



## Ta for the feedback...well, some of it

Some of my columns this year have proved controversial, which is the aim, I guess.

I'm never quite sure how people will react to that, but judging by the warm response I got from an audience of 120 at a recent gathering of U3A members, most seem okay with controversy.

I don't get much feedback on individual columns, and what I do get mostly appears on the dreaded Facebook, whose credibility hasn't exactly risen lately.

You have to be careful with FB comment threads. There is sometimes a pattern: the naysayers will often make the first dozen comments, rubbishing what I've said, which suggests some are mates of whatever organisation or person I've offended.

In long threads following the column about weeds in Pukekura Park, after about the 10<sup>th</sup> post the majority of the next 100 seemed to concur with my concern.

With last week's column about the gun laws, I got two phone calls, which is unusual. One was from an official involved in the aftermath, a man who seemed to know a great deal about gun laws, especially about what happened following the Hungerford (1988) and Dunblane (1996) massacres in the UK.

In his view, the government's signalled reforms do not go far enough. After Hungerford, the UK introduced stricter controls on semi-automatic rifles and military-style weapons - just as we are now doing in New Zealand - but that didn't

stop the maniac who shot 16 schoolchildren in Dunblane in Scotland. He used handguns.

The second call came from a gun club member who objected strongly to my reference to far-right extremists possibly belonging to clubs, like the one in Dunedin frequented by the Christchurch killer.

It was my fault. He missed my overly subtle use of the word “apparently”, which was meant to signal that some people, maybe a lot of people, will now be uneasy about any and all gun clubs, no matter how unfair that seems and how impeccable their procedures.

Returning to the subject of Pukekura Park’s weed problem, I had another look a few weeks after that column and took 75 photos of asparagus fern, ginger and other pests. The alarming thing was the fern and ginger were covered in berries and flowers, respectively, suggesting the problem is spreading.

Staying with NPDC, the councillor appointed to chair the Accessibility and Aged Issues Working Party is Waitara’s John Williams, who joined the council mid-term to replace Craig McFarlane, who became ill.

Williams chaired his first meeting on Wednesday, and hopefully the minutes will be more readily available so we can see what he and his council colleagues do to improve the committee’s efficacy. When I say readily available, I mean able to be found on the council’s website, which is in an appalling state.

When I repeatedly tried to find working party minutes, the website invariably indicated there were 3500 to 4500 relevant items to view. My numerous attempts to search using different search terms, discovered only a single document about the working party.

More often than not, my search’s first pages were dominated by items related to hearings on the Mt Messenger bypass. The minutes might be there somewhere, but it would take a week to find them in the morass.

New Plymouth District Council needs advice from Taranaki Regional Council, whose website rarely throws up more than 130 hits; I can always find what I’m after. Perhaps it suits NPDC to have a website that’s impenetrable for those of us whose job it is to monitor the council's performance.

The column about my neighbour’s battle with the Ministry of Social Development brought an anguished letter from “Fleur”, who recounted similar woes some years back. Despite all the promises, the neighbour had his phone cut off by Spark because MSD paid the wrong account. Spark was unsympathetic and he now faces a big bill for reconnection – and Spark says it’s up to him to sort it with MSD.

There has been some nice feedback. A man who didn't want to be named wrote to say how much he appreciated my obituary on Ian Eliason, saying it was a pity Legs himself didn't get to read it.

The letter-writer, a former All Black, was one of my rugby heroes when I was a kid. He played nearly a century of matches for Taranaki during the Ranfurly Shield eras of the 1950s and 1960s.

Thanks John. Glad I got that one right, at least.