

## CONFERENCE OPENING ADDRESS

On behalf of the EDANZ Board, I would like to welcome you to our 2009 national conference.

We meet at a time of considerable change. A global recession resulting from a global financial meltdown, a change of government with a fresh ambition for New Zealand's future and a local government sector undergoing challenge and change.

By its very nature, change creates opportunity.

The opportunity for New Zealand in the context of a global recession is that a chasm is likely to form between economies with sound strategies and those without them. When the tide goes out, it becomes obvious who is swimming nude. As any man will understand, to compound Iceland's problems, they are in a very cold climate.

New Zealand must be efficient and growing. Growth initiatives must be driven at all levels of the economy – locally, nationally and internationally.

Do not under-estimate the 'local' element in this equation.

Economic development at a local level provides a vital connect to the active face of the economy. In this respect, EDAs together with EDANZ, are uniquely placed to gather and share knowledge gained on the ground and to identify opportunities and initiatives that will stimulate growth.

The benefits of the local connect are two fold:

First, locally led initiatives have a track record for having vision and impact and;

Secondly, it is here on the ground that potentially great businesses are identified, connected and nurtured.

The opportunity for a change of government is to think differently. And they are. For economic development, this is especially significant. The sector has a history of disconnect between central and local government activity and ambition. This will always be sub-optimal. We now have an opportunity to work with the Minister and his team to establish a clear strategy and implementation plan. Implementation will require clear specialisation, role definition and connectivity between international, national and local action. Local government and their economic development agencies are a partner in this process, not a piece-meal contracted provider.

The opportunity for change in thinking affecting local government is to demonstrate, not just take for granted, that economic development is a core function of local government. And it is.

Why? Local governments, by their very existence, profoundly affect the economic performance of a locality. They regulate. They plan. They monitor. They have a responsibility to undertake all of this activity in a manner that is economically as well as socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable.

Growth and efficiency drivers must be embedded long term in the legislative, governance, leadership and organisational culture of the new Auckland Council.

In short, make economic development a key focus.

Consider this; regulation is currently either a significant impediment or enabler of economic growth. Use an economic development perspective to drive regulation and priority will be given to the clarity, certainty and speed of these processes. With economic development as a responsibility, an efficient regulatory and planning context is more likely to succeed.

Focussing on economic development will also simplify the process of project choice and programme delivery for local government. Where there is clear evidence of market failure and evidence that outcomes will be better achieved through public intervention, these activities should be taken on.

Where does EDANZ sit in all this.

EDANZ and its members have the most comprehensive reach into New Zealand's communities. Our members use their passion, their understanding of local need and their unique position to excite and motivate local communities to connect and grow. In short, we deliver local solutions to global challenges.

This engagement at the active face of the economy presents EDANZ as a valued partner to central government. Minister, that is our offer to you today. We are committed to gather and share knowledge gained on the ground and work with you and your team to identify and deliver on opportunities and initiatives that will stimulate growth locally and nationally.

And with that offer, I am pleased to welcome the Minister of Economic Development, the Honourable Gerry Brownlee to reveal whether he has his trunks on or off as the tide went out.