



Wherever I Roam, The Coast Is My Home

Monday the 14th of December 2015.

What a great opportunity the Coasters Club has been given to us by Maureen Pugh to talk with Hon Judith Collins about the Coast and what's happening in the halls of power in Wellington.

The opportunity arose by accident and it started with a magnificent meal at the Theatre Royal Hotel in Kumara. Judith was to speak to a local group of supporters when her flight was cancelled. No mucking around, she hired a rental car and drove to the Coast. No drivers, no security and there was no way she was letting anyone down. It's the mark of this women.

When she walked in the door and was given a standing ovation she said she was there to support West Coast MP Maureen Pugh. Judith immediately took up where Richard John Seddon finished on the podium, it was down to earth with no rubbish and some good advice to the Coast .

I had heard a lot about Judith Collins and had a picture in my mind but, like everybody there, we followed the Coast way of taking her at face value. Best thing we could have done. She's attractive, bubbly and simply told everyone

her views and experiences as an MP in a low key way that blew away the preconceptions held completely.

After a really interesting couple of hours I plucked up the courage to ask her if the Coasters Club could chat to her about her thoughts for now and for the future on the Coast and she said no problem see you in Greymouth tomorrow.

I'm going to tell you I was pretty excited. I rang up Mike Keenan our patron and I said "Mike I'm going to interview Judith Collins." "Great stuff Bruce. She has been to Kumara, now bring her to Ross and make sure she knows why we need the roading projects and our Chinese gardens."

Sunday morning I sat down with Judith Collins in Greymouth. She is bright and bubbly, she looks nothing like how she's been portrayed in the media.

Judith is 56 years old and I told her she is in great nick and she clearly looks after herself. Not sure if you are meant to say things like that but it's true so I guess it's ok.

I ask her how the media image of her is so different to the real person and she tells me that the media can be very difficult to deal with and there are people totally committed to bringing politicians down, no matter which party they represent. And it's not just the media, there are some bad people in this world and I try to avoid them. There are some negative people in this world and I try to avoid them as well.

I asked Judith what she sees on the Coast. Her answer was quick and very clear, "the Coast has a lot of negative comments coming from across the board, in your newspapers and from the people that are paid to represent you,

and this causes the rest of New Zealand to think that everything is bad on the Coast and it's all doom and gloom. Well let me tell you, it's absolutely not. Your average income per capita is one of the highest in the country, you've got to get used to the fact that coal at the present price simply won't work. Get over it.

Your tourism sector has had incredible growth year after year and international tourist numbers to the Coast reached 1,643,473 in 2015 and it was spread between Westland 833,659, Greymouth 635,457, and Buller 174,357.

Add in the domestic traveller and you do the numbers!"

"I support roading as its an enabler of development, and let's face it, if it's a toll road you can't take it away once its built. So your tourism numbers are growing, your dairy sector has a huge advantage. I know hundreds of farmers in drought stricken areas that would love to have the farming conditions that you have on the Coast. You have water and plenty of it, as I saw coming over last night. The droughts in some of the eastern parts of the country are terrible and they will continue, so the Coast should be celebrating the fact that its farmers have great water supplies.

Your mineral sector has huge potential in goldmining, garnets, rock, and rare earth minerals so the Coast should be celebrating the fact that you have so many resources available to you. Your fishing industry continues to grow, your power generation continues to grow, and it's yours and it's on

the Coast and you should be celebrating its success and striving to grow it further. Your timber mills continue to process and harvest sustainable pinus radiata and are exporting to a number of countries around the world with the big markets being Australia and the USA. Celebrate the success and help further grow this industry.

What I'm saying is that you have got wonderful resources you've got water, you've got scenic attractions that are unbelievable and that's why tourists from around the world will come to the Coast in increasing numbers. Walk away from the negative, it's no good. Start following those people out there that have got off their bums and are doing something. Look at what positive leadership by the likes of Garry Howard is doing for his area and the Coast.

For my part as you know I am to be reappointed as Minister of Corrections and Police and I'm excited about it. National is the party of law and order and that's what I will ensure we deliver."

I asked Judith about the reforms of the RMA.

"Under MMP everything we do is in consultation with other parties. We are committed to reform the Resource Management Act and we are making small incremental changes which Minister Nick Smith is driving. I've been in business, and it was a small business, so I know how difficult it is, as everyday there's another twister to handle. So I'm on the side of small business."

Well Judith, and I guess this is the last time I'll be able to call you that, it will have to be Minister from here, we will miss you and Annette on the Paul Henry Show.

On behalf of the Coasters Club I want to thank Judith for being open, frank and so completely different to the image the media had created in my mind.

Thanks to Maureen Pugh for getting her to the Coast.

So to all my fellow Coasters out there, I am not a journalist and never will be, but I have tried to capture for you the essence of my discussion with the Hon Judith Collins. She could easily be a Coaster and I hope she returns.

Hon Judith Collins and Bruce Smith for “The Coasters Club”

