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	Response Date	
	Notes	
Q1	Select the chapter you want to provide feedback on	
Q2	In general, to what extent do you support the contents of this chapter?	
Q3	Objective/Policy/Rule/Standard reference:	
Q4	Feedback/Comments	
Q5	Objective/Policy/Rule/Standard reference:	
Q6	Feedback/Comments	
Q7	Objective/Policy/Rule/Standard reference:	
Q8	Feedback/Comments	
Q9	Objective/Policy/Rule/Standard reference:	
Q10	Feedback/Comments	
Q11	supporting documents?	
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Q12	If you need more space, or have any other general comments, please leave them here	

Waitaki District Council - Annual Plan 2022/23

SUMMARY

Business South Inc welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on Waitaki District Council's Annual Plan 2022/23. We are pleased to make a submission on behalf of over 150 members in the Waitaki district.

We consistently work to ensure the business community has a voice in local government and value the positive working relationship we have with Council in several projects to ultimately build on and grow the Waitaki economy, albeit in unprecedented times.

Business South Inc wishes to take part in the hearing process to discuss this submission with the Council. We see ourselves as a collaborative partner with the district from the perspective of maintaining open and transparent communication and engagement with the business sector.

Our Waitaki Advisory Committee have an engagement framework in development and the intent is to create a collaborative work plan that focuses on creating a business environment for businesses to succeed across the district. It will help focus the Council to support the themes that have been identified as important: Retail; Infrastructure and Local Government; Brand Waitaki; and Workforce Development.

Business South Inc has been formed by the recent merger of the Otago Southland Employers Association and the Otago Chamber of Commerce. We are well connected and well-resourced through these organisations and our shareholding in BusinessNZ (see **Appendix 1**). These provide centuries of combined wisdom with access to some of the best policy minds influencing and shaping the future of our nation and is ambitious on behalf of the business community to work with Council on its planning whilst ensuring the business voice is loud, collaborative, influential and heard.

Making the district attractive by having a business-friendly brand is vital for future investment.

We have questions of Council:

1. **What is the Council doing to support small to medium (SMEs) and start-up businesses** to driving our local business economy? Councils can play a role in helping businesses to leverage new opportunities, thrive and being proactive in recognising opportunities.
 - a. Our members want support from Council for attracting and retaining local economic activity to create a business-friendly environment so they can operate effectively and sustainably.
 - b. There are immense pressures on businesses right now – issues with workforce, affordable housing, and supply chains. The price of doing business is going through the roof. How is Council working to retain people in a vibrant district and

attract new talent? How is the Council resourced, organised and is there adequate capacity to assist businesses? Council must be proactive with strategic foresight to ensure this is a compelling place to do business, locally, nationally, and globally across all industries.

2. **What is happening with the Thames Street business district?** Business South Inc would like to see investment in the main street to make it a vibrant place to visit and shop. A thriving downtown Oamaru is critical to the district's economic growth. Many downtown businesses are still grappling with Covid and the aftermath. Businesses are closing and continue to close. Retail, hospitality, and events members are feeling the financial strain and impact on their wellbeing.

Business South Inc wants to build on the positive transparent relationship with Council, and advocates for recognition that retail makes a significant contribution to the business ecosystem. Our members want Thames Street to be a future-focused retail area and would like to be part of working collaboratively with Council to build confidence in the area, ensure appropriate development and retail innovation to occur. We need tenants who are confident to sign ambitious leases. Our members also want a continuation of free parking in Thames Street.

3. **How can we be involved in the new Economic Development Plan?** Business South Inc is supportive of the economic development change initiative being undertaken by Council. We await the results back from the consultation process and specific governance actions for the plan. We look forward to being an active collaborator in the next phase providing input in the outcomes sought and actions required. Our members want transparency and input heard when finetuning the plan. We would welcome active participation in shaping the final plan.

Businesses within localities outside of Oamaru throughout Covid, like all businesses, have had their challenges with demand in hospitality and tourism. They look forward to continued support from the Council. The popularity of the cycleways and towns of Omarama and Kurow have had hospitality and tourism demand coming through since Easter which is positive.

4. **What is happening with infrastructure, planning, consenting** and creative options for **housing** given the recruitment challenges currently being faced by many employers in the district. Business South Inc is working collaboratively with other groups including Workbridge and Mayor's Taskforce for Jobs to find solutions.
 - a. We need to increase the affordability, availability and variety of housing options and types for workers and families across Oamaru (and the wider district). We need land packages opened up; public private partnerships; consideration of housing in commercial areas.
 - b. Businesses are renting and/or buying accommodation to accommodate staff for major employers in the district.

KEY ISSUES

There is no 'one view' of issues with a business lense, as business owners come with diverse ranges of life-skills, life cycles, skill sets, innovations (both technological,

sustainably and a change mindset) making significant contributions to the business and wider community both locally, nationally, and internationally. We do, however, bring together a cross-section of perspectives to collaborate with Council and bring about real positive change for the Waitaki in making it a prosperous district.

SMEs nationally are 97% of the NZ business landscape, the numbers are similar for our regional membership. Small businesses and local entrepreneurs and those that support them are the 'backbone of our economy'. They are the ones growing local jobs, providing stable employment, developing, and strengthening community resilience and fostering opportunity.

Business South Inc's strategic vision is to have a thriving business environment that benefits the whole region, thereby ensuring economic growth is achieved in balance with building cohesive communities. One of our key pillars is to ensure that local government are constructive partners in developing vibrant and sustainable local economies.

While the range of concerns expressed by our business community are varied and often reflect local circumstances, there are several common themes. These are: the challenge around funding, the regulatory and compliance cost burdens, infrastructure requirements, accountability, capacity, and the increase in the range of issues within local government's scope.

A. IMPACTS FOR BUSINESSES

1. **Rates increase** - Why are there such large rate increases overall?

It must be said that the timing of rates rises, as businesses are recovering from Covid-19 is not the best. It is poor timing to introduce rates rises for employers and employees at a time when cost pressures on businesses are extremely tough with businesses recovering from the impact of Covid. The pandemic has cost the country and individuals a great deal. Cost increases have not been matched by increases in revenue. There are members who cannot see the benefit of rate rises under current economic conditions.

Business South Inc would like the council to review the differential between residential and commercial rates. The commercial rate differential is greater than the residential rates. Our members want the Council to look at reducing the differential.

2. **Forrester Heights** - Business South Inc is surveying the membership on the proposal and will share the results with Council when they are available.

3. **South end of Thames and Harbour Street** – Business South Inc would like to see key stakeholders in this area come together to find solutions for the issues identified by businesses in this unique historic area. There is a need for collaboration to address the long-term viability of securing sustainable tenants. In Harbour Street, several businesses have closed and there are supply issues to create spaces new businesses want. As with some old buildings when they change hands, the new owner/tenant have plans to get them redeveloped discover structural issues, and the business plan falls over. Oamaru

then ends up with old buildings with no one in them that needs a lot of work. There needs to be basic standards of development.

4. **Seagulls** – The presence of the seagulls in town is a real issue for business owners with the seagulls using CBD buildings for nesting and shelter away from predators. We understand there are building owners who have worked to dissuade them. We urge the Council to find a balance between their protected status and working with those building owners who have done nothing.

B. FUTURE PLANS FOR THE WAITAKI DISTRICT

There should be provision for businesses to readily engage with Council to co-create projects that are future-focused aiming to attract investment and sustainable business growth in the district, and wider region. The purpose is to make the Waitaki an outstanding, cost effective and compelling place to do business. There is no one answer on how to do this. A key element to do so is through supporting investments and brave actions that will help employers successfully recruit and retain staff with necessary training, skills, and experience.

We encourage positive collaborative action with Council on the following initiatives:

1. **NZ Immigration regional representation** – While it is a central government responsibility, support from Council to get this on the agenda and being present in the Otago region would be a vital outcome for businesses to be competitive in attracting quality migrants. This would make a statement as to the district's status and vitality to people overseas considering where to base their future lives.
2. **Stimulating productivity across all our business sectors** – Productivity is being impacted by labour force shortages, access to supply chains and rapidly rising costs of doing business. We need Council assistance to advocate on behalf of our members to help overcome these problems.
3. **Sustainability** – Business South Inc will drive social, environmental, and financial sustainability as an organisation as well as supporting the businesses of Otago and Southland to embrace sustainable business practices. Collaborating with Council on sustainable projects will be beneficial to our community. BusinessNZ see this as a critical area of focus from a national perspective.
4. **Tourism initiatives and getting the trains running** – Tourism businesses would like to see leadership from the Council in terms of new tourism initiatives. We need new attractions and packages to attract tourists. Our members would like to see the return of day trips between Dunedin and Oamaru (and Christchurch), timed to go with the forthcoming return of cruise ships and an option for tourists generally. Having the trains running on Saturday and Sunday would give individuals the option to stay overnight.

5. **Hosting big events in Oamaru** - Our event, hospitality, accommodation members are looking for proactive sales and marketing of diverse events that will draw visitors to the district. Revitalising the Fire and Steam, and Victorian events will be beneficial for the town.
6. **Waitaki Events Centre and Business Hive**– From business perspective Business South Inc supports the proposed event centre. The current focus appears to be on providing facilities for elite sport. Good business decisions are good community decisions, so it's also important to create a community hub and space to support creative outlets for community groups, older people and volunteers who are part of the business and wider community. The plan is to develop an impressive asset and realise the economic utilisation of this asset and future uses. We welcome participation in building a collaborative plan for the centre. The Business Hive is a fantastic development for Oamaru from a collaboration perspective.
7. **Strengthening Māori and Pasifika business community** – Business South Inc is building long-term partnerships to foster and grow the creative and diverse business communities. We would like the Council to support cultural diversity in the business sector.

On behalf of our members, thank you for considering this submission and we look forward to presenting at the forthcoming hearing in mid-May 2022.

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, contact the Chief Executive Officer, Mike Collins, 03 479 0181.

APPENDIX 1. ABOUT BUSINESS SOUTH INC

Business South Incorporated - Otago Chamber and Southern Employers is a membership-based service organisation. The Chamber and Southern Employers together have a combined history of nearly 300 years' worth of business support, expertise, and representation in the region. The Otago Chamber of Commerce¹ was founded in 1861 and the Otago Southland Employers' Association was founded in 1890.

Comprised of over 1,300 members, Business South Inc actively provides information, advocacy, and support for business:

- connecting members through networking events and functions
- advocacy
- business support
- employment relations
- health and safety
- workforce development
- developing capability and skills through our training workshops and programmes, including the not-for-profit sector.

We also advocate and offer a voice for business concerns and submit on behalf of members on local and national government policy. We represent a broad cross-section of business demographics including, location and industry type, with a full range from small businesses through to large employers and stakeholders in the Otago and Southland region.

We are a member of both the national BusinessNZ and NZ Chamber of Commerce networks.

¹ Business South Inc excludes the chamber organisations in the Queenstown Lakes District – Queenstown Chamber of Commerce and Ignite Wanaka.