

Malcolm Sutherland - TCRT

Malcolm Sutherland's involvement with the Taranaki Community Rugby Trust started with a shoulder tap.

The New Plymouth business consultant got on board as a trustee in February 2016 and was chairman a week later.

"I had an invite for lunch from Peter Crawford, Ray Barron and Michael Joyce," he said.

"I wasn't too sure what the agenda was but I had a lovely lunch before they raised the question about me being a trustee. They then added the prospect of being chair after that."

Sutherland said he spent about three weeks looking through the trust as an organisation, doing his "due diligence" before deciding how best he could help.

"The trust had been through its start-up phase and things weren't that easy as they were coming out of low (dairy) pay-outs but things were improving," he said.

"As an organisation, I could see there were opportunities to do some things. After having a good, deep look into it, I could see what I thought was going to be useful."

Sutherland's motivation to get involved in the trust "from the get-go" was the ethos of the trust and its determination to keep Taranaki kids fit and healthy.

He said he also had a deep respect for the people involved.

While he was mindful of the trust and the work it did, Sutherland never had a deep understanding for just how much it did before getting involved.

Once on the board, he could see there was a lot of potential to improve on the great work the trust was doing.

"In my thinking, coming from the work that I do, it was pretty clear it was at the stage of development where it really needed to create a pattern that worked organisationally and I guess I have some know-how on that," he said.

"The mission I gave to myself was to help it create an avenue at a governance level and out further to an operational level in a way that the organisation would have a sustainable model and achieve some of its aspirations in growing, too."

In doing that, Sutherland introduced a number of sub-committees - finance, audit and risk, farm business and communications and promotions.

"It gave them a clear working and strategic mandate to get on and work on those things that were in those strategies," he said.

He remembers a clear focus once he came on board that the trust, or the farm business, needed to grow, while there was also a mandate to potentially look for land to purchase for the long-term goal of owning its own farm.

He said there was an incredible amount of work going in from the trust's farm advisers as well as those employed on the land.

"The trust was blessed with the people that were on the farm committee, the likes of Ray Barron, Peter Crawford and Michael Joyce, plus a lot of other people because they all understand farming very, very well.

"Their understanding and ability to work in the farming community and negotiate and look for opportunities was second-to-none."

Away from the board dealings and those being handled by individuals on the farm committee, Sutherland quickly picked up on the importance of the trust in all of the rugby clubs it dealt with.

While the pro-rata distribution worked well, the committee also saw areas of growth that appealed to him.

“I never, ever found a club that took us for granted,” he said.

“The level of appreciation was really sincere and the feedback we would get, sometimes through personal letters and the like, was really quite outstanding.”

An example he highlighted was from the Eltham club which had used the money it received to pay for the use of the floodlights, something they estimated kept a number of players in the game simply because it helped the dynamic of family life.

During his tenure, which ended in 2021, Sutherland was thankful to the work of a number of trustees who had since left, including Gary Dunlop, Mike Green and John Eagles.

Recruiting new trustees was also a rewarding experience for Sutherland who was impressed with the work undertaken by the likes of Tracey Phelan who moved into the deputy chairman’s role after Garry Carnachan took over from Sutherland.

Lawyer, and now Family Court Judge Alex Laurenson, also came onto the board under his watch and impressed.

But finding trustees was not easy, he said, given the demand from a growing number of charities throughout the country.

“The pickings are quite thin but they are still there. Sometimes it’s a case of people knowing people and being able to tap someone on the shoulder,” he said.

“But in some cases we have to go wider than that and advertise and seek good people who do come out of the woodwork.”