

Why the Queen City needs change

Tony Garnier



Nobody in Auckland wants the status quo. In fact, most Aucklanders think that doing nothing is not an option.

As in many other metropolitan regions, especially in the biggest cities of most OECD nations, the case for governance reform in Auckland is being driven by four imperatives: efficiency, economic competitiveness, equity and community. All four feature in the terms of reference of the royal commission.

“The success of this inquiry depends on getting the widest feedback possible from the people of Auckland, from our diverse communities and every walk of life,” royal commissioner Peter Salmon says.

The commission will be calling for public submissions in February-March and indicates it intends to keep its procedures as informal as possible. “In other words, we don’t expect people to have to engage legal representation,” Mr Salmon says.

Each week *NBR* will seek insights and comments on the key matters the royal commission is to consider, including:

- Auckland as the country’s business capital and commercial engine room;
- the ability of Auckland to compete internationally as a desirable place to live, work, invest

Making Auckland a better city

From January 25, *NBR* is running a special project to back the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Auckland Governance.

Throughout 2008, we will publish robust debate and provide ways that allow the public to have a say on how they want Auckland’s regional governance strengthened.

Business consultant Tony Garnier will write a weekly column and provide background to the many options already under discussion. This will ensure that these are given serious consideration by the commission.

THE COMMISSIONERS

The Royal Commission Inquiry into Auckland Governance comprises retired High Court judge Peter Salmon QC (chairman), Dame Margaret Bazley and last year’s rate inquiry chairman David Shand. It was appointed on October 29 last year to report by December 1 this year on what is needed to achieve Auckland’s potential to be a truly internationally competitive city to live, work and do business.



Peter Salmon QC

and do business;

- the ability of the region to respond to economic, environmental, cultural and social challenges;
- Auckland’s role as a key transport hub and distribution centre for New Zealand and the Pacific region; and
- what governance and representation arrangements will best meet Auckland’s different communities of interest, cultural diversity and other groups and stakeholders in decision-making processes.

I will assess options under discussion for their

strengths and potential weaknesses against five inter-related questions the commission will assess:

- Why are world cities undertaking governance reform?
- What are the main drivers and variables of these reforms and their main strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the main options for Auckland and what are their strengths and weaknesses from an international perspective?

■ What are some fresh options not being considered by Auckland but which might add value?

■ What are the main lessons to learn from international experience? In particular, what is a practical outcome for Auckland’s governance reform?

The debate last year leading up to the government decision to set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry was underscored by two assumptions:

- Auckland’s future depends on how well it is organised, on the roles of central, regional and local government, and on how the talents of entrepreneurs are used; and
- Fragmented governance arrangements are holding Auckland business back from achieving its potential to be New Zealand’s internationally competitive world-class city.

Mr Salmon is already hitting the right notes for promoting a sensible long-term (not band-aid or expedient) solution to harness Auckland’s economic muscle and innovative and creative potential. He says: “The commission’s aim is to recommend a form of local body governance which will serve Auckland well now, and for the next 50 years. This means thinking carefully about what the future holds for Auckland – its identity, the competitive and other pressures on Auckland, its ethnic mix, and Auckland’s place in the Pacific and the world.”