

## **Some success for tourism-friendly candidates in local body elections**

Last weekend's local body elections produced a few surprises and also saw the predictable return of a number of sitting Mayors and Councillors. For the tourism industry, there have been some successes for tourism friendly candidates, although it remains to be seen whether a general move to the centre-left around the country will favour the industry or not, says Tourism Industry Association New Zealand (TIA) Chief Executive Tim Cossar.

Len Brown, who had a convincing win to become the first Mayor of Auckland Super City, has gone on record as backing the tourism industry, says Cossar.

"He pledged his commitment to tourism development at a recent Tourism Auckland industry update. He says he wants to promote Auckland's diversity and would give his best efforts to making Auckland a world class city for visitors. Speaking in a Mayoral debate just a few weeks ago, he also talked of promoting the city as more than just a gateway destination."

Wanganui's new Mayor Annette Main is the owner of tourism business The Flying Fox. The city's first female Mayor, Cossar says she is also one of the first tourism operators to hold the top job in a New Zealand city council. Main beat off closest challenger and former Deputy-Mayor Dot McKinnon by 200 votes to replace Michael Laws who did not stand. Main says she wants Wanganui on the map for the right reasons, and with a tourism background, promoting and raising the profile of her city is sure to be high on her agenda.

Jeroen Jongejans, owner of award winning tourism business Dive! Tutukaka was successful in gaining a seat on the Whangarei District Council. Cossar says Jongejans is a committed tourism player and he will bring an informed tourism voice to politics in the Northland region. Meanwhile, the Coromandel District has elected a Mayor who is known to be supportive of the visitor industry. Glenn Leach easily beat the incumbent Philippa Barriball by more than 3000 votes.

At the time of writing, the result in Wellington is on a knife-edge with incumbent Kerry Prendergast holding on by just 40 votes from former Green councillor Celia Wade-Brown. Nearly 1000 votes will decide the outcome, to be announced on Wednesday 13 October. Cossar says Prendergast has been an unashamed tourism promoter for Wellington and a keen supporter of bringing events to the capital. Whether Prendergast or Wade-Brown wins, he is confident the city will continue its tourism focus.

In results from other North Island regions:

Kevin Winters was returned with an overwhelming majority in Rotorua.

Rick Cooper has scrapped in as Taupo's Mayor by just over 100 votes from former Tourism Minister Mark Burton.

Harry Duynhoven, former Labour MP has won the New Plymouth mayoralty replacing Peter Tennett.

Stuart Crosby was returned in a landslide in Tauranga.

Barbara Arnott won by more than 8000 votes in Napier – interviewed by Radio NZ recently, Arnott said it was important to grow tourism numbers as that's what adds value and grows jobs in the region.

Julie Hardaker beat Bob Simcock by 800 votes to become Hamilton's new Mayor.

Cossar says the result in Christchurch that saw Bob Parker re-elected Mayor will be good for the tourism industry. "Parker proved his mettle in fronting the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquake. This included helping Christchurch and Canterbury Tourism with its promotional efforts aimed at getting visitors to continue visiting the garden city.

"This support for the local RTO reflects the commitment Parker has shown to the visitor industry in his first term as Christchurch Mayor, a commitment we hope will continue for the next three years."

In Queenstown, Vanessa van Uden has been elected Mayor to replace Clive Geddes. Cossar says Geddes was a great voice and supporter for tourism. "She's said she intends to bolster the major economic drivers of tourism and property development in the region, which is a good first sign."

In Westland, Maureen Pugh, who has been a huge advocate at local government level for TIA's freedom camping initiatives, was re-elected Mayor by a handsome margin. "We look forward to working with Maureen Pugh to further the progress made on freedom camping initiatives", says Cossar.

In results from other South Island regions:

Alistair Sowman was re-elected as Mayor of Marlborough.

Winston Gray has become the new Mayor of Kaikoura.

Aldo Miccio is the new Mayor of Nelson beating Kerry Marshall who came fourth.

Dave Cull beat Peter Chin to become the new Mayor of Dunedin.

Tim Shadbolt trounced Suzanne Prentice by more than 10,000 votes in Invercargill.

Frana Cardno is once again the Mayor of Southland.

Tim Cossar says as part of its local government strategy to forge a closer partnership with local government in order to boost the already significant contribution visitors make to communities, TIA will be writing to all successful Mayors reinforcing the commitments it set out in its manifesto document, *Local Government and the Visitor Industry: A Powerful Partnership*.

“We have already received interest from a number of councils who want to engage with us on the strategy with the first of such meetings scheduled with the Ruapehu District Council in early November.”

A Powerful Partnership sets out five priorities as the basis for building the local government partnership. These are centered around a closer working relationship, industry involvement in council investment decisions relevant to the visitor industry, environmental management, regional promotion, and partnering with council to identify ways to ease the compliance burden and foster a business-friendly regulatory environment for high quality operators.

Cossar says the tourism industry has benefitted from the close relationship it has developed with central government, and it now needs to replicate this with local government, arguably its most important partner.

“Councils play a vital role in deciding the level and quality of visitor services and infrastructure available, the events that take place in their community and how much to invest in destination promotion. This activity and their attitude towards tourism has a significant bearing on the visitor experience, how long they stay in a region and how much they spend.”