

Nelson says no to nukes

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The Nelson City Council last night declared Nelson city a nuclear weapons-free zone.

The Mayor, Mr Peter Malone, moved the resolution and Cr Craig Potton seconded it. All 11 councillors present spoke on the issue and all supported the "symbolic" gesture except Cr Seddon Marshall. (Cr Kerry Neal was not present.)

The decision was made in spite of a cautionary report from the city manager Mr Len Ardell on the implications of the decision.

Cr Marshall moved a subsequent resolution stating the council's opposition to violence and war. It was passed but with five of the 11 councillors opposing it and one abstaining from voting (see P3).

The motion resolving that the council, "as an expression of its concern about the proliferation of nuclear weaponry", declare the city a NWFZ was accompanied by a long preamble.

The preamble said the council accepted:

- the public concern about the proliferation of nuclear weaponry;
- the council had no legal capacity to control such proliferation or location of nuclear weaponry;
- many citizens thought concern about the proliferation could be expressed by declaring the city a NWFZ;
- proliferation could only be finally contained and eliminated through the multi-lateral decision of countries with nuclear weapon capability;
- New Zealand's responsibilities under its defence treaty obligations.

The declaration of the NWFZ follows the presentation in August of a petition signed by 5204 people by Nelson MP Mr Philip Woollaston, Dr Brian Neill and Mrs Shirley Ellis. A statement on the petition written by Captain Cyril Simister was read by Mr Tony Martin.

On June 17 the council had unanimously decided to call on world leaders to establish a nuclear weapons-free world.

In moving the resolution last night Mr Malone said it would be a symbolic gesture. He said the petition had been presented in a responsible way and mentioned that Mr Woollaston had said it was already Government policy that nuclear weapons could not be located, transported or stored on New Zealand soil.

Mr Malone referred to a recent speech in New Zealand by the former British Prime Minister, Mr Edward Heath, who said there were sufficient numbers of stored nuclear weapons to obliterate the world 11 times over.

The mayor said he had read widely on the topic and believed a great majority of New Zealanders were clearly concerned about the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Cr Craig Potton said the petition was the biggest to ever come before the Nelson City Council.

He noted that it was worded as a symbolic gesture, and not as a legally binding move. He referred to the wording of the Town and Country Planning Act which showed the resolution was a legitimate way of expressing the concern.

Cr Potton said the Auckland Regional Authority had recently been the first united

council to declare itself nuclear free and he hoped it would give the lead to other united councils (the petition goes to the Nelson Bays United Council on September 29). He said 37 per cent of New Zealand's population now lived in nuclear weapons-free zones.

Cr Darcy Blair said it was purely a symbolic gesture. "It would have about as much effect if we asked the Lord to make the Wood a frost-free zone."

Cr Marshall said he was against unilateral declarations of nuclear weapons free zones but supported multilateral NWFZ declarations for the world or the South Pacific.

Declaring New Zealand a NWFZ unilaterally was deserting our allies and achieving nothing else.

Cr Marshall said the petitioners came in three categories. He was only interested in the first category which was those who had a genuine concern that included medical practitioners.

The other categories were those with their own political concerns who wanted to undermine the Government and those who followed an ideology incompatible with New Zealand who wanted to undermine the network of allies and sought to divide the free world.

Cr Marshall asked why the council's June resolution calling for a nuclear weapons-free world was not strong enough for the petitioners. It went beyond a useless gesture and was much more positive.

He referred to Palmerston North being a NWFZ — "no nuclear ships are allowed there" — and Waimea County Council being a NWFZ. Did that stop ships with nuclear weapons tying up at the Mapua wharf?

"It is so symbolic it is useless, it does not achieve anything."

Cr Ian Gourdie said even if it was only a symbolic gesture the declaration represented genuine concern and he supported it on that basis.

In his report, Mr Ardell said the council had no legal power to superimpose its view over central government.

Mr Ardell said: "This city has to be administered by an efficient and experienced body and I do not think any single issue publicly raised by any pressure group warrants the future wise government of the city being put on the line — or ballot paper — especially when you have no power to achieve what the petitioners request."

"May I also offer a note of warning that the council should not become a tool of the central government politician and thus be put in a position of having to take the effects of any action initiated by central government. Or else you may find in future subjects on your agenda, such as abortion and other politically sensitive ones, resulting in an unnecessary influence on local politics."

Mr Ardell said the council could not control the action of the harbour board under international convention giving refuge to a nuclear armed ship.

Mr Ardell advised that the council's decision should indicate to the Government what it believed the general view of Nelsonians might be.

The decision should be capable of being implemented or else a symbolic gesture. The council should lead by example by acting within the law and it should beware of Parliament "passing the buck on future sensitive political issues".

His report was referred to only briefly at the council meeting.