

20 October 2023

Via Email: ju@parliament.govt.nz

SUBMISSION TO THE JUSTICE COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL (LOWERING THE VOTING AGE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS AND POLLS) LEGISLATION BILL

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission on lowering the voting ages for local elections and polls.

The Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) is supportive of efforts to increase democratic participation and education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

QLDC recommends that any changes to voting in Aotearoa New Zealand be applied consistently to all elections, and that a comprehensive plan for civics education in schools is developed and executed alongside changes to the electoral roll.

QLDC would not like to be heard at any hearings that result from this consultation process. It should be noted that due to the timeline of the process, this submission will be ratified by full council retrospectively at its next full meeting.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,



Glyn Lewers
Mayor



Mike Theelen
Chief Executive

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1.0 Voting behaviour in the Queenstown Lakes District

- 1.1 The Queenstown Lakes District (QLD) is one of the fastest growing populations in Aotearoa New Zealand, with 5.6% average growth per annum over the ten years to June 2022. The district has a resident population of 50,160, the total population growth has been 74% over the past ten years, and Statistics NZ predicts that the district's population will grow an additional 48% by 2043.¹
- 1.2 In the 2022 local elections, voter turnout was only 43.05%² of those on the electoral roll in the QLD. This was a low result when compared with other local authorities and continues a declining trend since 2010 for voter turnout in the district for local elections.
- 1.3 Enrollment rates on the electoral roll for the QLD are higher among those aged 45+ when compared to the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand but lower for those in younger age brackets³. The exception to this is 18 to 24-year-olds. Compared to national figures for this age bracket, the enrollment rate in the QLD is much higher⁴. This signals that young people in the district are more engaged and aware of democracy in the QLD than in the wider Aotearoa New Zealand population.

2.0 QLDC supports efforts to increase youth civics education and participation

- 2.1 QLDC values positive democratic outcomes, transparency, and good governance and recognises that engagement and education with young people regarding civic participation and citizenship can encourage and nurture increased participation in local democracy.
- 2.2 QLDC partners with youth groups and schools to help inform and educate young people about the democratic process, how government works, and the value of participation. Recent activities include a poster design competition for the 2022 local election, a youth group participating at Community Board meetings and dedicated youth stakeholder group event to help shape the district's Spatial Plan.
- 2.3 The cost to include the approximately 700 people aged 16 and 17 enrolled in schools in the district⁵ in the local electoral roll would be an estimated \$2000 per triennial election⁶. QLDC considers that this cost is not a barrier to the inclusion of youth voters.

3.0 Alignment between the youth electoral roll and the general electoral roll is supported

- 3.1 QLDC supports alignment between a youth electoral roll and a general electoral roll, particularly the consistency in having both the Māori and non-Māori electoral rolls in the youth electoral roll as well as the general electoral roll. This would allow for a seamless transition from the youth electoral to the general electoral roll, but also allows Māori to choose on which roll they wish to be.
- 3.2 QLDC queries the implications of introducing a youth electoral roll to local elections and not general elections. Whilst the increased inclusion of youth in democracy and democratic processes is supported, this should not just be limited to local government. In lowering the voting age for local elections only, it could be perceived

¹ <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/community/population-and-demand>

² [Final voter turnout results - Vote 22 | Pōti 22 \(votelocal.co.nz\)](https://www.votelocal.co.nz/vote-22/poti-22)

³ <https://elections.nz/stats-and-research/enrolment-statistics/enrolment-by-local-council/>

⁴ <https://elections.nz/stats-and-research/enrolment-statistics/enrolment-by-local-council?name=Queenstown-Lakes+District>

⁵ <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/know-your-region/territorial-authority/student-population/age?district=70®ion=14>

⁶ Based on QLD cost planning for the 2025 local election.

that local government is less important and of lower consequence than general elections. There is an implication in the proposed changes that devalues local government and indicates that it is acceptable to experiment with local elections but not general elections.

- 3.3 It is also possible that a youth electoral roll for local government democratic processes alone and not including youth in the general election could cause confusion regarding eligibility to vote. For all of these reasons, QLDC recommends that a youth electoral roll be applied to all democratic processes and not limited to local government.

4.0 The introduction of a youth electoral roll alone will not encourage youth involvement in democracy

- 4.1 The addition of a youth electoral roll should not be a standalone development to encourage youth involvement in democracy. Other steps should be included, such as civics education as part of the mandatory school curriculum that is mandatory, not optional, and includes local government. Young people deserve to be armed with knowledge to properly participate in democratic processes so that voting is an ingrained habit from early in life. There is precedent for this type of curriculum both historically within New Zealand Aotearoa and currently in other countries.
- 4.2 During a period when participation in voting is decreasing and mistrust in central and local government is increasing, QLDC supports investment to help voters participate positively in democratic processes, shape policy, and represent the diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand communities, including young people.

Recommendations:

R.1 - QLDC recommends that any change in voting be applied consistently to all electoral systems.

R.2 - QLDC recommends that any work to develop and implement a youth electoral roll also includes a commitment to civics education curriculum to support democracy and the roll of youth.