

N-free zone meets little opposition

A move to declare the Nelson Bays region nuclear weapons-free was passed with only two dissenting voices at a meeting of the Nelson Bays United Council yesterday.

The motion calling for the declaration was put by the united council's deputy chairman and Mayor of Nelson, Mr Peter Malone.

It was opposed by Mr Bruce Ferguson and Mr Seddon Marshall.

The motion followed a deputation from the Nelson Action Committee on International Affairs (Nacia), the Nelson branch of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and National Council of Women, Sir Wallace Rowling and Nelson's Member of Parliament, Mr Philip Woollaston.

Nacia's spokesman, Mr Tony Martin, presented a petition to the united council calling for such a declaration, signed by 9238 people.

The united council also accepted a consequential motion from Mr Marshall stating the council's opposition to violence and war.

Mr Malone's motion was accepted last week by the Nelson City Council, but it turned down Mr Marshall's motion.

The first motion resolved that the united council, as an expression of its concern about the proliferation of nuclear weaponry, declare the united council's area a nuclear weapons-free zone.

United council principal officer Mr Len Ardell told members in July that they may not be legally able to support a petition calling for an end to nuclear weapons. He doubted whether the united council was empowered by legislation to deal with the subject.

But yesterday Mr Martin said Nacia had sought legal advice on the question.

Under the terms of the Town and Country Planning Act a united or regional council, acting through a properly instituted regional planning scheme, had the power to establish a legal regional nuclear weapons-free zone.

Nacia regarded it as a simple matter of planning procedure, he said.

He said parts of the petition had already been presented to other territorial authorities and from 48 of the regions's local body councillors 27 had supported it.

With seven not voting this represented a ratio of about two-thirds.

Within the united council, eight members had supported it at the local level while only one had voted against it.

He asked the united council to uphold the symbolic declarations made by the Waimea County Council and Nelson City Council recently by declaring the region a nuclear weapons-free zone.

This was not an empty gesture but rather a meaningful one which recognised and expressed the very serious concern of many people throughout the region.

He also asked the meeting to ratify this gesture by initiating the necessary procedures that would enable the concept to be embodied in the regional plan "in a manner that is legally significant within the terms of the Town and Country Planning Act".

Sir Wallace said the nuclear threat had reached the stage where no one could opt out.

He suggested the united council could do something by starting in its own backyard and becoming involved in the business of educating people about the implications of a nuclear war.

Many people believed nuclear weaponry acted as a deterrent in preventing the spread of communism.

Sir Wallace said it had not prevented Russia from trampling over Afghanistan, Vietnam moving into Kampuchea or Russia sending an unarmed civilian airline to oblivion.

"We as civilised people cannot tread further down this track."

Mrs Shirley Ellis, representing the Nelson branch of the NCW, said the petition represented an expression of concern.

Mr Woollaston said the united council was competent to make such a declaration under the Local Government Act.

The petition was in essence of a symbolic nature that could not be covered by restrictions imposed by the Act.

It was a proper matter for the united council to consider.

Mr Peter Low, representing IPPNW, talked about the helplessness of existing health services in the event of a nuclear war.

In successfully moving that the petition be received, Mr David Kennedy said it was time the region as a whole made a positive decision and accepted it should be a nuclear weapons-free zone.

The united council was a much more appropriate body for the petition to be presented to, he said.

In moving the motion, Mr Malone said the presence of nuclear weapons had stabilised the world from a position that it could have arrived at and experienced twice before.

"But we have gone too far. The proliferation of nuclear weaponry is stupid."

Miss Elma Turner said she could not on anything but moral and humanitarian grounds do anything but second Mr Malone's motion and support it fully.

In opposing the motion Mr Marshall said he did not believe the united council would be acting properly and legally by trying to impose this resolution on the province as a whole.

He did support a nuclear weapons-free world and South Pacific.

He would not desert his allies and would not expect New Zealand to do either.

Legally they could not stop an allied ship carrying nuclear weapons from visiting Nelson and he was not in favour of symbolic gestures.

Mr Ferguson felt the petition was being presented to the wrong people.

It should be directed at central government not to the united council, which should not be bothered with this type of thing.

"We have no powers or teeth. I'm afraid that in other parts of the world this business of the movement for peace and abolition of all nuclear armaments is perhaps being encouraged, funded and fostered by the Soviet bloc," he said.

"This does concern me. I know that today popular thinking seems to be that we have the choice of either being red or dead because of the number of nuclear weapons there are in the world."

No one in their right mind would encourage a nuclear war but they had a responsibility to their allies under the Anzus Pact.

Mr Marshall then moved that the united council be totally opposed to violence and war and the proliferation of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons.

He also called on the nations of the world to get together to reduce their defence expenditure and increase food production and agricultural research programmes.

Mr Marshall said the united council should urge Parliament to take every opportunity to provide world peace and reduction of war weapons and armaments.

Mr Courtney Lawry seconded the motion.

Mr Darcy Blair said he opposed the motion because it went well beyond the authority of the united council.

The motion for a nuclear weapons-free zone did not contain a proviso that it would not prevent nuclear armed ships from visiting Nelson. A report to that effect yesterday was incorrect.