

Regional chief thanks critics

COUNCIL

by Mike Dinsdale

Some of the Northland Regional Council's "watchdogs and critics" received warm thanks from council chairman Mark Farnsworth at its last meeting of the year.

On Wednesday, Mr Farnsworth reviewed the "interesting" year for the council.

The positives included reviewing and refocusing the council structure; completing its 10-year Long Term Council Community Plan; and a regional transport strategy.

It had also progressed its management plans for the Kaeo, Kaihu and Awanui rivers, had improved public transport in Whangarei and enhanced the region's environment.

The designation process for the proposed Marsden Pt Rail Link had been carried out and the NRC had taken a greater interest in Northland Port Corp, of which it is the major shareholder.

He said the council's lows this year were self-evident, including the hostility between the region's three mayors and the NRC, particularly over the moves by the Whangarei, Kaipara and Far North district council to become three unitary authorities, therefore rendering the NRC redundant.

"Ratepayers might expect their local government leaders ... to get on and co-operate in the best interests of Northland," he said.

He also took the unusual step of thanking "our watchdogs and critics" — the members of the public who regularly attend NRC meetings, including Integrity Action Whangarei member Mike Mansell, Warren and Pam Slater and Don Hedges.

"Well done. To Mike Mansell, at times we don't agree on what we say, and at times you totally p*** me off," Mr Farnsworth said.

But by and large the "watchdogs" kept the council on its toes.

Mr Farnsworth then awarded the Slaters a bottle of wine for being the most regular attendees at NRC meetings.

Mr Farnsworth also thanked his council's staff and the wider public who took the time to get involved in NRC activities.