

**Pre – election
voter attitudes
in
W h a n g a r e i**

A study commissioned by Brian MacLachlan

September 2007.

I n d e x

page

Client brief.....	3
Methodology.....	4
Findings.....	5
Conclusions.....	10

Client brief

With an election only 30+ days out, this measurement was designed to establish public attitudes toward Whangarei's required actions for fiscal management at Council level. It also looks at the public requirement in terms of systems by which the electorate can communicate with the Council in formal approaches to major decision-making.

Given that candidate nominations had been confirmed on Friday 24th August, this study, conducted in the first week of September, sought to identify the next Mayor of the Whangarei District Council.

Methodology

This study was conducted in an identical manner to the previous measurement ("Aspects of Local Government Performance") carried out in August 2007 for Mr B. MacLachlan.

Telephone interviews were conducted between 6 September 2007 and 11 September 2007, unanswered calls were repeated twice before abandonment.

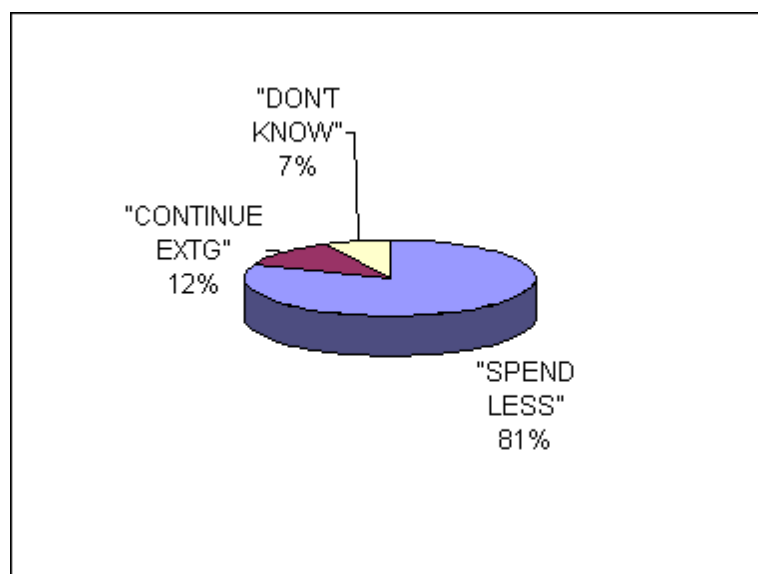
The sample ('n') size was 300 and the margin of error was $\pm 3.1\%$.

Findings

Question 1.

'Required debt action'TABLE I

options	%	response
"SPEND LESS"	81%	243
"CONTINUE EXTG"	12%	35
"DON'T KNOW"	7%	22
total	100%	300

Comment

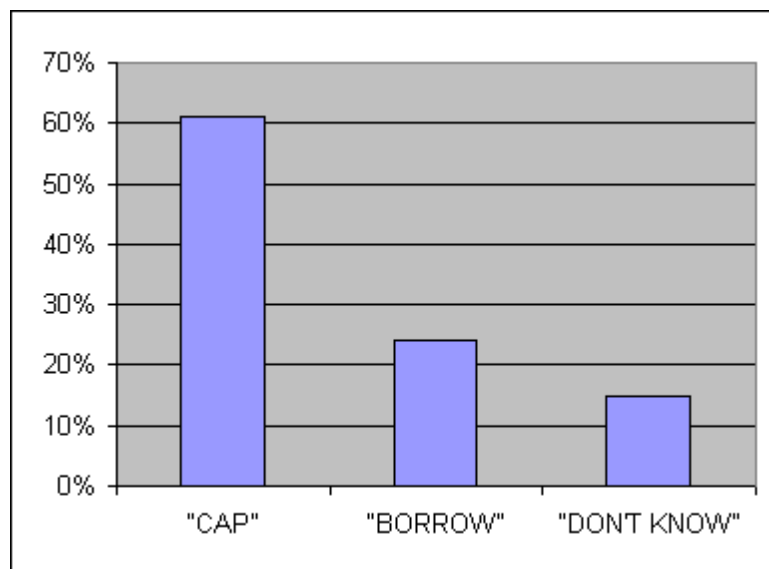
The majority of respondents (81%) were in favour of containing spending within income. A minority group (12%) favoured the status quo on spending. An even smaller number were in the 'Don't Know' category.

Question 2.

'Rates action'

TABLE II

options	%	response
"CAP"	61%	183
"BORROW"	24%	72
"DON'T KNOW"	15%	45
totals	100%	300



Comment

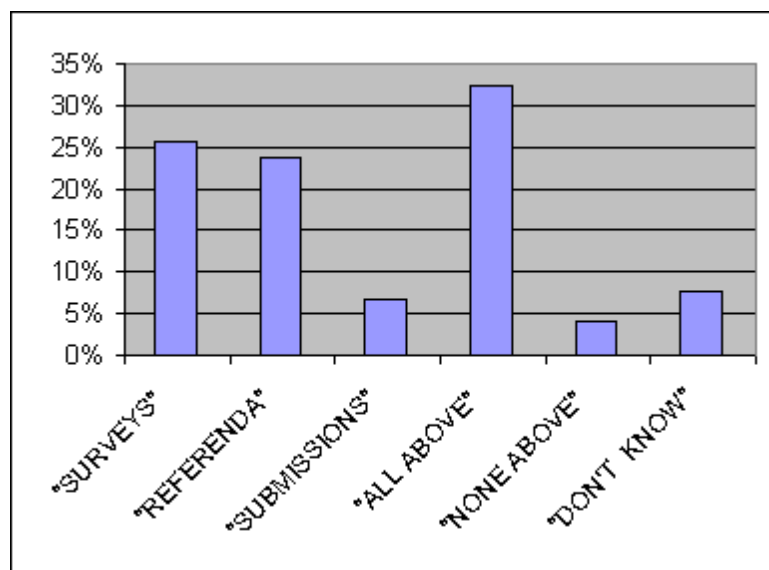
61% of all respondents were in favour of capping rates and Council seeking economies. One quarter of the sample preferred the "Borrowing" option, while 15% did not know which avenue was suitable.

Question 3.

'Electorate communication'

TABLE III

options	%	response
"SURVEYS"	26%	77
"REFERENDA"	24%	71
"SUBMISSIONS"	7%	20
"ALL ABOVE"	32%	97
"NONE ABOVE"	4%	12
"DON'T KNOW"	8%	23
totals	100%	300



Comment

The most favoured single system for 'listening' was by "Surveys"(26%), followed by "Referenda" at 24%. Submissions rated only 7%. The overall preference was for the combined basis at 32%. The combined systems aggregate was 57%. 4% of respondents did not require a communication channel with Council.

Question 4.'The next Mayor of Whangarei'TABLE IV

options	%	response
SEMENOFF'	32%	96
PETERS'	11%	33
COCURULLO'	1%	4
DAISLEY'	nil	nil
BLISS'	1%	2
HEDGES'	nil	nil
SLATER'	nil	nil
'VAILINGS'	nil	nil
"DON'T KNOW"	55%	165
totals	300%	300

Comment

As at 10 September 2007, approximately 33 days from election deadline, the majority (55%) are either unaware of who are Mayoral contenders or have no definite view of the outcome. At this time however, SEMENOFF leads PETERS on a basis of 3:1, with no other candidates in sight.

Conclusions.

1.0 There can be no doubt what the residents of Whangarei are currently thinking in respect of the Council's debt total. An overwhelming majority of 81% would have the Whangarei District Council spend less than it earns, in order to reduce present indebtedness.

1.1 When this anxiety over debt is related to the individual, by way of the property rating levels, it translates into an attitude that says "Enough is enough".

2.0 Question 2 poses, in a none too subtle way, the decision of the public to back a system that is designed for 'growth' in terms of improvements in infrastructure and social amenities as opposed to a regimen that would bring about economies and hold rate increases to an acceptable level.

2.1 The majority are much in favour of the conservative approach in terms of fiscal management. 61% of residents plump for the "Cap & Economise" tactic that could be employed by Council rather than the 24% who would have the present policy of "Borrow more Capital" continue.

2.2 In realistic terms, any first year Commerce student will tell you that capital borrowing is not an alternative to Rates capping, as the end result is the interest, and eventually the repayment of debt, still become the liability of the ratepayer.

2.3 It is probably too greater call to expect that the general public is au fait with asset values, property portfolios and the intricacies of creative accounting. However they should not be underestimated in their attitude toward a group of people, in this case Council, who are spending the public purse in ways that cause displeasure to the majority.

3.0 The unhappiness of the electorate is not contained by purely monetary matters. There is a percentage, unknown, but nevertheless growing, that is most concerned by the nature of Council process in arriving at decisions. The previous study, carried out recently, that examined the public attitude toward Council's ability to 'Listen' and to 'Respond', drew attention to a wide section of the Whangarei community who are not impressed with the standards exhibited by this latest Council. Over 65% of residents felt that Council does not listen to the public.

3.1 In this measurement it is most significant, that in nominating the means by which Council should be listening to the electorate, the process of Submissions, although rating as a positive means, was lowly rated at 7% within the three forms of public communication with Council.

3.2 Comparing this with the combined figure of approximately 50% for the use of Surveys and Referenda, it is not difficult to see that the public, for whatever reason, is disenchanted with the submission process. It is no coincidence that both the W.D.C. and the Northland Regional Council have barely acknowledged the numbers and content of public submission on important issues. in recent times.

4.0 With a field of eight candidates for the Whangarei Mayoralty, the public would seem to have a broad and interesting number of contenders to think about and eventually vote for.

4.1 Two weeks after declaration of official candidates and approximately four weeks to the final election date, the residents of the district are already showing a marked preference for SEMENOFF against the incumbent, PETERS. With nearly three to one indicating that they see SEMENOFF as the next Mayor of the District, it would take a major upset, or change of direction on the part of any candidate for this kind of early majority to be reversed.

4.2 Notwithstanding the large percentage in the "Don't Know" category, all things being equal, the 55% of 'D/Ks' will translate into much the same formula as we are seeing now. The other 'hopefuls' may move their single figure achievements upwards with a little more personal exposure, but are unlikely to make double figures.