

estimated \$1 million price tag.

Auckland Council has previously made it clear, in relation to coastal erosion at Waiheke's Picnic Bay (see *Gulf News*, 6 July 2017) that as rising sea levels become a reality it will not intervene every time to protect coastlines and instead priority will be given to places with significant infrastructure, close behind an affected area, that cannot easily be relocated.

The Rakino request is for funding from the local board's work programme

budget and council officer John Nash informed the members at the meeting any financial help would have to come from local board funds. The local board quickly determined that the higher priced options in the engineer's report were simply off the table as unaffordable.

The proposal to spend around \$300,000 raising the floor levels to buy more time for the facility, compared to leaving the building to its fate, creates a true dilemma. It is heightened by conflicting considerations of the small

permanent population on Rakino and the importance of the sole public facility to the local community.

After hearing the Rakino delegation and considering the report, the local board resolved to fund work to lift the building higher above sea level, but with conditions.

The key one is that the project has to establish its place and priority in the list of renewals projects in the local board's work programme for the next financial year. • *Rob Brennan*

Rates objectors end year at Parliament

Waiheke holiday-home providers fighting a potentially crippling local body rates increase had their voices heard by a parliamentary select committee in Wellington last week.

Having delivered a petition to the Select Committee on Administration and Governance in late October, their representatives - Ed Coutts and Ray Pitch - were invited back on Wednesday 19 December to detail the ratepayers' concerns about the Accommodation Providers Targeted Rate (APTR) introduced from 1 July 2018.

The latest presentation to the parliamentarians is the culmination of a determined seven months long campaign against the levy and comes after a lobby group, Waiheke Accommodation Providers, was formed and a well-attended public meeting about the issue was held in Oneroa's Morra Hall in early October.

Mr Coutts says the petition has been signed by 2273 people and asks that Waiheke property owners be exempted

from the new rate. That would be achieved by re-classifying the island as Zone C under the rating system, instead of the current Zone B.

"I provided an overview to the committee of the council's flawed process to date with regard to how the APTR has been implemented, the impact this has had on some Waiheke Island residents and why the APTR sets a bad precedent throughout the country for other councils who may decide to implement a similarly blunt and inequitable ratings mechanism," he says.

"I also made the point that the issue is bigger than Waiheke and it all comes down to the few levers councils are able to use to raise revenue through rates.

"I said that councils throughout the country are struggling to raise money to fund their regions, that the Local Government Rating Act needed to be reviewed and a fulsome discussion had at a national level about the introduction of visitor levies or bed taxes at a

regional level.

Mr Coutts says one of the select committee members asked whether a legal challenge has been considered. He and Mr Pitch replied that the cost of a judicial review, at around \$100,000, was prohibitive.

Auckland Central MP Nikki Kaye was on the select committee. "I was pleased to have the APTR petition presented to select committee members," she says.

"I thought the discussion was very thorough. They presented very well and represented Waiheke Island positively. I felt that other members of the committee were asking hard questions about Auckland Council processes.

"The committee is still considering the next steps. I am hopeful that we can continue to fight to send a strong message to the council about this inequitable and flawed tax. I know that there are islanders who have pulled out of accommodation as a result of this." •

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