



Dear Mayor Hanna,

We acknowledge that this might be the first time you have heard of the very real struggle Surf Life Saving is experiencing in the Waikato region, trying to cover the increased demand for our services at the many beaches which fall within the Waikato area, however we please ask that you read below and advocate on our behalf.

Recently Surf Life Saving, and other emergency services lodged submissions as part of the Waikato Regional Council long term plan review [appended]. These submissions received strong support from your rate payers. The submissions' essentially request Waikato Regional Council take the administrative responsibility for the central funding of our services at a Regional level as the funding burden has been historically unmet at a local authority level.

Without more resources from the Council, we believe the delivery of our services will no longer be sustainable. The population of the Waikato Region has grown steadily over the past twenty-five years, from 325,220 in 1986 to approximately 416,200 in 2012. This represents an increase of 28% and this steady growth is anticipated to continue throughout the next 15 years with the population reaching approximately 469,910 by 2031. 17% of the Waikato's population are immigrants and this number also continues to grow along with more and more tourists whom are drawn to our magnificent surf beaches (four of New Zealand's 10 top beaches are in your Region). Unfortunately, it is these very people, many unfamiliar with the perils of surf, who are especially likely to be at risk of drowning.

As outlined, our organisation remains chronically short of funds, despite energetic approaches to new and existing funding sources such as Trust Waikato and greater use of the begging bowl. We gratefully acknowledge that we receive some \$232,680 annually through the different territorial local bodies' annual planning process for our Regional Lifeguard contract for service, but this still amounts to less than 63% of the cost of service that we solely contract to your councils to provide. **We are being asked to do more and more on less and less.**

And, as you will have been made aware, the reality we face is none of this funding is for the operational cost of the volunteer services we provide and that make up 78% of our operations. Council has nothing budgeted to help with these operational costs and, as you the Waikato Regional Council has indicated, you are looking for cost cutting opportunities right across your entire budget.

Unfortunately, in Surf Life Saving, cost cutting (or failure to help provide adequate support) costs lives.

We could not operate without our selfless volunteers, who are already stretched to the limit. Inadequate funding saps morale and discourages recruitment. The volunteers, who have stuck with us and committed to patrolling selected beaches, understandably become disillusioned with the grinding fundraising and the demand for increased services on a shrinking budget.

Whether we can continue to provide even this basic service is in doubt, without additional assistance from the Council. I know that you and most of your Councillors and Local Boards are very sympathetic to these serious issues, and would not want to see more fatalities at the beaches that rank among our top tourist attractions.

There is also consistent support from the media and ratepayers, but they need the Council to provide leadership on this urgent issue. There are 194,000 ratepayers in this Region. The extra help we are seeking amounts to little more than a couple of extra dollars per ratepayer extra on their annual rates bill.

We ask that

- 1) That Waikato Regional Council and a prescribed list of eligible emergency services enter into an initial fixed-term three year funding agreement that sets out the terms, condition and criteria to be met in order for Council funding to be allocated to a particular service.
- 2) That the agreement provide for an amount of up to \$800,000 to be available over the three year period commencing 2015 - 2016 as Council's contribution to the operations of volunteer emergency services in the area.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Williams

Portfolio Manager



Thursday, 12th March

FUNDING FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Background

Some of the Waikato's greatest recreational assets are its beaches and harbours; they are regularly touted as "the regions favorite playground". These are kept safe largely by volunteers whom are provided little to no public funding for their services.

It is a fact that nearly every Waikato rate payer and the majority of visitors to the region are at risk of drowning at some point in their lives or time in the area.

Our beaches are a significant taonga and asset in our community. They are also some of the most dangerous and frequented coastal locations in the country being the main draw card for tourist and visitors to the Waikato region. In Waikato, tens of thousands of people from all parts of the region are prevented from injury or drowning or rescued each year. There are no wards across the region that are exempt from these statistics or the services provided by these clubs. In addition thousands of school children receive beach education through the surf clubs and their facilities each year.

Surf Life Saving like many emergency services – the rescue helicopter and Coastguard – are not funded by central government or the public health system. They rely on funding from other sources, including councils, to keep operating. However, there's no consistency to how the funding requests are dealt with (for example, sometimes several councils provide funding to our organisation), and no clarity for the organisations about what funding is available.

As agreed by district councils at last year's Zone.1 forum, Surf Life Saving proposes changing the way that council funding is allocated to emergency services in Waikato. This would replace funding from the district councils and instead create a single, contestable fund that's open to all eligible emergency services on a three year basis.

Proposal

Waikato Regional Council to provide operational funding for emergency services by way of a contestable fund and triennial contract for emergency services, replacing the existing funding by district councils and being paid for by a new rate per household.

Process

It is proposed that:

- Waikato Regional Council and all eligible emergency services will enter into an agreement that outlines the terms, conditions and other criteria that needs to be met in order for Council funding to be available for a particular service
- Waikato Regional Council to create a contestable fund of appropriate amount for emergency services, replacing the existing district council funding for the services and paid for by a new yearly rate per household
- On a triennial basis all eligible emergency services apply to this fund to assist in covering the operational costs of their services



Rationale

The proposed method of contestable funding opens funding up to all volunteer emergency services that meet the criteria and creates a single, efficient process for accessing council funding for volunteer emergency services. The benefits to council are that it releases district council funds to do other things and reduces the amount of administrative workload in having to deal with a vast number of member clubs versus just the organisations regional bodies.

The reality of the current situation is that there is no operative mechanism to ensure effective funding at a regional or local level. This deficit in direct funding requires organisations such as Surf Life Saving year-to-year, to go “cap in hand” to councils on an individual basis, only to receive mixed and inconsistent levels of support at a huge administrative expense to our organisation. Currently Surf Life Saving receives \$25,000 from Waikato Regional Council; \$38,000 from Hamilton City Council; \$34,500 from Waikato District Council; \$111,180 from Thames Coromandel District Council; \$24,000 from Hauraki District Council for our Regional Lifeguard contract for service.

Furthermore at many of our patrol locations we require funding from multiple local authorities. Currently we have to apply for this independently and this requires us to balance out what either party may or may not be willing to contribute, which we do through consulting with council officers. This method of funding application often results in one party not being funded to the requested amount and leads to deficits in the funding of our services. This has historically left us, as an organisation, having to seek funding for the remaining operational costs through Trusts or Gaming grants to provide the prescribed level of service; a precedent that is not sustainable and that we can no longer meet.

Across all Waikato Councils we receive no funding towards lifesaving operational costs for our volunteer services and although there is currently partial funding of our council contracted paid lifeguard service there is still a significant funding shortfall. We have requested this funding from the Territorial Local Authorities but they have been unable to grant funding to the level required. The current method also enables many ratepayers to be charged twice for the same service through different local authorities while other ratepayers whom use the service in the Waikato Region do not get charged at all as their local authorities do not contribute.

Volunteer surf lifeguards provide a critical service to Waikato and visitors to the Region that visit patrolled beaches. In addition to lifesaving services, this volunteer base also provides over 2000 highly trained and effective emergency/disaster response resources for the Region.

In relation to the volunteer lifesaving services, every one of our clubs has the opportunity to apply for community grant funding through their Territorial Local Authorities – however in some cases this is the very same grant funding pool that Surf Life Saving applies to in order to fund the paid week day lifeguard service that patrols during the high demand, peak holiday period. This means that Surf Life Saving is often being funded to the detriment of the volunteer surf lifesaving services provided by our clubs that provide weekend beach patrols over a six month season. Where this is not the case there is often five or six clubs submitting to the same territorial local authority and the funding of one club can cannibalise the funding of a neighboring club who is delivering a similar essential service.

Surf Life Saving has forecast that their request for funding from Waikato Regional Council would be \$433,680.

Regional Lifeguard Contract for Service - \$260,000

Towards the nine patrolled locations currently that are contracted over the peak summer months. This is the same as previous asks from the numerous territorial local authorities we have applied to but would represent an 11.7% increase on the previous granted amounts should we be successful, allowing us to extend the patrol seasons at Sunset Beach, Raglan, Hot Water Beach and accommodate for the operational growth required at Whangamata.



Club Operational Support payments - \$110,000

78% of all lifesaving operations in the Waikato region occur in the volunteer space. This \$110,000 would be a contribution to the annual operating costs of the eight volunteer surf life saving organisations in the Waikato Region. The average annual operating cost for these clubs is circa \$90,000 per annum, council's contribution to this vital volunteer emergency service would equate to approximately 15% of each clubs overall operating costs. This would ensure that the first dollar raised by the clubs through other fundraising activities does not have to be spent on operational expenses such as power, rates, insurance and maintenance. This is a major benefit to these clubs and we believe that council is responsible for contributing to the sustainability of this vital and iconic volunteer service. A fully council funded professional lifesaving model would cost the Council in excess of \$6m a year. All Clubs would provide accountability to Surf Life Saving for the operational grants they received. This represents a good shared and cost effective operational model for the Waikato Region.

Surf Life Lifesaving Operations Administration / Business Expenses (Supporting our Clubs) - \$65,000

To be utilised for essential lifesaving operational and business and admin expenses that Surf Life Saving incurs acting as the regional organization on behalf of our surf life-saving clubs. These include maintaining our radio network, Surfcom; lifeguard training and development; rookie lifeguard programmes; lifesaving manager wages; general lifesaving costs related to maintaining systems; equipment and databases; accounting; insurance; occupancy; and general costs. Many of the expenses that we incur assist our clubs to perform to the optimal standard required and achieve their primary objective of drowning and injury prevention on our beaches and coastlines

Recommendations

- 3) That Waikato Regional Council and a prescribed list of eligible emergency services enter into an initial fixed-term 3 year funding agreement that sets out the terms, condition and criteria to be met in order for Council funding to be allocated to a particular service.
- 4) That the agreement provide for an amount of up to \$800,000 to be available over the 4 year period commencing 2015 - 2016 as Council's contribution to the operations of volunteer emergency services in the area.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Williams

Portfolio Manager

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