

The beat of the heartland

Tax cuts may be dominating this election, but are they the most important issue for North Islanders? *Te Waha Nui* went tiki-touring to find out.

Whangarei — 'Fix our roads'

Aucklanders aren't the only ones complaining about traffic problems, with roading high on the priority list for many in the Whangarei electorate this year.

The removal of more than 120 parking spaces and ongoing road works in the centre of town are particular concerns for locals, who say transport problems are killing the CBD and preventing the city from developing.

Tu Walters, a resident of Whangarei, says he is concerned at how long roading projects in the area take to complete.

"Helen wants to spend \$280 million on roads in Auckland, but it takes three quarters of a year to put in a roundabout in Whangarei. I think it's a bit disproportionate."

Whangarei resident Carmel Hubner says growth in the region has forced students to travel from areas such as Whangarei Heads to the centre of town to go to school. She would like to see more schools built around the area.

"We're jam packing our classes to 30-40 kids a class. How are they ever going to learn properly? It's ridiculous."

Both the National and Labour candidates agree about the issues facing Whangarei this election.

Phil Heatley has been National's MP in Whangarei since 1999 and is expected to win again this year.

He considers infrastructure to be the biggest issue facing Whangarei and is particularly focused on improving roading, power supplies and recreation and leisure facilities in the region.

Labour's Whangarei candidate Paul Chalmers agrees. He would like to establish an infrastructure trust so that projects such as refurbishing the polytechnic and other "outstanding education facilities" can be undertaken more easily.

— Sarah Worthington

Hamilton — 'All we want is a fair deal'

Waikato voters are underwhelmed by the upcoming general election. They have not hardened their opinions on which party they will vote for and some have little idea who the electoral candidates are.

Designer Te Hiku Wai Kohu is enrolled on the Maori roll and is a member of the Maori Party. She has not decided who she will vote for in her Tainui electorate.

"I'm not voting for Nanaia Mahuta but I find it difficult to support the Maori Party because of regional issues."

Wai Kohu says these regional issues are the tribal politics of the Tainui region. "I'm only interested in getting my land back. Will the candidates get my land back?"

Waikato Federated Farmers president Peter Buckley has firm ideas on how local farming issues should be addressed, but has yet to decide who to vote for.

He says the Resource Management Act is the biggest issue for farmers: "I would like to see the act over-hauled and made to work the way Geoffrey Palmer wanted it to work."

"All farmers want is a fair deal between town and country. There's a concern among the rural community that there's not the support there used to be."

Mother of seven Jacqui Cootes is on the Maori roll but will be giving her party vote to Labour.

"I reckon they need to give them another go."

But Cootes, 35, says Labour is wasting too much time fighting National and needs to think about what is good for the country.

She supported Helen Clark's stance on the war in Iraq.

"She's got her mind right on what's been done overseas. No one's got a right to go."

— Nicholas Moody

Palmerston North — No-one seems to care

Election apathy is rife in Palmerston North, where 18-24 year-olds have been slow to enrol.

Sophie Roper, a 19-year-old shop assistant, says young people don't know much about the election.

"Everyone says 'go Greens coz of grass legalisation'."

Most people surveyed were satisfied with their city and its direction.

One said local government was doing fine on its own, and was hampered by central government "sticking their noses in".

However, another demonstrated some confusion.

"Getting rid of all the fuddy-duddies on the council would be a start."

But beneath Palmerston North's complacency, there are common threads of frustration. A lack of police presence in the city was noted and blamed for the high rate of petty crime.

Ken, who owns Innercity Post and Lotto Shop in the central city, has had three windows broken in 12 months and is adamant the police presence needs to be beefed up.

"They get all this revenue from fines but there aren't enough police on the beat."

Economic growth in the region was seen as largely positive. But there are fears that big business – New Zealand's largest Warehouse has recently been built in the city – would have a negative effect on small industry.

— Sarah McDonald and Miles Erwin

Thames — 'We want to make our vote count'

Thames voters are ready to make their votes count. As early as August 98 per cent of eligible people were enrolled – one of the highest levels in the country. Improving the one-lane Kopu Bridge, the Treaty of Waitangi and the local environment were some of the big issues people were most concerned about.

Labour won the Coromandel party vote in 2002 with 48 per cent, followed by National with 32 per cent. Paula, a 35-year-old mother, plans to vote Labour as she did in the last election.

"I think they're heading in the right direction. A lot of the moves they have been making are right."

Long-time resident Owen has been voting Labour for the last 58 years and will do so again.

"I think they should have fixed up the treaty 50 years ago. This issue is a big stir in our society. It's become a Maori against Pakeha situation," he says.

Wendy, 46, will also use her party vote to support Labour. "If National gets in we're going to leave the country. We're just a normal family and National would have us back to subsistence in a flash," she says.

National also has support around Thames. Ian, who is in his 40s, will be voting National. "I'm sick of the social legislation this Government is forcing on us. The Kopu Bridge could be done if there was the political will to do it."

Elderly couple Jack and Hora will not be voting in the 2005 election.

"I've got no confidence in the lot of them. They're a pack of thieves. If Guy Fawkes was around now I'd back him," says Jack.

— Fiona Peat

Tauranga — Young voters are confused

Tauranga's young voters about to take part in their first general election are torn between voting for the now and voting for their future. Many of the first-time voters surveyed are influenced by student loan policies, but feel there are more important issues.

Business student Anneliese Simpson, 20, is unsure of who she will vote for.

"National and Labour are both addressing student debt. But there are probably other values that are more important to me that they don't stand for."

Bay Of Plenty Polytechnic student Chrystal Shelley, 20, is tossing up whether to vote for National or Labour.

"Labour will support me now as a student, but National will look after my future. National is much more focussed on business," she says.

Twenty-three-year-old business owner Jared Pemberton agrees. "Labour is about the employee, National is about the employer."

BOP Polytechnic student Layna Armstrong, 30, says there are not enough activities for young people in Tauranga.

"I don't think there is enough for young teenagers to do around here."

They cater for the older, retired age group, but they don't cater for families and young people," she says.

Student Hayden Bruce, 19, agrees. "I'd like to see somewhere set up for boy-racers to drag, instead of them having to race on public roads. There is nowhere that they can do it. If there is a safe place they can go, then people won't get killed," he says.

Winston Peters' policies stirred the most reaction.

Layna Armstrong likes him because he's different. "I quite like Winston Peters. He talks a lot of rubbish but he's outspoken and charismatic. He's not boring like other politicians," she says.

— Caitlin McGee, Lucy Grigg and Summer Hamilton

Whakatane — All about the family

When *Te Waha Nui* spoke to people in Whakatane, the usual issues – tax, student loans and immigration barely rated a mention but were instead replaced by family issues.

"We just have different priorities," was 57-year-old Gil Jones' view. "We just want to get on with life, and we don't complain too much if things don't go our way."

In their place was talk of benefits and family support, like the Working for Families package.

Leanne Wood is a 27-year-old mother of two. She disagrees with the headline family stance taken by Destiny New Zealand, but thinks the Government should look more closely at the family unit.

"Kids that grow up in good families will grow up to be good adults. They are the ones to take us forward and they need a good start in life."

Parties like the Greens, United Future and Destiny New Zealand were also popular among voters.

Andrew Johnstone has only recently moved to Whakatane from Wellington.

"The smaller parties tend to focus on issues that people here are affected by. In Whakatane, not everyone has a massive student loan and we aren't over-run by immigrants."

"Issues like family values and the environment do affect us, so people look to those parties," he says. — Jonathan Williams

