



2 August 2024

South Wairarapa District Council
Mayor and Councillors

Mayor Martin Connelly themayor@swdc.govt.nz; Deputy Mayor and Councillor Melissa Sadler-Futte melissa.sadlerfutte@swdc.govt.nz; Councillor Rebecca Gray rebecca.gray@swdc.govt.nz; Councillor Colin Olds colin.olds@swdc.govt.nz; Councillor Aaron Woodcock aaron.woodcock@swdc.govt.nz; Councillor Martin Bosley martin.bosley@swdc.govt.nz; Councillor Alistair Plimmer alistair.plimmer@swdc.govt.nz; Councillor Pip Maynard pip.maynard@swdc.govt.nz; Councillor Kaye McAulay kaye.mcaulay@swdc.govt.nz; Councillor Aidan Ellims aidan.ellims@swdc.govt.nz

South Wairarapa District Council silences local farmer

Good afternoon,

1. The Free Speech Union (FSU) is a registered trade union with a mission to fight for, protect, and expand New Zealanders' rights to freedom of speech, conscience, and intellectual inquiry. We believe that freedom of speech is not only a legal principle but a social good that allows for people in modern liberal democracies to peacefully and freely advocate for the causes they care about without risking unjust retribution.
2. We write following an article in *The Post* yesterday reporting on a public forum of South Wairarapa District Council's Strategy Working Committee on Wednesday 31 July. A presentation made by a local farmer, Mr Hedley, who was expressing his views on the establishment of a Māori Ward in South Wairarapa, specifically, he said, "*I do not agree with the Māori Ward. That is racism.*" Mr Hedley was cut off by Counsellor Rebecca Gray and not allowed to continue his presentation on the basis his comment was "*disrespectful*", "*offensive*" and not tolerated under meeting rules. Further, Councillor Pip Maynard told Mr Hedley it was "*racist not having one*".
3. As you are aware, Māori Wards are a highly debated topic in Parliament, local authorities and among the public following the Government's release of the Māori Wards Bill ("the Bill"). Some are of the view the Bill is discriminatory and others (including the Government) are of the view the Bill returns democratic decision-making powers to communities. The parliamentary select committee has determined the Bill will go ahead meaning the public will decide by way of local referendums.
4. As an elected body, the Council represents its constituents, not the personal opinions of Councillors. The purpose of public forums is to provide an opportunity for people to express their views to the Council and the rest of the community. By cutting Mr Hedley's presentation short, you silenced his voice on the matter and breached his right to express his opinions. Considering Councillor Maynard's strong objection to Mr Hedley's comments, the inference can easily be drawn that the Council feel entitled to

silence those its Councillors may not personally agree with i.e., silence those they democratically represent.

5. Please explain why the Council feels it is entitled to shut down the views of its constituents on topical issues and debates in a public forum.

Yours faithfully,
Free Speech Union (NZ) Inc.



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