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to various media channels.

I write to you to express our situation and our extreme dissatisfaction, annoyance, anger and disbelief of the stupidity of the strategy around the closure of the SH1 over the Brynderwyns hills.

The road closure has cost us at least \$200,000 in lost income, added expenses and short-term opportunities. We have reduced staff numbers (beyond the necessary seasonal reduction) and put several infrastructure development projects on hold. These developments would have led to future income opportunities this coming summer. It has also stuffed up financing opportunities for future growth. As a result, this poorly strategized road closure will take years to recover from.

Waipu Caves Farm Park is a privately owned business and property with a range of income streams and service sectors including tourism, outdoor education and a recreation park set on a mostly forested 320-acre property with much of it in conserved areas. We are inland, Northwest of Waipu township. We operate one of Northlands most significant natural features called the Milky Way Glow Worm Cave which we recently opened to the public with guided tours daily. It is the closest glow worm cave to Auckland and fast becoming known as a destination for domestic and international travellers. We have great reviews on goggle maps (see goggle maps pin for Waipu Caves Farm Park and also a second pin for Milky Way Glow Worm Cave). The park has 3 camping areas for motorhomes and tents. We run school and youth camps with many activities for them to do. There are 10km of walking tracks (known as The Jurassic Walks). Recently added is rock climbing and bouldering (known as The Jurassic Climbs) where people can come and climb on the rock boulders and cliff faces. There are friendly goats and sheep to pet. An area is set aside for airsoft wargames and a miniature remote control car track is under development over winter. 20km of mountain bike tracks are also under construction.

The ultimate goal of the owners and developers Ian and Cindy Fox is to provide a venue for people to engage with nature through a wide variety of activities in this stunning and unique environment caves, limestone rocks and high quality and diverse native forest.

Much of our project revolves around conservation and teaching guests, kids and youth about conservation of the forest, river, and cave systems and the human element of health through getting into nature.

The road closure has seriously affected us as the detour routes around the East coast roads through Mangawhai to Waipu township means vehicles come out onto the state highway North of Waipu township and North of the main route (Shoemaker Rd) people would take to drive in to visit us. This has led to a near dead zone where the road traffic is very minimal.

The detour to the West around the Brynderwyns brings them back to SH1 about 15km north of us. Only a small number of travelers come back southwards down to us.

Whilst the vast majority of Northland is suffering from the road closure it is as if we are in a 'Bermuda triangle' Northwest of Waipu township.

Since starting the construction of the park from bare farmland in February 2018 we have been delayed and affected (like everybody) by the 2-3 years of pandemic related issues, delays in resource consents, then trying to open for Christmas 2022 we had the wettest summer from hell (including cyclone Gabrielle and other storm events) and finally opened 25th February 2023 on the day that many roads and bridges were washed out or flooded.

So, we have persevered through 5 years of adversity while we are in a startup mode and early growth stage. It's a bit hard to take when you add the compounding issues of government legislation around the banking industry and the banks lack of willingness to lend to business entrepreneurs even when we have very high equity (about 85%) in land assets.

The road closure has obviously negatively impacted many Northland businesses and their employees, or perhaps former employees now since businesses have reduced staff or closed down for the period.

What I have not heard in the media is the discussion about the ongoing business finance impact for the next 2 years. When a business wants to borrow money from a bank for business investment or for the owners personal things such as housing, the bank will require the profit and loss statements for the period they are in and the set of accounts for the previous year or two. The loss of sales income due to the current road closure will, for many businesspeople, stop them getting financed. Banks are already difficult to deal with, in part due to excessive banking regulations set by the government, but also their own spinelessness and poor long term business strategy (of not feeding the golden goose (business entrepreneurs with assets)). The banks will not care about an excuse like, 'my sales were low in the first half of 2024 calendar year because the government stopped my customers coming to me by closing the state highway for 5 months'.

I would like to see the government offer low interest rate lending for businesses seriously impacted by the poorly strategized road closure. This would be much like the government lending during covid, where there was a period of interest free and then low interest. I used this option for our business during the covid period and paid it back in less than 12 months, before the interest period started.

Personally, I was always opposed to the Brynderwyns hill closure as I believe that the highway closure was very poor strategic thinking and that a significant undisclosed reason behind the closure was due to funding policy and bureaucratic sales psychology (selling the idea to the public and politicians).

I believe a number of factors played a part in this poor strategy.

A publicised reason for the need to close was that 'the road had a number of slips over the previous 2 years (one of which was extremely wet) which led to the road being closed a number of times and that to avoid the uncertainty of road closure then a repair should be done in a pre-emptive strike' to avoid future road closures. That sounded reasonable.

From that point the planning goes very poorly.

In order to save the possible road closure from slips people were sold on the idea that the devil you know (a known fixed road closure period) is better than the devil you don't know (possibly several road closure of unknown length) if there were future slips. Understandably, the unknown and unscheduled disruption of a short-term closure due to a slip which may last a day or even a week or two would surely be annoying and would have some negative financial impact for businesses, however most businesses can take a week or two of reduced income and often the income is picked up later as it was only a delay. However, a sustained negative impact for 3-5 months is enough to cripple or at least have long term impacts for many businesses and the owners.

The most logical thing to do would have been to accept the risk of possible closures while upgrading the alternative routes to the East from Wellsford, Tehana and Kaiwaka through Mangawhai and up the East coast to Waipu. This would need to be an actual upgrading not just the superficial repair of potholes and resealing which was done prior to the road closure. The upgrade of these alternative routes would need to include replacing the 4 or 5 one lane bridges with two lane bridges and the straightening a number of sections and the notorious hair pin corner where long trucks get stuck, North of Mangawhai. This would give an alternative route able to be used by all vehicles in the event of a road closure on the Brynderwyns.

The next road to upgrade around the Western edge of the Brynderwyns, would be the gorge road from Maungaturoto to Waipu. This road would need to be sealed. It is wide enough for 2 lanes and trucks to pass along a lot of the road distance. The bridges are already two lanes wide, so it is clear that when they were built, it was envisaged that this road would be the alternative.

The other far West alternatives would also serve as alternative routes as they are now.

So why was this not done. I genuinely believe it is because they are district roads and funded differently, and it would be seen as the funding for state roads going to serve the district and that would be unfair to other districts. It would also be seen as building of new infrastructure and come from new infrastructure funding rather than repairs funding. We have had this stupid 'so-called repair' forced upon us because of bureaucratic BS.

The people who planned this and those that signed off on this poorly thought-out strategy did not look at the big picture of cost of project, negative impact to revenue for Northland businesses and employees, loss of tax revenue for the government, lack of alternative options assessment, loss of positive outcomes if they had improved the Eastern coastal roads (which will still need to be done at some point). They went into this without considering the whole picture. In fact I would say they must have intentionally avoided certain options to get through the funding process. I hope that these people are removed from the privilege of planning and overseeing major projects.

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