

NATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE, AUCKLAND

VERBAL SUBMISSION TO AUCKLAND COUNCIL

26 APRIL 2012

- This morning I wanted to ask you to put aside any prejudices and distractions that have entered the debate on a National Convention Centre and assure you that a purpose built convention centre for Auckland is a game changer. As you would expect, it will need a strategy linked to events and tourism, to deliver jobs, investment and much needed economic activity.
- Business has been discussing this for the past decade and we need it to happen. It has come up at every growth forum Auckland has ever had – when we ask what we can do to create the most change and the greatest contribution...a convention centre is always near top of the list. The single biggest thing which can make a difference to Auckland's business environment, and in fact the New Zealand business environment, is a National Convention Centre which can accommodate large-scale conventions of 3000 delegates and more.
- The largest convention held in Central Auckland in the past decade was the International Bar Association Conference for 2000 delegates and to host it, we had to spread it across the Aotea Square, Carlton Hotel and SkyCity. We know Auckland is an attractive proposition for large conferences and conventions, and we must have the facilities to be able to compete on an even playing field with the likes of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane.
- Research undertaken three years ago highlighted the economic opportunities offered by a National Convention Centre. We were informed we could expect direct benefits of close to \$400 million and additional benefits of \$85 million in increased tourism spend. We were also informed the spend per conference attendee is \$650 per night – double that of the average tourist.

- We talk about the economic benefits which sporting events bring to the city and the country, but we only need to look at the example of the 1990 Commonwealth Games to see how much more economic benefit there is to be gained from large-scale conventions. In June 1990 a Law Conference was held in Auckland with lawyers from around the world coming into the city, staying at the right hotels, eating at the right restaurants and shopping in our high value retail areas – the direct economic benefit was far higher than that gained through hosting, earlier that year, the Commonwealth Games.
- Conferences bring high value professionals into the city – these are investors, thought providers and influencers. If we want to grow economically, these are the types of people we must attract.
- The SkyCity issue over pokies and subsequent debate around problem gambling has seriously muddied the very real need for a convention centre for the city. I am asking you to believe in the need for the facility, for the future of Auckland and good of New Zealand.
- That aside, let me say, I believe the Casino and the Government have let us down. We have not been presented with all the facts, there does not appear to have been enough thought given to the consequences of the present arrangements, but I am asking for us to work together to get the clarity we deserve.
- If the intent was to reduce the overall number of pokies in community hotels, where they are considered “too accessible and not as responsibly managed”, we should have been told this.
- If the intent was to concentrate the overall number of pokies into an environment where there could be less “community casualty”, the public deserved to know this and be told what the plan would be to mitigate the community cost.
- If we were going to review the damage of gambling to the community in an informed way and measure it against the cost of alcohol on families and our health system, or the cost of methamphetamine and rugs on our young and the extended cost to families and communities, there has been time to do this and for us to be informed, but that has not happened.

- Nor does there appear to have been consideration given to the impact on all those community groups, like parades, bands and other deserving activities, who could be deprived of the contribution the community pokie trusts make. Have we determined how they might benefit from a decision to concentrate the pokies at a casino? – I think not.
- My sense is that the arrangement with the Casino could, if managed well, be a good one, but we need to ensure consideration has been fully given to the impact on all the community.
- At the end of the day, we must move forward on a National Convention Centre in Auckland if we are to follow the model on the table at the moment. I am asking that we consider the wider impacts of affected communities, the businesses and the people and do it in an informed and measured way.