

## 30 assaults on Coast cops

By Lee Scanlon

Assaults on West Coast police officers have resulted in 30 charges against 24 people over the last two years.

More than half of the assaults occurred in Greymouth, said West Coast area commander, Inspector John Canning, responding to an Official Information Act request from The News.

Of the 18 charges of assaulting police in 2010, 11 were in Greymouth, four in Reefton, two in Westport and one in Hokitika.

Of the 12 charges in 2011, six occurred in Greymouth, four in Westport, and one each in Hokitika and Reefton.

The assaults included punches and kicks, Mr Canning said.

To his knowledge, none of the assaulted police officers had been admitted to hospital but some had required medical treatment.

None had left the force as a result of being assaulted.

The maximum sentence was four months jail, but that included other charges.

Other sentences included:

- five months community detention, nine months supervision and 120 hours community work;
- 270 hours community work;
- \$300 plus court costs and six months supervision;
- 75 hours community work;
- three months jail (sentence included other charges);
- 100 hours community work;
- \$750 plus court costs;
- 50 hours community work;
- three months home detention (sentence included other charges).

Mr Canning said West Coast police officers had used pepper spray against nine aggressive offenders over the past two years. They had sprayed six offenders in Greymouth last year, one in Reefton last year and the year before, and one in Westport last year.

Two people had been tasered in 2011, both in Buller, for aggressive and combative behaviour.

Westport detective Mal Haughey said the threat of being tasered was often enough to deter offenders.

"It [the weapon] is bright yellow, it stands out, and people see it. The reputation it has often means that people will calm down immediately."

Mr Haughey said the general rule for police was to take a taser to any job where one might be required.

A taser blast was a "five-second burst" to stop offenders in their tracks.

Tasers were not standard issue to police, but every officer was issued with pepper spray.

The spray created a burning sensation but did not physically harm the person who was sprayed.

"The idea behind it is a goal-focused person is diverted from their goal."

He had only fired a taser in training and had used pepper spray only once – when he was assaulted in Auckland's Karangahape Road. He was wearing plain clothes at the time, and pepper spraying his assailant was a safer and quicker option than a physical response.

"That experience, for me, was the right choice and it worked perfectly and with the least risk to anyone," Mr Haughey said.

Tasers are hand-held weapons that deliver a jolt of electricity through a pair of wires propelled by compressed air from up to 10.6m away.

The jolt stuns the target by causing uncontrolled contraction of muscle tissue.

More than 16,200 law enforcement agencies in more than 40 countries use tasers, according to the weapon's United States' manufacturer.

Pepper spray is classed as a restricted weapon in New Zealand. It is used by police officers and mental health workers to subdue severely disturbed people.

Its active ingredient, derived from cayenne pepper plants, causes intense irritation of mucous membranes and the skin. New Zealand police have issued it to front-line officers since 1997.



CD Mercado and Jimmy Tisbury show off their dance moves at the Westport skatepark on Saturday afternoon. (Photo – supplied)

## Skatepark a community asset – Reap

By Keira Stephenson

Supporters of the Westport skatepark have hit back at council threats to close the park down.

After spending 45 minutes picking up empty alcohol bottles in the park recently, Cr Peter Campbell said council could look at closing it if people continued to treat it as a rubbish dump.

However, Buller Reap youth worker Shelley Taylor said the park was a valuable community asset and focal point for youth and family-centred activities.

She had helped facilitate two youth events at the skatepark including 'Showing Off Our Jockeys' on Saturday, said Ms Taylor.

The party, showcasing the talents of Westport's young DJs and dancers, went without a hitch, she said.

Four DJing and six hip-hop dancing course graduates performed to about 70 people over the afternoon.

The alcohol-free, family-friendly event attracted all ages from little children on their scooters to

youth in their early 20s, and parents as well, said Ms Taylor.

It was a "good cruisy day" and the site was left clean, she said.

Reap manager Deirdre McGrath said Reap really believed the council had an obligation to at least maintain the skate park and hadn't really done so.

A group of young people, some just children, had stood up in front of the council annual planning submissions meeting and spoken on the issue last year, said Mrs McGrath.

Council had indicated it would take the young people's views on board, but nothing had been done, she said. "You only have to walk past at any-time of the day, especially in the school holidays and there are hundreds of young people using it..."

"If there was a bit more respect shown from the council by maintaining it then the kids will respond with the bit more respect as well," said Mrs McGrath.

There were many other sites in Westport where rubbish was dumped, but they hadn't been singled

out for possible closure. The council wasn't talking about closing North Beach because of all the burnt-out cars left there, she said.

The skatepark was the same sort of community asset as the playground next door and deserved the same amount of maintenance and development.

She had had parents asking for more events like 'Showing Off Our Jockeys' to be held at the skate park.

"This is the sort of thing that kids love because not every child is interested in traditional sports and it should deserve as much recognition."

Ms Taylor said the Ministry of Youth Development, Reap, the Buller Community Development Company and Karama Sound Machine jointly ran the 10-week summer DJ/VJ course and hip-hop course.

Terry Lineham had donated his truck to use as a stage and designs and ideas for an upgrade of the park were on display.

The group held a sausage sizzle to fundraise for future events.

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## Nelson-Tasman revamp unlikely - Wylie

By Lee Scanlon

The Buller District Council's new chief executive believes voters will reject a Nelson-Tasman reorganisation scheme, approved by the Local Government Commission (LGC).

Paul Wylie was Tasman District Council's chief executive before taking up the Buller job in December.

He reiterated yesterday that the reorganisation scheme had nothing to do with him seeking the Buller job, and that he did not believe the scheme would proceed.

The LGC had merely taken the "politically astute approach" - to let the electors decide, he said.

"Every similar one [reorganisation] in New Zealand has been turned down and I think this will follow exactly the same pattern. The people of Tasman will turn it down. I suspect that while it may have a majority of support in Nelson, it won't be overwhelming."

Tasman voters were worried about the loss of rural representation, because most councillors would come from the small urban area of Nelson and Richmond, Mr Wylie said.

The reorganisation would not save ratepayers money.

"In bureaucracies, big leads to diseconomies of scale and costs actually go up. That's the world-wide research..."

"The one advantage you do get is a bigger council supposedly has more clout. "Tasman's argument against that was 'well, two mayors going to Wellington are going to get on better than one'."

Tasman already had efficient local government, he said. Tasman's average rates were lower than those in Nelson. Residents had good local representation and Tasman was handling difficult situations – like the recent floods – extremely well.

Tasman had led the way in combining services with Nelson where savings would accrue.

"There are now 39 shared services between the two councils. That's the trick, to work out those services where combining produces a benefit and to avoid becoming a cumbersome bureaucracy by



Paul Wylie

combining everything."

Nelson Mayor Aldo Miccio had campaigned for reorganisation to boost his own profile prior to the last local body elections. "But wait and see how he gets on in the next election."

Mr Wylie said the original research showing reorganisation would save money on council staffing was "amateurish and appallingly inept". Researchers had concluded one in eight staff were surplus to requirements, based on a comparison between council staffing in Nelson-Tasman and Tauranga City.

They had overlooked the fact that both Nelson and Tasman were unitary councils.

"If they were to do a correct comparison they should have compared a total of Tauranga City plus a big chunk of the Bay of Plenty Environment Council, and they didn't."

Grey Mayor Tony Kokshorn has previously promoted a unitary council for the West Coast.

Mr Wylie said Coasters had sensibly rejected the idea, "because you won't have the 'local' in local government".

"One thing I can absolutely promise you is, the bigger the council the less the community is involved. That's reflected in lower and lower voter turnout."

LGC chairman Basil Morrison said it believed the new Nelson Tasman district would provide a more distinct community of interest, more efficient and effective local government, and improved decision making.

A referendum will be held by both Nelson City and Tasman District in April this year. The proposal will only proceed if a majority of electors in both polls are in favour.

If approved the new scheme will come into effect on November 1, 2012.

The Nelson Tasman District would be divided into eight wards with a mayor and 16 members.

A Māori Board and Rural Advisory Committee would also be established alongside two community boards in Golden Bay and Motueka. The administrative headquarters for Nelson Tasman District would be located in Richmond.

## Private baches phased out on public land

By Keira Stephenson

Owners of baches on public land may have to make their baches available to the public, following recent changes to the West Coast conservation management strategy (CMS).

However, in Buller there were only three baches on public conservation land that the CMS would apply to, said West Coast Conservancy Department of Conservation (DOC) spokeswoman Jose Watson.

Currently people owning baches on conservation land paid an annual concession fee of \$700-\$1500, said Ms Watson. Concessions generally lasted 10-15-years.

As the concessions came up for renewal the new clause in the CMS might be imposed "only where it is considered appropriate", she said.

The policy states that no new private accommodation is to be built on conservation land. When considering renewing concessions for existing baches DOC should "make provision, where appropriate, for public use of the facility".

"Basically if a bach was in an area where there was nowhere for the public to stay DOC might require in some circumstances for people to make their bach available for the public as a holiday home," said Ms Watson.

DOC Buller area manager Bob Dickson said the policy aimed to reduce "inappropriate" private use of public land over time, while still recognising the iconic status of the traditional Kiwi bach passed down through generations.