

Duncan Campbell
C/- duncancampbellbythesea@gmail.com

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The Ombudsman
C/- info@ombudsman.parliament.nz

Subject: Complaint Regarding Denial of Speaking Rights Under the Public Forum - Taupō District Council

Dear Ombudsman,

I am writing to formally lodge a complaint concerning the conduct of **John Funnell, Mayor of Taupō District Council** in denying me the right to speak under the Public Forum section of the Council meeting held on 5 February 2026.

As an elected Councillor, I submitted a request in advance to speak during the Public Forum in the same manner that any member of the public would be entitled to. I was subsequently advised that my request was declined on the basis that I am 'not a member of the public', and that this speaking opportunity was therefore not available to me.

In my view, this rationale is both procedurally flawed and constitutionally dubious. The purpose of the Public Forum is to allow members of the community to raise issues of public interest or concern. There is nothing in law or in our Standing Orders (which I attach) which prohibits an elected member from speaking as a resident and ratepayer, particularly when the matter does not relate to a personal grievance, but to Council processes and community representation. In particular, Section 15.2 of Standing Orders specify the reasons a chairperson may reject an appearance - none of which applied to me.

15.2 Restrictions | Ngā Herenga

The chairperson has the discretion to decline to hear a speaker or to terminate a presentation at any time where:

- A speaker is repeating views presented by an earlier speaker at the same public forum;
- The speaker is criticising elected members and/or staff;
- The speaker is being repetitious, disrespectful or offensive;
- The speaker has previously spoken on the same issue;
- The matter is subject to legal proceedings; and/or
- The matter is subject to a hearing, including the hearing of submissions where the local authority or committee sits in a quasi-judicial capacity.

Moreover, the manner in which this decision was handled further deepens my concern. Rather than take full responsibility for the decision, the Mayor cited advice received (presumably from staff) and **then chose to place the matter before elected members for a vote on whether I would be permitted to speak**. This was unprecedented, politicising a basic procedural right and setting a dangerous precedent for suppressing minority viewpoints or dissenting voices within Council.

This appears to me to be a cynical misuse of process to prevent critical comment from being aired in a public setting. It undermines democratic transparency and chills open discourse, particularly when the content I intended to raise relates to Council accountability and the erosion of democratic norms.

I therefore ask the Ombudsman to investigate whether:

- 1. The denial of my right to speak at the Public Forum was procedurally valid and consistent with the principles of natural justice and open local government.**
- 2. The Mayor acted appropriately in seeking advice that effectively disenfranchised an elected member from public speech.**
- 3. Taupō District Council's interpretation of Public Forum rights is in line with best practice and legislative intent.**

Please note that Taupo District Council does practice Council meetings without an agenda slot for elected members to raise general matters, and the item I was wishing to present was not in a format suitable for a formal Notice of Motion. Submitting for Public Forum really was a last resort if it were to be recorded and made readily viewable to members of the public.

For additional context, you may wish to view the meeting session where this 'debate' took place starting from 1 min 30 and lasting around 15 minutes (several times longer than it would have taken me to speak my allotted 5 minutes!):
https://www.youtube.com/live/pMThj19NDqw?si=Ne3Z3wbnSUB_QlrS&t=92

I am available to provide further background or documentation as needed, including correspondence confirming the denial of my request.

I look forward to your reply

Yours faithfully



Councillor Duncan Campbell
Taupo District Council Ph (027) 4861380