

NH Adv 24/7/08

# Mayor: You're whiners, wafflers and wasters

**COUNCIL**  
by Mike Dinsdale

Whangarei Mayor Stan Semenovoff has launched a broadside against some of his council's critics, calling them whingers, whiners, wafflers, wasters and windbags.

Mr Semenovoff made the comments in a letter to Mike Mansell, of "voter education" group Integrity Action Whangarei.

Mr Mansell had written to the council asking for a forum at council meetings so the public could raise issues and ask questions.

While Mr Mansell found Mr Semenovoff's response insulting and disparaging, the mayor defended the letter, saying: "I intended to portray in a light way the sorts of people whose constant complaints would lead to council wasting ratepayers' money. Surely, Mr Mansell would agree he wouldn't want his rates money wasted."

In the letter, the mayor said he was not in favour of such a public forum, then went on to comment on the "small group of disaffected" that would turn up to such forums.

"We wouldn't want ratepayers' money wasted on listening to innate abject whingers, inveterate anti-everything whiners, idle asinine wafflers, inane arrant wasters and insipid aimless windbags," he stated.

He also says the process would be "sought to be hijacked by the same few who have contributed little to this district, but whose names appear so regularly in the letters columns of local media attacking those who do attempt to better the lot of their fellow citizens".

The tone of the letter surprised Mr Mansell, who said his organisation simply wanted to



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— Whangarei Mayor Stan Semenovoff

promote something done by other councils throughout New Zealand. A forum could give councillors an indication of how ratepayers were thinking, and ratepayers a chance to have their questions answered.

But Mr Semenovoff said the public already had a consultation process "enshrined in law".

"It is simply a fact that there are people in our district, and probably every district in the country, who will endlessly berate council on their very narrow topics of interest. These can range from dog control to the drain outside their house."

Council staff would have to spend time vetting speakers and he did not want to waste rates listening to people airing the same topic week after week.

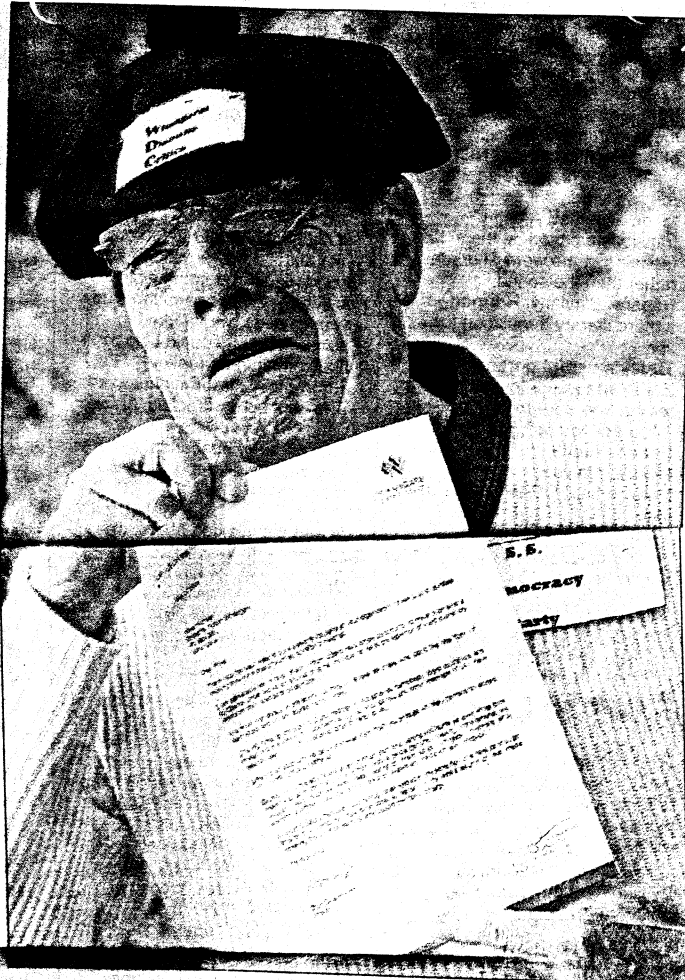
"Citizens with positive suggestions or wanting things done can approach ward councillors ... Councillors do their homework and bring any genuine

issues of policy to the council table, and take operational matters to the staff who can do something about them," he said.

"There is no lack of democracy in Whangarei district. There are, as I need, people who will only accept their version of democracy. In Whangarei we have democracy suited to the majority, and simply have to bear the ongoing criticism of people who want things done differently, although not necessarily in a better way, just their way ... They would want to be de facto councillors, turning up at every council meeting to grandstand to the media.

"Those people already have a forum for their views granted them by our democracy — the letters-to-the-editor columns. It is their right to bombard those columns with letters, giving what one of your correspondents termed their 'trademark one-finger salute' to our democratically elected councillors while ignoring the significant efforts made by those councillors to better the lot of their fellow citizens."

A spokeswoman for Local forums.



**GOB-SMACKED:** Mike Mansell, of Integrity Action Whangarei with the mayor's damning letter.  
PICTURE / MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM

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Would a public forum before or after council meetings be a good idea. Why or why not?



■ Mayor Stan Semenovoff's letter in full ..... P3