

UWEN Questions

Response from Hannah Pia Baral, Labour's Upper Harbour Candidate

1. Significant challenges faced in the Upper Harbour electorate

What do you believe are the three most significant challenges facing our Electorate? Why are these issues important to local residents? What practical steps would you take to address them if elected?

a) Cost of Living

Mortgages, rents, groceries and power bills are squeezing households across the electorate and there is real financial stress. Labour has plans to ease some of the pressure. We will remove the \$5 prescription fee, bring power bills down through SolarSaver so families can get solar without the upfront cost, and make grocery prices fairer by breaking up the duopoly's grip on wholesale supply.

Locally, I want to make sure that people get the support they're already entitled to and ensure they are aware these services exist. I will work with local community groups to run regular clinics where people can get the support they need.

b) Access to health care and local services

Many residents struggle to enrol with a GP or get a timely appointment, and the cost can be a barrier to some individuals and families. Labour will give every New Zealander three free doctor's visits a year through a Medicaid and will make cervical screening and maternity scans free. Labour's Family Doctor Loan Scheme will support doctors to open new community-based practices, free up 4.5 million appointments a year so people can get an appointment sooner and fix general practice's long-term funding challenges.

Locally, I would work with practices, Auckland Council and developers to plan for space for medical centres in Upper Harbour's newer suburbs and work with community groups to help families, especially new migrants, enrol with a GP so they can benefit from free doctor's visits.

c) Infrastructure that keeps pace with growth

Upper Harbour has grown faster than the infrastructure around it. Roads are busy at peak times, some schools are filling up, and people in the newer suburbs have concerns about stormwater and local facilities. Growth is also putting pressure on our streams and the harbour, and climate change is bringing heavier rain and coastal erosion, which residents on Herald Island can already see.

Locally, I would advocate to Auckland Council, Auckland Transport and the Ministry of Education for infrastructure to keep up with new housing. I would also be a point of contact for residents dealing with these agencies on local issues and I would advocate for development that protects our waterways and plans for climate risks such as flooding and erosion.

2. AI Data Centres

Within this current government's term, New Zealand's AI Strategy has been launched with a clear mandate to invest \$25-35 billion in data centres. Currently there is no requirement

for environmental disclosure and no regulator monitoring energy or water use or water and light pollution, or mitigations regarding social impact. What is your view/parties view on this? Does your party intend to implement a national policy for data centres in NZ – and if so, what will it include?

Response:

A Labour Government will set clear rules for large data centres, so their growth does not leave households and businesses carrying the cost or put pressure on water and electricity supplies. We will require data centres to secure their own renewable energy supply, pay for their own connection costs, reduce electricity demand during peak stress periods, and use water efficiently.

3. Land-use and urban planning

Under the Planning Bill recent amendment, urban trees are no longer protected, unless they have significant historic heritage value. This means that 6,000 trees in Auckland are now vulnerable and no longer protected due to their ecology, amenity and ecosystem support.

Whenuapai, just recently included in this Electorate, has only 8% tree canopy, when 30% has been shown to be required for healthy environmental and social outcomes. Auckland Council's Urban Ngahere strategy sets an overarching target of reaching a 30% tree canopy cover across Auckland's urban area by 2050.

In the face of high intensification and climate change, Upper Harbour is experiencing the urban heat island effect, mental and social health impacts and greater flooding risk. Trees have been proven to help mitigate these impacts. What is your position on this – and what will you do to protect the Electorate's mature tree coverage?

In addition, what is your position on continuing the Fast Track Approvals Act and Private Plan Changes, particularly on Future Urban Zones? How would you ensure this aligns with Council infrastructure delivery programmes and blue green spatial network plans?

Do you support or oppose the RMA reforms (including the recent proposed amendments) regarding;

- Regulatory Relief
- Removal of Council placing Environmental caps
- Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana Protection Act 2025
- Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008

Response:

Auckland Council's Urban Ngahere (Forest) Strategy

Locally, I would back Auckland Council's Urban Ngahere target of 30% canopy cover and advocate for tree planting and protection in low-canopy areas like Whenuapai. I would also support the volunteer groups across UWEN who are already planting and restoring our local habitats.

Land Use and Urban Planning:

Labour supported the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill to Select Committee at first reading in December 2025. This is because we were committed to working constructively through the Select Committee process with the aim of changes being made that would have improved the Bills. Unfortunately, almost all policy decisions made during the Select Committee process made the Bills even more unpalatable and unworkable.

We know the RMA is out of date and needs changing. It is too slow and environmentally degrading. That's why, in Government, Labour replaced it with the Natural and Built Environment Act and the Spatial Planning Act. National then repealed those Acts and reinstated RMA.

Labour will not repeat the 'repeal and replace' cycle of resource management law this Government has chosen but will make changes in Government because the law needs to be workable and do better for the environment and communities.

Labour proposed amendments to the Planning Act and the Natural Environment Act during the final stages in Parliament. These show what Labour would do in government, including:

- Making the goals of the Bills have a clear emphasis on environmental limits and climate change.
- Making environmental limits actual limits rather than targets.
- Removing the regulatory relief provisions.
- Adding protections for Waitākere Ranges, the Hauraki Gulf, and Wildlife Act approvals.
- Improving protection and consideration for green spaces and trees in urban areas. These are an important resilience protection for flooding and heat.

- Requiring regional spatial plans to map or otherwise record blue and green natural environment networks, environmental enhancement areas, and preferred urban form outcomes (for example, greenfield areas and intensification areas).
- Inserting a definition of a well-functioning urban area. Labour proposed defining it as "a planned environment that enables a variety of uses and provides good accessibility between housing, jobs, community services, natural spaces, and open spaces, including by way of public or active transport." It would also support, as much as possible, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, green spaces and trees, public amenity that enhances wellbeing, and resilience to the effects of climate change.

These (and many other) APs are available as published amendments here:

https://legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/?active_tab=related-amendment_paper#d3004146e9

https://legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/234/en/latest/?active_tab=related-amendment_paper#LMS1520811

Fast-track

Labour will fix the Fast-track Approvals Act so that environmental protections are not overridden, there is public participation, and robust processes in decision making.

RMA Reforms

- Regulatory Relief (Oppose. Labour moved to remove these provisions)
- Removal of Council placing Environmental caps (Oppose. Labour wants environmental limits to be actual limits)
- Changes affecting the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana Protection Act 2025 (Oppose. Labour proposed adding protections for the Gulf)
- Changes affecting the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008 (Oppose. Labour proposed adding protections for the Waitākere Ranges)