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Wanganui Code of Conduct complaints - Rob Moodie

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Press Release: Alastair Thompson

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PRESS STATEMENT

By Dr Rob Moodie lawyer, barrister and former Mayor of Manawatu (1995-98)
on behalf of the complainants
Code of Conduct complaints
Wanganui District Council
March 30 2005

I have been engaged to represent complainants alleging breaches of the Wanganui District Council's Code of Conduct by Wanganui Mayor Michael Laws. The complaints are to be heard tomorrow afternoon by the Council.

The thrust of the complaints and the material supplied to me today indicates serious concern about the tone of the mayoral responses to various matters raised and debated by citizens of Wanganui and the tone that comes through in his columns, some of which affect and apply to citizens of Wanganui. For example, general reference to members of the Brethren Church, general reference to artists and others that fall into categories that come within the scope of the mayor's comments also apply directly to members of the Brethren Church in Wanganui and to artists and others categorized who live in Wanganui.

There is a process of denigration, ridicule and contempt that parallels some of what was seen in Germany in the 1930s and my clients find it totally unacceptable for the first citizen of Wanganui to be describing people in the terms that Mr Laws consistently does. Particularly this is so when speaking directly of matters affecting the city.

This is not just a matter of a few citizens in Wanganui being concerned; even many of the Mayor's supporters appear to be concerned. And of course it is now a matter of national focus.

The hope for tomorrow is that the council and Mayor Laws will recognise that the unnecessary division and concern that Mr Laws' comments are causing are not serving the best interest of Wanganui or its citizenry, and that the Mayor, when pursuing his satirical passion, will have regard in future to the leadership responsibilities that accompany his mayoral chain.

The process the council must follow in respect of the complaints made under the Code of Conduct is comprised of three parts:

The first involves the evidence and submissions and my expectation as counsel for the complainants is that the hearing of evidence and submissions will be in public.

The second stage is the deliberation process and that stage should be in camera because the council as a whole or a committee, depending on determinations made tomorrow about structure, will need to confer as a jury will confer.

The third stage is promulgation of the decision, which may be in a public forum or in writing.

What is complained about are matters that have received considerable publicity and its effect on others, and Wanganui itself, is a matter of serious public concern. The evidence and submission process must be in public. There is no reason whatsoever for it not to be in public and if it is not a public hearing, there is little point in the matter proceeding.

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