



24 November 2009

Civic House, Ground floor  
110 Trafalgar Street,  
Nelson

Dear Sir/Madam

**SUBMISSION ON THE PERFORMING ARTS AND CONFERENCE CENTRE CONSULTATION  
– prepared by the Nelson Tasman Chamber of Commerce**

The Nelson Tasman Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of its 490 members has prepared this submission following full consultation with our members. 100% of members have had the opportunity to input into our submission. The proposal has been discussed at a Board level and by three of our Focus Groups and the submission has also been discussed and endorsed by Uniquely Nelson.

We seek the opportunity to be heard in support of our submission.

**Summary**

Congratulations to the Nelson City Council on presenting an opportunity for our region to benefit economically – particularly from the establishment of a Conference Centre.

The Nelson Tasman Chamber of Commerce strongly supports the development of a Conference Centre and recognises the benefits that will accrue to our region from attracting the Conference market. We know that Conference delegates are the highest spend of all tourist visitors and that only a quarter of that spend is on accommodation – with the wider benefits to the transport, retail, hospitality, and tourism operators.

**Scope of our submission**

- The main focus of the Chamber submission is on the Conference Centre. The Chamber has consistently supported investment in a Conference Centre because of the positive economic benefits such a Centre will bring to the region. The Chamber is well aware that not having a Conference Centre means our region is currently missing out on significant economic opportunities.

**Conference Centre**

- The Chamber submission focuses on the minimum specifications for a Conference Centre in our region and only supports this development if these are met. These specifications take into account the current and future potential conference market for our region and the capacity of our relatively small region to finance and support such a facility both now and in the future. The minimum specifications relate to:

- Capacity and features. These are outlined later in the submission but it is critical that there is one space suitable to hold 700 delegates for a plenary session.
  - Contestability. This development must ensure catering, beverage, promotion, theming and other related services are open for tender and not exclusively tied up with one provider.
- To deliver the potential benefits, any proposal for a Conference Centre must ensure that the very highest standards are met. The specifications for the Performing Arts Centre point to a quality facility and the Chamber urges Council to ensure that those standards are guaranteed in the development of a Conference Centre and additional hotel rooms to service it.
- One of the benefits of the establishment of a Conference Centre is the stimulus that would provide to increase our quality hotel bed capacity and the Chamber believes the proposal should identify how this will be achieved.

## **Performing Arts Centre**

- The Chamber submission stresses that the effectiveness of the current proposal requires as a minimum that the Performing Arts and Conference Centre are seen as one development and that access between the two must be integrated and seamless. The design and architecture for both facilities needs to ensure that seamlessness in function as well as image.
- The Chamber would also encourage Nelson City Council to ensure that, for the Performing Arts and Conference Centre, sustainable design is identified as a priority from the outset. It would be fantastic to see a centre that not only meets the community's need for a major new venue, but at the same time makes a statement about Nelson's commitment to sustainability.
- Many local businesses in the catering, wine, audio visual, promotion and organizational sectors stand to benefit from the Performing Arts Centre and the Conference Centre – but only provided contestability for contracts is ensured. At a minimum the Chamber would want to see the options for tendering for these contracts rather than exclusivity tied up with one provider. For example, the catering for the Performing Arts Centre needs to be open to tender and to ensure this it may need to have basic catering facilities as part of its design.
- The Chamber recommends the establishment of an independent body to manage and promote the joint operations of the Performing Arts Centre and the Conference Centre. This body needs to be responsible for ensuring commercial returns are maximized and competitive tenders are run so that small businesses who currently provide theming, catering, a/v, lighting etc are not excluded from tendering for the Conference business or the Performing Arts Centre work.
- We recognise that the current proposal lacks detail but as it currently stands it is not clear to the Chamber that the investment in the Performing Arts Centre will provide an economic return to the region. Previous feasibility studies have been based on the joint operations of the Performing Arts Centre and the Conference Centre and provision needs to be made within this proposal for the ongoing operational costs of the Performing Arts Centre to be minimized for rate payers and the maximum potential returns of the operational of Conference Centre to be returned to ratepayers.
- The Nelson Tasman region has a strong history as one of New Zealand's leading artistic centres and this part of our identity does require ongoing and active support if we are to maintain and benefit from that identity (both in terms of economic returns through tourism and economic returns from greater social cohesion and local pride). Any Performing Arts Centre would need to ensure it supported that cultural identity rather than seeing its contribution an only enabling international visiting acts to stop off in our region (if this was

the case it is likely to be a very underutilized facility and provide only minimal returns). Ways the Performing Arts Centre could help nurture the space would include a dedicated exhibition space; design and form that incorporates and showcases local identity, heritage and artists; explicit links between the Centre and other artistic and heritage attractions; and the provision of a joint entrance for the Performing Arts Centre and Conference Centre.

- It is thus critical that this Centre integrates with all the other Arts facilities current and being developed/enhanced (e.g. Theatre Royal, NSOM) and can be developed and managed without detriment to those important facilities, especially when funding for the arts is and will remain tight.

## **Submission – Support for the Conference Centre**

The Chamber has consistently supported Council investment in regional infrastructure and has rated the development of a Performing Arts and Conference Centre a high priority. The Chamber support is particularly for the establishment of a Conference Centre as we believe that will deliver tangible economic benefits to the region and give a return on investment. We encourage the Nelson City Council to ensure that ratepayers get access to part of the return that the Conference Centre will provide and to contractually link the development of the Conference Centre to the Performing Arts Centre to ensure both are completed within the same time frame.

**Purpose Built Facility** – an ideal Conference Centre would be a purpose built facility rather than an extension or adaptation of an existing facility. However, the current proposal can, in the Chamber's view, still meet many of the ideal specifications and receive our support. Those requirements were set out in some detail in a report received by Nelson Tasman Tourism prepared by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers "Planning a Conference Centre" – February 2008. We endorse those requirements.

**Location** – the ideal location would be close to the airport, CBD and waterfront. This proposal is close to the airport and CBD. Provided there is sufficient loading bay access 24/7 to the Conference Centre and room for delegates (and partners) bus transportation we believe the additional parking pressure can be accommodated within the development of the Heart of Nelson (and attention will need to be paid to ensure good links between all day, overnight (and evening) parking and the venue. We recognise however that many Conferences are just for one day so day time parking needs will need to be addressed.

**Size of a Conference Centre** – our region is extremely well placed to cater for Conferences in the 700 - 1000 people size range. At a minimum, a pre-function area for 700 standing plus space for 30 – 40 trade stands (at approximately 3m each), plenary room that can cater for 700 delegates, at least six break out rooms able to accommodate 100 people each as well space for a sit down banquet dinner for 800 delegates and partners. Conferences of over 1000 people are likely to require access to international airports and therefore favour Auckland, Wellington or Christchurch. The current proposal only allows for 700 capacity over two rooms and this is insufficient. It is vital that one space can cater for the 700 delegates and the 800 for a conference dinner.

**Features** – the plenary, breakout rooms and catering must be part of one complex and very close together. They must all meet minimum technical specifications (wireless, sound, lighting, staging, seating etc). A pre-function area is critical for Conference organisers as selling trade stands is an important way for conferences to offset costs.

**Parking** – while most conference delegates will come from the airport, recent experience (for example the Aquaculture Conference in 2009 and the Aspire Conference in 2008) shows that

the current parking is insufficient to cater even for the smaller conferences currently held up this end of town. Suitable day time and safe and secure evening parking will need to be provided to support both the Performing Arts Centre and the Conference Centre.

Promotion – Conference Promotion needs to be professionally managed and to get the most benefit out of the Performing Arts and Conference Centres the promotion needs to be complementary and leverage off opportunities both venues provide in terms of audience. The Chamber supports a dedicated Conference Promotion Role resourced by the Council and that role would promote both this proposed facility, other conference and hotel accommodation options as well as delegates and partner attractions in the region.

Conference Organisers – There needs to be incentives and support for Conference Organisers (who have repeat business and loyal clients) to use this Conference Facility. Incentives include commission on room bookings, ability to secure sponsorship and trade space; ability to negotiate catering and wine supply; ability to negotiate a/v supplier. The Chamber would support the Conference Centre having two or three preferred suppliers for critical areas to ensure Conference Organisers have both choice and available professional support.

Dot Kettle  
Chief Executive