](#)

[Events](#)

[Dine Shop Stay](#)

[Notices](#)

[Trades Services](#)

[Home](#) > [News](#) > [WAG should be open to other people's views](#)

Fri, Oct 11, 2024 4:00 AM

WAG should be open to other people's views



Contributed

Standing up for what you believe in and challenging council is important, but Whakatāne Action Group's views should also be open to scrutiny, writes Dave Stewart.

In response to Suzanne Williams letter in the Beacon (October 2), I have to say I am somewhat perplexed at simply pointing out a few obvious home truths regarding the constant negativity the Whakatāne Action Group (WAG) that these are viewed as "attacks" by WAG members.

Are they that precious that they cannot have someone challenging their narrative?

In my article and subsequent follow up, I raised three points.

Negativity v alternatives

Not being misled by false accounts of waste.

Dealing with contrary views.

My concerns about WAG's negativity is that it risks hiding the costs and outcomes that are the alternatives, as we discovered after the post-election euphoria of the cancellation of the previous government's water reforms – a \$440,000,000 ratepayer bill.

This concerns the risk of the support WAG have given to central Government's attacks on local democracy under the banner of "local government reform" without knowing what it will look like.

We only need to ask the good folk of Dunedin with the huge protests over the hospital cancellation or Wairarapa, with the eye watering hike in user pays road tolls, to see how badly that can turn out.

As an example of that concern, I highlighted WAG's unconditional support for Prime Minister Chris Luxon's "white elephant" example of "council wasting spending" being the Wellington Convention Centre – Takina. While Mr Luxon's intent was to deliver a barb at local council spending, this was an easily proven poor example.

I went into some detail on this on the WAG Facebook page, listing chapter and verse the facts that showed Mr Luxon was simply grandstanding over Takina, and WAG should be very cautious of rubber-stamping misinformation on their page as it could lead to embarrassment.

On September 2, WAG's Facebook page carried a post that accused Whakatāne District Council of creating a Wellington Convention style "Luxon White Elephant", buying two VW vans at a cost of over \$100,000 each for use as "mobile internet cafes" for remote areas.

The post quickly gained momentum, even after it was pointed out by councillor Nandor Tanczos and former councillor Gerard van Beek that no ratepayer money was used for these; they were a central Government-funded initiative, and the purpose was to provide access to council facilities in remote outlying areas.

The post remains there today and the pile-on of disinformation the post attracted remains with it. A simple edit by admin to the main post would prevent this being viewed as disinformation.

I was advised that my post exposing the facts was "too long" and that "Facebook administrators have the ability to ban you altogether from the page if they feel your comments are not contributing positively".

I decided to accept their invitation to attend their public meetings where I was pleased to hear people there echoing my call for more positivity from WAG, and one person even suggesting that WAG consider working with the council rather than against it.

Later, in a discussion about my article on WAG's negativity, again the misinformation around Takina was repeated along with the observation from the top table that "I could ban Dave Stewart from our page but instead I am happy to meet his comments head on and correct them point by point".

I then stood up at this meeting and corrected the speaker, saying that what he just said was not the truth, and that the facts about Takina had been left unchallenged and the only response from WAG was being told to only contribute positively or be banned from the page.

I appreciated that after raising this point, chair John Howard acknowledged this as factual.

I raised this the next day on the WAG page and the response from the page admin was another personal attack, which included a decree to stop criticising WAG and I was subsequently banned from the page and all my posts were removed.

In her October 2 letter, Ms Williams pointed out the concerns I had about the way Mawera Karetai was treated at a previous WAG meeting for expressing a contrary view over the Rex Morpeth Hub were probably a one-off and not an example of how well WAG handled contrary views.

With all due respect, I would contest that.

The real concern here for all of us is that while WAG champion themselves as challenging the council, they behave in Orwellian ways when someone challenges them and points out that what they are putting out into the public domain could be more effective if a higher consideration was given to accuracy.

There are several areas I feel I could work with WAG on, but, of course, not everything. In my world, you make progress by finding common ground and working together on the things you agree on, and leave the other stuff for another day when you have the luxury to argue for the sake of it.

Right now, I don't think we have that luxury.

I have immense respect for the people who are involved with WAG because it's not easy swimming against the tide, and standing up for what you believe in is incredibly important in these times and too few are prepared to do it.

But the important thing to always remember when facing an opponent is to respect the mana of your opponent.

My criticism of WAG has and always will be based on principles and only principles.

Nothing is achieved when we turn our focus to personal attacks.

I will keep attending WAG's public meetings and will keep pointing out where I think

**Support the
journalism you love**

Make a Donation

