

Editorial: On the stumps of a dilemma

Taranaki Daily News

Last updated 05:00 03/12/2009

OPINION: Good governance, at central or local government level, is often about the delicate balancing of competing interests in the allocation and use of fixed resources.

If that is a primary or mineral resource such as forestry or oil, those charged with their allocation or use must reach a compromise between their exploitation and protection, between competing interests of industry and sustainability, economy and ecology.

It is rare to achieve a compromise that pleases all sides of the argument, and more often than not the best outcome is one accepted by representatives of those competing interests with stiff handshakes, gritted teeth and no court action.

The New Plymouth District Council faces that dilemma in the plan to build cricket practice nets at Pukekura Park.

Given the park's status in the hearts and minds of the city's residents there is an abundance of people and groups who would claim a competing interest: Users of the park, Friends of Pukekura Park, neighbours to our "jewel in the crown", the Taranaki Cricket Association and sports fans in general.

All would claim to have a say in the allocation and use of this finite resource, and would be justified in saying so.

The council will be mindful of past experience when it comes to dealing with issues surrounding the use of Pukekura Park, its prestigious role in the city's history and what it affords Taranaki in terms of promotion, image and the hosting of sporting and cultural events.

George Fuller might not have been entirely right in his bid to save his puriri tree but his courageous campaign, with the enthusiastic backing of Friends of the Park and the Bowl of Brooklands, showed once more that any changes to this highly regarded amenity will be subjected to the most intense scrutiny.

A point hammered home even further in the vitriolic reaction to plans for temporary concert seating over the bowl's lake.

However, the cricket association and sports fans cannot be ignored.

Some of the country's top players believe Pukekura Park is one of the best grounds in New Zealand, and cricketing bible Wisden has in the past named it as one of the premier venues in the world.

If association chairman Neil Sulzberger is right, and cricket at this iconic ground is under threat, then that must reduce the amount of wiggle room left for the council. It would be a huge blow to lose top-level games in the region.

So there is clearly much at stake for those who will weigh the arguments and those who will await the decisions.

And the council will be doing very well to come out of this one without one or more of those groups feeling seriously aggrieved.