

ISK to widen its scope

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INDUSTRIAL Symbiosis Kawerau has widened its scope beyond the town from which it is named. ISK president Jacob Kajavala told Whakatāne District Council the organisation had “taken its Kawerau blink-

ers off” recently. Mr Kajavala was at the council’s first public meeting for 2023 to speak about the organisation at the invitation of chief executive Steph O’Sullivan. Ms O’Sullivan had also invited other chief executives from Whakatāne-based organisations to hear Mr Kajavala’s presentation. Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Awa chief executive Reuben

Araroa, Horizon Energy Group’s Ajay Anand, ToiEDA’s Donna Perese, Eastern Bay Chamber of Commerce’s Andrew Watson attended and Eastbay REAP’s Ryan Morrison. ISK, a co-operative group of around 23 Kawerau-based industrial businesses, education providers and other organisations, had its start as the brainchild of Kawerau District Council’s economic

development wing 12 years ago. It creates opportunities for Kawerau businesses to work together for the benefit of all members on projects such as staff training. Though the council is still a member of the group, 18 months ago ISK pulled away to become an independent organi-

Industrial symbiosis about more than just the K

sation and no longer receives any council funding.

“In that regard, as a stand-alone entity, we are a start-up,” Mr Kajavala said. “The last few months have been really interesting for us. Because we were a quasi-political thing rather than a truly industrial thing, we’ve been trying to figure out how that works.”

Ms O’Sullivan asked whether energy production would be a component of ISK’s development, as it was with the Scandinavian model of industrial symbiosis groups. “[Energy] was really important in terms of Kawerau and your geothermal energy. Where has that led and would it be a component?”

Mr Kajavala said there were “a lot of serious conversations around hydrogen and the energy movement from high heat to low heat”.

“That has happened as much as it can within the industries that are currently sitting there.”

Ms O’Sullivan also asked for an update on key infrastructure projects funded through central government such as the planned container terminal. Mr Kavavala said there were still negotiations to be done with one of the hapū, around land where the off-road highway was being located but that there was a lot of optimism around it going forward.”

He said ISK had recently been solely focused on staff training and, while that was an important part of what they did, they wanted to work on other ideas that benefited industry. Because it’s funding model relied mostly on Ministry of Social Development, it had “warped” the organisation from what it was about.

“We’ve had to be about training and job placement exclusively, because that’s where the money comes from. But really, we are about growing industry because from that grows opportunity. People often ask me, are we about industry, or about employment or about community.

“We’re actually about all of this, because they’re all connected.”

One of the group’s more recent realisations is that most of the staff of the member industries do not live in Kawerau. Mr Kajavala, who is managing director of Kajavala Forestry (KFL), which he described as a medium-sized forestry business, said almost 70 per cent of his staff lived in Whakatāne and speaking to managers of some of the larger ISK industries, he learned some of them had even larger percentages of



staff living in Whakatāne or travelling from places further afield.

“We should be called ISW. In fact, that last letter is irrelevant. We are, broadly, a regional thing,” he said. “For the past 12 years we’ve been, strictly speaking, Kawerau, which is ridiculous. You think about when this pebble drops into the water, all the ripples spread out. They don’t stop at the boundaries of Kawerau. Of course, when we were part of the council, that was what it was supposed to do.”

Mr Kajavala’s presentation was well received by Whakatāne district councillors.

Councillor Andrew Iles said it was something the council should get behind and support.

“What a fantastic way to start off this year, a presentation that has brought leaders of industry into this room. Hats off to our chief executive for bringing all these people together to give us that insight and that push, that I think, as a council, we need.

Mr Kajavala talked about some of the recruitment and training initiatives ISK had provided for Kawerau industry over the past 12 years.

“You sit with any group of employers and ask, ‘what’s your problem?’ It’s recruitment, training. These are the common grounds that we all struggle with, but when we co-operate, we are better collectively than we are individually. Even if we’re competitors, we can still pool our resources.”

He described how ISK had set up joint training workshops for common compliance training that all industries must undergo, such as for working at heights, operating forklifts and first aid.

“We realised that if we pooled them all together, via ISK, we could run a full workshop on a regular basis. Rather



ISK president Jacob Kajavala

than me pulling down 21 people for first aid training, I just send two this month, two next month.”

ISK could track the compliancy of various certificates of its members staff and send reminders to business owners when they needed to be updated.

It also provided a connection for industries with the Ministry of Social Development and educators around what skills and training they required in job seekers.

“Last Thursday, for instance, we ran a huge forklift training course, not just for people in industry but people on MSD’s books. Some were school leavers or about to leave school, some were people from Corrections. What they’ve found interesting about that, is that the unemployed get to rub shoulders with people who are in work, so they get to have conversations and see what it looks like what it feels like.

“From industry, we get to see the folk that, say for instance, got out of prison recently really want to change their lives. Those are nuggets of gold. We want to have access to them.”