

**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government



**Internal Affairs**  
**Te Tari Taiwhenua**

# **Simplifying Local Government**

## **A draft proposal**

Making local government simpler, clearer, and more  
cost-effective for all New Zealanders

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November 2025

*This document summarises a draft proposal for public discussion.  
It is not Government policy.*

## **About this document**

This document presents a draft proposal for Simplifying Local Government. Final decisions about the draft proposal will be made pending consultation. More information about this draft proposal can be found on the Department of Internal Affairs website:

[www.dia.govt.nz/simplifying-local-government](http://www.dia.govt.nz/simplifying-local-government). You can contact the Simplifying Local Government team by email at [simplifyinglocalgovernment@dia.govt.nz](mailto:simplifyinglocalgovernment@dia.govt.nz).

Changes to this document are tracked in Annex D.

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## Ministerial foreword

Local government matters. It shapes the places we live, the local services we rely on and makes decisions that affect us every day. But the system we have today isn't working as well as it should. We don't need yet another report or a review to tell us that local government needs to change.

Local government is meant to serve communities, not confuse them. But right now, the system is tangled in duplication, disagreements, and decisions that don't make sense. No wonder over half of New Zealanders don't vote in local elections.

Take the council that spent hundreds of thousands challenging a housing development over wetlands that didn't turn out to exist. Or the region where different councils and the Crown all employ park rangers to do similar jobs. Or the developer who needed consents from two separate councils for the same project, each with different rules, different fees, and different timelines.

This isn't just inefficient – it costs ratepayers time, money, and trust.

We're proposing a reset. Under this plan, regional councillors will be replaced by a new governing body. Our preferred model is a Combined Territories Board: a team of mayors who already know their communities and can work together to make regional decisions. It's a practical step that cuts through the clutter and brings clearer leadership. There are alternative options for regional governance set out in this document, based on the Crown Commissioner model, so with less local voice.

But the real change comes with the regional reorganisation plans.

Every region will be required to develop a plan that sets out how councils can work together to deliver services more effectively and efficiently. These plans will reflect local needs, include public input, and meet clear national standards. They'll look at everything from shared services to structural reform, and they'll be the basis for future decisions about how local government is organised.

This is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It's a framework for regions to design what works best for them, with a clear expectation that the outcome must be better than what exists today.

We want your feedback on this proposal. Whether you support it, oppose it, or have ideas to improve it, your views will help shape the final decisions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Chris Bishop".

Hon Chris Bishop  
**Minister Responsible for RMA Reform**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Simon Watts".

Hon Simon Watts  
**Minister of Local Government**

## We want to hear from you

The Government wants your feedback on a proposal for simplifying local government. This document explains what will happen if the plan goes ahead.

In short, the Government proposes replacing regional councillors with a board of mayors who will work together on regional issues. This new board will be required to identify how council services can be delivered more effectively and efficiently in the regions in a regional reorganisation plan. The Government will consider these plans for approval. We also want to hear your views on alternative short-term options for regional governance, including ones where the Government plays a bigger role.

The easiest way to share your thoughts with us and provide feedback on this proposal is through our [website](#). You can fill in a survey or upload your own written submission. We recommend using the survey to ensure your submission covers everything. You can answer as many or as few questions as you like.

To begin visit: <https://consultations.digital.govt.nz/simplifying-local-government/proposal>

or use this QR code:

Your feedback will help the Government consider refinements to the proposal before it makes any final decisions.



## What you need to know before you make a submission

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Before you share your thoughts, you should know:

- **Department of Internal Affairs staff will review submissions using digital tools and this may include artificial intelligence.** Technology helps us to quickly sort through submissions and identify the key issues people are worried about. It saves time and taxpayers' money.
- **We may proactively publish your submission or it may be subject to release under the Official Information Act 1982.** If there is anything in your submission that you do not want to be released, please clearly indicate this.
- **The Privacy Act 2020** governs how the Department collects and uses personal information about you and your submission. You have the right to access and correct personal information.

# Summary

## What is being proposed?

Most places in New Zealand have two separate councils – a regional council, and a city or district council (sometimes called ‘territorial authorities’). Each have a separate set of elected councillors who look after separate (but often similar) things.

There are 11 regional councils that govern services such as environmental management, regional transport planning, and civil defence. There are 67 city or district councils that govern services such as roads, water infrastructure, rubbish collection, libraries, parks, and land use planning. There are 6 ‘unitary authorities’ that combine the two roles.

The Government is proposing to simplify local government in two steps:

- **Step 1:** Instead of electing separate regional councillors, the mayors you already vote for will collectively lead regional issues and govern the regional council. We also want to know what you think about the appointment of Crown Commissioners (appointed by the Government) to lead or join the board.
- **Step 2:** This board of mayors will develop future-focussed plans for how the councils in your region can work together more effectively and efficiently. These plans will be developed in consultation with you, examined independently, and be approved by the Government.

## What is a combined territories board?

A combined territories board (CTB) is the name for the board that will handle regional issues and govern your regional council. The rates you already pay will fund the CTB.

## What exactly will a CTB do?

CTBs will take over the governance for the roles and functions of regional councils, such as:

- managing rivers, lakes, the coastal marine area, and air quality
- implementing any Treaty settlement commitments that are administered by regional councils
- managing assets
- regional transport planning
- civil defence and emergency management
- environmental regulation and resource management.

## How would a CTB make decisions?

CTBs will play an important role in making decisions about how your region is managed. To do so, CTBs will meet regularly, like how city / district councils do now.

When making decisions, each mayor would have a set number of votes. This number would be based on population and adjusted to ensure smaller communities receive effective representation. The independent Local Government Commission would make these adjustments.

CTB decisions must comply with the same laws regional councils have to comply with now, including consulting with communities and considering environmental impacts.

## What are the alternative options?

While a CTB made up of mayors is our preferred approach, we are considering alternative options for structuring regional decision-making in the short term. To ensure the system works in practice, we are seeking your views on alternative options that include a stronger role for the Crown. There are 3 options for a Crown Commissioner on the CTB:

- **Observer only:** Crown Commissioner has no vote
- **Veto power:** Crown Commissioner can override CTB decisions
- **Majority vote:** Crown Commissioner has more than half the votes on the CTB, with the remaining votes distributed among the mayors.

Another alternative option is to have no CTB at all and to appoint Crown Commissioners (Government appointees rather than elected representatives) to lead regional councils through the regional reorganisation plan (discussed below).

## How will a CTB balance urban and rural interests?

Currently, the law requires regional councils to act for the benefit of all or a significant part of its region. Decisions cannot be taken to the benefit of a single district. This legal obligation will carry over to the CTB (or Crown Commissioners).

Under the CTB model, participation by other agencies at the regional level will still occur where it is appropriate.

For example, regional land transport planning doesn't just include the regional council. It also includes the city and district councils, and the New Zealand Transport Agency. This makes sure urban, rural, and national interests are all balanced.

A similar model is being proposed for the new resource management system to strike a balance between urban, rural, and national interests. This approach is described later in this document.

## **Why this change?**

Local democracy is important, but many people don't vote in local elections or understand the difference between regional councils and city or district councils.

CTBs simplify governance by consolidating decision making with mayors. This reduces duplication (only one set of councillors) and ensures regional decision making is more aligned across councils. There would be clear accountability to the public by the CTB for delivery of regional services. If Crown Commissioners are appointed, they would have the same responsibilities as regional councillors currently have.

## **Are CTBs permanent?**

Each CTB would develop a regional reorganisation plan within two years of being established. Regional reorganisation plans will set out future-focussed ways that council services are delivered effectively and efficiently. Depending on the region, the CTB might be kept, dissolved, or repurposed via these plans. If Crown Commissioners are appointed, the appointments would run until a regional reorganisation plan is agreed.

These plans will need to reflect and incorporate local context and community feedback. They will:

- map all council functions in the region
- recommend the best delivery model for each of the functions across the region (e.g., shared services, joint council-controlled companies, or amalgamations)
- require mandatory consultation with communities, iwi, hapū, Māori, and stakeholders in the region
- be approved by the Minister of Local Government if they meet statutory criteria (not by referendum).

The goal of regional reorganisation plans is to design a better way for your councils to deliver services for you. The plans will reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and be responsive to local needs.

To support this, a Government review of regional council roles and functions will provide clarity on which responsibilities remain local and which may be either centralised or discontinued. This review will be completed before CTBs are established and CTBs will need to take into account the outcomes from this review when developing their plans.

The areas that don't have a separate regional council can opt in to doing regional reorganisation plans, but don't have to. These councils are Chatham Islands Council, Gisborne District Council, Marlborough District Council, Nelson City Council and Tasman District Council.



Auckland Council is set up separately to other councils so won't be able to develop a regional reorganisation plan.

### **What does it mean for me?**

If this proposal is implemented, the only thing that will change on day one is that your mayor will represent you regionally – rather than you having separate regional councillors do this. If Crown Commissioners are appointed, they will represent you regionally in the short-term until the regional reorganisation plan is completed.

All other things will continue until your mayor and your CTB develop the regional reorganisation plan and consult you on it. The plan would need to be submitted to the Minister of Local Government within two years of the CTB being established for approval. There will be no changes for Auckland Council. Other unitary authorities can choose whether they want to do a regional reorganisation plan.

In the meantime, regional council operations will continue as they do now. For example:

- all public consultation requirements remain under the Local Government Act 2002
- functions under the Resource Management Act 1991 remain unchanged (until that Act is replaced)
- stakeholder groups, advisory panels, and joint committees continue to operate
- Treaty settlement commitments, arrangements and obligations remain unchanged.

### **How can I have my say?**

Please make a submission on our website before 20 February 2026.

### **Where can I get more information?**

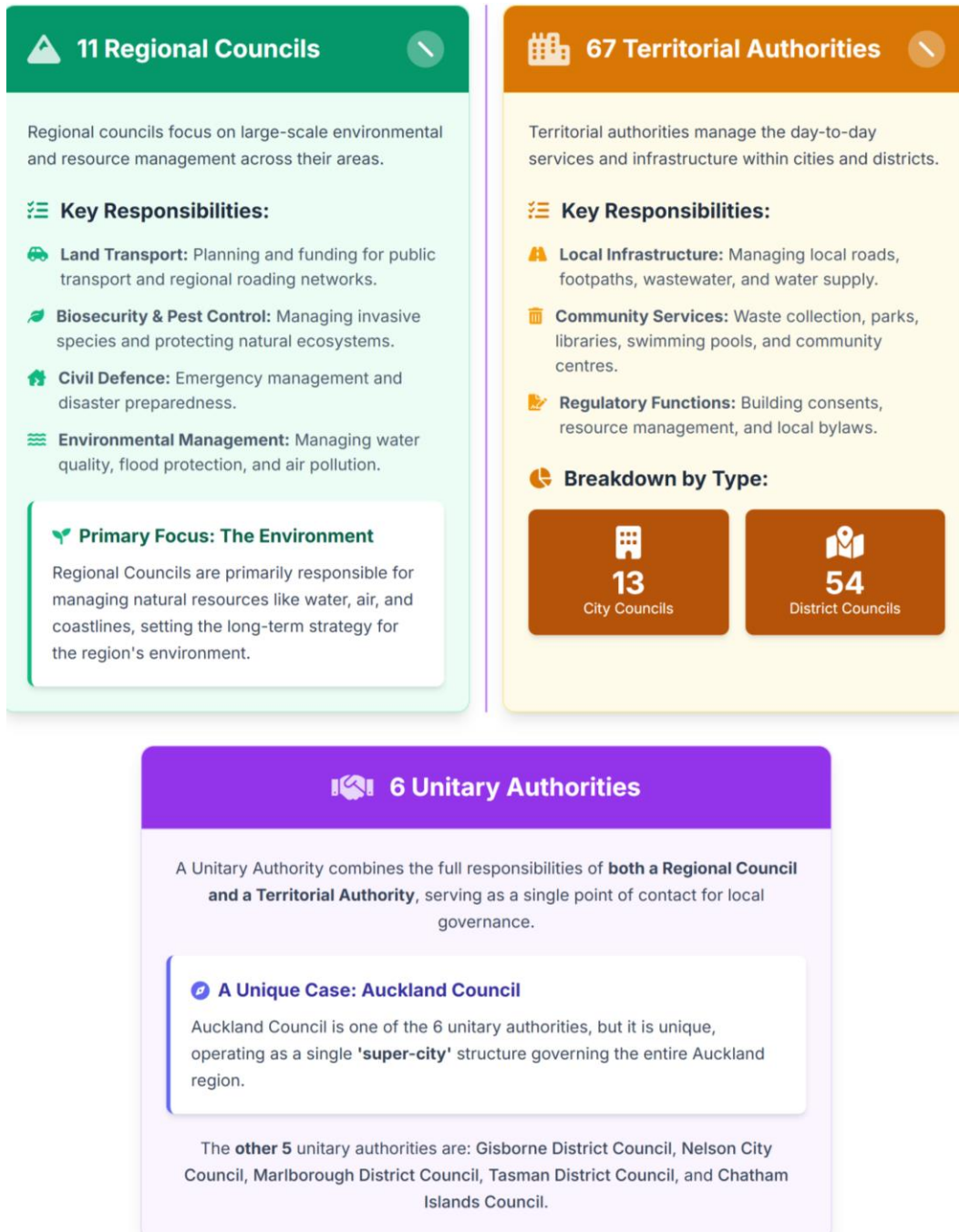
The remainder of this document provides further details on the proposal. There are four main parts:

- **Part A:** provides background information
- **Part B:** sets out how the proposal will simplify local government (including decision-making used for systems like transport and resource management)
- **Part C:** sets out how the proposal will improve local government
- **Part D:** sets out the proposal's impacts on Māori representation.

# Part A: Background

## What is local government?

New Zealand currently has 78 councils. There are **two overlapping systems of local government and two different types of councils**. One type is called a regional council and the other type is called a 'territorial authority' – known commonly as city or district councils.



Some areas have combined their councils into one 'unitary authority' including Auckland Council, Chatham Islands Council, Gisborne District Council, Marlborough District Council, Nelson City Council and Tasman District Council.

**Regional councils** are led by a chairperson and look after the 'big picture' environmental issues for the whole region like air quality, water quality, the health of lakes, rivers, and coastal areas, and managing pests. They are also responsible for public transport and play a key role in transport planning. There are 11 regional councils.

**City and district councils** are led by mayors and provide the day-to-day services and facilities for your local community, such as roads, rubbish collection, libraries, and parks. They also decide where and how new housing, businesses, and infrastructure can be built. There are 67 city and district councils.

For example, if you live in Kaiapoi, your two councils are Canterbury Regional Council and Waimakariri District Council. Each is governed by a separate set of elected councillors and run by separate chief executives, who employ separate staff. Both councils set rules for your area that influence what people and businesses can do (e.g., where you can build and how it must be built).

## Why do we need to change things?

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Two things have led to the Government developing this proposal.

Firstly, having two types of councils operating in the same area is complex, confusing, and costly. For example:

- While you might know your mayor, could you name the chairperson of your regional council?
- We have heard councils struggle to attract key staff as they compete for similar skills in the same area. For example, some regions may have Department of Conservation park rangers, regional council park rangers, and city/district council park rangers.
- Councils don't always work together well – there are examples of them contesting each other's rules and decisions in court.
- Some projects will require developers to obtain consent from two or more councils for the same project which can be complicated and confusing.

Secondly, we're thinking of the future. The Government's resource management reform and other changes (like water services reform and climate adaptation) will change how councils operate in the future. Resource management reform will bring more consistency across regional councils' functions. More activities will be permitted by default, reducing the work of councils in both planning and consenting. The Government has also announced plans to centralise some regional council functions as part of the new resource management system (for example, a national compliance regulator).

Both of these issues mean it is a good time to review how our councils work to see if there are better ways to do things.

### **What do you think?**

Do you agree there is a need to simplify local government?

What do you think of the proposed approach overall?

## **What's being proposed?**

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The Government has developed a proposal to make local government simpler, more efficient, and better value for money.

### **Step one**

Step one is to make mayors (or another city or district councillor) you already elect come together as a board to represent a region. This 'combined territories board' or 'CTB' would mean you no longer need separate regional councillors and the existing set would be removed. Alternative options are to include a Crown Commissioner on the CTB (with either a majority vote, a veto power, or an observer role only) or to replace regional councillors with Crown Commissioners in the short term.

### **Step two**

Step two is to require the mayors on the CTB (or the Crown Commissioners) to review how your councils work together and come up with a plan for more effectively delivering services on behalf of you and your region.

These two steps are discussed in more detail later in this document.

# Part B: Simplifying regional governance

## Making mayors work together for the benefit of your region

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### What would happen?

Territorial authorities are led by mayors. Under this proposal, all the mayors in a region would sit on a board that becomes responsible for the governance and decision-making on proposals that impact the wider region.

We call this board of mayors a ‘combined territories board’ (or CTB). The CTB would make the decisions regional councillors currently do.

This means you won’t have two separate sets of elected councillors for the same area. The CTB would take over all the regional council’s roles and obligations until step 2 is complete.

A list of CTB groupings and the councils in each is attached as Annex A.

### Why?

This simplifies local government in your region without you losing local control over your community assets and important decisions – your mayor would communicate these views to the CTB.

By simplifying governance at the regional level, decisions should be much more coordinated. It’ll be easier to understand who is responsible for what.

During step 2 of this proposal, CTBs will focus on making a plan that supports delivery of better services and value for money for your regions.

### How?

CTBs take over all **roles and functions of regional councils**, such as:

- managing rivers, lakes, the coastal marine area and air quality
- managing regional council assets
- implementing any Treaty settlement commitments which are administered by the regional council
- regional transport planning
- civil defence and emergency management
- environmental regulation and resource management

CTBs will meet regularly, like a council meeting. Decisions must comply with the same laws regional councils do, such as consulting communities, considering environmental impacts, and meeting other statutory obligations.

### **Are CTBs permanent?**

That will be up to the individual councils in the region. Further detail is set out in Part C of this document.

### **How will CTBs work in practice?**

CTBs will have to make decisions in the regional interest (not just one community), just as regional councils do now. Regional council operations remain the same for now.

CTBs will be able to establish committees on the same basis as they do currently. City and district councillors will be able to be appointed to committees by their mayor, as a delegate. This will help split the workload between the mayor and other councillors.

Any committees established as part of a Treaty settlement would remain in place.

Regional councillors are paid at a level set independently by the Remuneration Authority. The same will apply for CTB members and delegates (with modifications to the process as necessary).

### **What about the alternative choices for regional decision-making?**

A CTB is our preferred option but there are alternatives. A Crown Commissioner could be appointed to the CTB alongside the mayors. This would ensure that the national interest is considered in regional decision-making.

The Crown Commissioner could have:

- **no vote:** the Crown Commissioner would participate in discussions but not be involved in final decisions
- **veto power:** the Crown Commissioner would have the power to veto CTB decisions when they thought this necessary in the interests of New Zealand as a whole
- **majority vote:** the Crown Commissioner would have the majority vote on the CTB (more than 50% of the weighted votes). The remainder of votes would be distributed among the mayors as set out in our preferred option. This would ensure that decisions are made in the interests of New Zealand, not just the region.

Another option is to appoint Crown Commissioners to replace regional councillors. Crown Commissioners would be appointed by the Government to run regional councils in the short-term and to prepare the regional reorganisation plan.

### What do you think?

Do you agree with replacing regional councillors with a CTB?

What do you like or dislike about the proposal to replace regional councillors with a CTB?

What level of Crown participation in regional decision-making do you prefer?

- None – only mayors on the CTB
- Crown Commissioner (non-voting)
- Crown Commissioner (veto power)
- Crown Commissioner (majority vote)
- Crown Commissioners instead of a CTB.

## Allocating voting power

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### What would happen for voting arrangements on the CTB?

Currently, each regional councillor represents around 20,000 people so they get one vote each when they are making regional decisions. Under our preferred option (the CTBs), the mayors would vote.

Determining how many votes a mayor gets is challenging. There are two main options, but both have issues:

- **One Mayor, One Vote:** Every mayor gets one vote. This is simple but reduces the proportionality of voters. Mayors of small towns representing smaller populations would have the same power as mayors of large cities, allowing a minority of the population to have an outsized influence over the majority.
- **Pure Population:** A mayor's vote is weighted by the population of the city or district they represent. This is the most consistent with the democratic principles but could allow mayors of the largest city to dominate regional decisions.

A case study that shows how each example causes issues is provided as Annex B of this document.

### What are you proposing?

We are proposing that the number of votes a mayor gets:

- reflects the population they represent, **but**
- is adjusted by the Local Government Commission so communities receive effective representation.

The Local Government Commission is an independent agency separate from the Government. The principle of 'effective representation' is already used by local authorities when undertaking representation reviews.

### **What does effective representation mean?**

Effective representation basically means that all communities should have a voice in regional decisions.

### **How would the Local Government Commission balance effective representation with population size?**

The Government is considering options to balance population size with effective representation when it comes to the CTBs.

The first option is to leave it up to the Local Government Commission to determine what the right balance should be. This provides the Commission with lots of flexibility to take into account the uniqueness of New Zealand's diverse regions and communities, and to come up with innovative solutions. The downside is that communities wouldn't know in advance how much voting power their mayors would have until the Commission does its work.

The second approach is to provide the Commission with specific legal objectives and criteria to guide its decisions. Under this approach, the Commission would have to find the best possible balance between different objectives when allocating votes between the mayors on the CTB. Draft objectives that are being considered are set out in the table below.

Objective	Description
<b>Democratic legitimacy</b>	This is the "one person, one vote" principle. The system must acknowledge that a mayor representing 500,000 people has a different democratic weight than one representing 5,000.
<b>Effective representation</b>	The system must consider how distinct communities of interest in the region, including those with smaller populations or unique urban, suburban, and rural characteristics, are represented and protected, and can contribute effectively to decision-making.
<b>Effective governance</b>	The final system is transparent, understandable, and facilitates decision-making and consensus-building rather than promoting gridlock.



## Will this apply to all decisions?

No, some decision making at the regional level also requires participation of others. As an example, regional land transport planning includes the regional council, city and district councils, and the New Zealand Transport Agency. This makes sure urban, rural, and national interests are all balanced.

Like transport planning, a separate decision-making approach is planned for the new resource management system. This decision-making framework will ensure the management of common pool resources (such as freshwater) has strong regional governance that reflects a balance of interests across urban communities and rural communities. The Government proposes that, when certain resource management decisions are made, the CTB membership will be slightly different and a dual condition voting procedure will apply. A resolution would only pass if:

- CTB members representing more than 50% of the population support the resolution, and
- More than 50% of CTB members with a voting mandate for decisions on spatial plan chapters and/or natural environment plan chapters, support the resolution.

There is more information about the proposed decision-making process for certain resource management decisions in Annex C.

### What do you think?

Do you agree that mayors on the CTB should have a proportional vote adjusted for effective representation?

What do you like or dislike about the voting proposal for the CTB?

## Cross-boundary issues

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### What is this issue?

Most district and city councils are contained entirely in one region. A small number of districts have parts of their territory split between two or more regions, as the table below shows.

### How would the proposal account for cross-boundary issues?

It is proposed that the mayor of those districts will sit on the CTB for the region where the majority of the district's population lives. But isolated populations (people who live in a different region from the majority of their district's population) need representation too. Decisions made by the CTB for their region will affect them.

The table below sets out those districts which have populations in more than one region. The Government needs to determine how these people will be represented in CTB decisions.

District	Regions and approximate populations	
<b>Rotorua</b>	Bay of Plenty	72,000
	Waikato	3,900
<b>Rangitikei</b>	Manawatū-Whanganui	15,600
	Hawke's Bay	Less than 50
<b>Stratford</b>	Taranaki	10,000
	Manawatū-Whanganui	Less than 200
<b>Tararua</b>	Manawatū-Whanganui	18,700
	Wellington	Less than 10
<b>Taupō</b>	Waikato	38,000
	Bay of Plenty	Less than 150
	Hawke's Bay	Less than 100
	Manawatū-Whanganui	Unpopulated
<b>Waitaki</b>	Otago	21,600
	Canterbury	1,900
<b>Waitomo</b>	Waikato	9,500
	Manawatū-Whanganui	Less than 50

### What are you proposing?

The Government isn't proposing changes to regional or district boundaries. In the context of local government reform and resource management reform, those are decisions best left to communities to determine in the future (see Part C: Improving local government).

Instead, the Government is proposing that isolated populations are represented in one of two ways.

- **District adoption:** An isolated population is adopted by an adjacent district. That district's mayor has additional voting power to reflect their adopted community. While isolated populations currently can't vote for the mayor who will represent them on the CTB, the Government is considering whether this should be allowed.

- **Additional representation:** A district with isolated populations is represented on all CTBs their district is aligned with. They have a voting share that is proportionate for the areas of their district that are part of that region. Instead of the mayor, it may be a local ward councillor who attends the CTB to represent the interests of the isolated population.

The different approaches reflect the different needs of isolated populations of varying sizes.

To decide which approach is used:

- the Local Government Commission determines which approach is best for each isolated population (as part of its work determining voting power), **or**
- a threshold is set to determine when each approach is used. For example, isolated populations could be represented by district adoption if there are less than 1,000 people living there and by additional representation if there are more than 1,000 residents.

### **What do you think?**

What do you think about the ways that communities crossing regional boundaries could be represented?

# Part C: Improving local government

## Improving how councils work together in your region

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### What would happen?

Under the Government's preferred option, each CTB would be asked to prepare a regional reorganisation plan within two years of establishment. Regional reorganisation plans will set out how all the services and functions your councils deliver could be improved in the future. This plan could also be delivered by an alternative regional governance entity.

The plans will be designed to answer the question: *“What is the best way the councils in my region can work together to deliver effective and efficient services and functions in this region?”*

Before CTBs are required to do their reorganisation plans, the Government will review regional council functions to see if any should be reallocated to another agency or delivery model (e.g., where national consistency is needed) or are no longer necessary. The results of this review will guide future decisions and help CTBs prepare their regional plans.

### What happens to the CTB? Is it temporary?

Regional reorganisation plans will set out what happens to the CTB itself. Options include retaining, dissolving, or modifying the CTB. The preferred option will depend on the region and what is planned for the other councils. For example, a region that currently has eight city/district councils and a regional council could be divided into two unitary councils, without a CTB laying over the top.

If Crown Commissioners are appointed, they would be temporary. The appointments would continue until the regional reorganisation plan is completed. The Crown Commissioners would be required to work with the councils in the region to prepare the regional reorganisation plan.

### What is the purpose of regional reorganisation plans?

The purpose of regional reorganisation plans is to:

- encourage all the councils in your area to work together to reduce duplication and improve efficiency
- keep local voice and identity where it matters most
- ensure services are delivered in a way that fits the region's needs
- provide a structured, transparent process for reform.

## **What will a regional reorganisation plan include?**

Under the proposal, regional reorganisation plans will be broad and flexible so CTBs can adapt them to their region. At their core, they will have to:

- map all current functions across councils in the region and assess how well they are working together and opportunities to do better. Where appropriate, CTBs might look at certain functions across more than one region (with another CTB) or sub-regionally (where this makes sense)
- set out options for future delivery, such as:
  - sharing services to save money (e.g., one council does all the back-office functions, like legal, HR, and IT)
  - creating joint council-owned organisations so everyone in a region gets the same service (e.g., if two neighbouring councils have separate rules for household waste collection this can be both confusing and costly. Instead, they could create a new council owned company to run this service on behalf of the whole region)
  - combining to form one or more combined ('unitary') councils for the region (or parts of it)
  - design new ways for the community to input into decisions (e.g., empowering community groups to make more decisions on parks or recreational activity).
- consider the likely impacts on cost, service quality, and local representation of different options
- work with post-settlement governance entities in relation to any relevant Treaty settlement arrangements
- set out a financial and organisational transition plan.

CTBs would have to consult the public, iwi/Māori, and regional stakeholders on a draft regional reorganisation plan.

The Government is considering whether the law needs new options to let communities make decisions on local issues – such as libraries, pools, and other facilities. Right now, options include community boards and local boards. Any new option would be something CTBs could choose to propose in their regional reorganisation plan.

## **What happens after consultation?**

The CTB for your region will update the regional reorganisation plan based on community views. Revised regional reorganisation plans would be provided to the Minister of Local Government (the Minister). The Minister will receive independent advice from the Local

Government Commission on the regional reorganisation plans. The Local Government Commission will assess each regional reorganisation plan against statutory criteria set out in the table below.

The Local Government Commission will make a recommendation to the Minister on the quality of the plan, how it could be improved, and whether it strikes a suitable balance between the criteria. The Minister can then either:

- approve the plan
- provide feedback on the plan, and request changes
- make changes to the plan directly
- appoint a Commissioner to draft the plan (if the CTB fails to produce a robust plan).

Once the plan has been approved, the decision is final and implementation will begin.

### **Criteria for regional reorganisation plans**

Each regional reorganisation plan must demonstrate how the proposed changes meet the criteria set out in the table below. These criteria will guide assessment by the Local Government Commission and the Minister of Local Government. Further guidance for councils could be published to support understanding of these criteria.

Regional reorganisation plan criteria		
Criterion	Does the plan...	Example
Big-picture fit	...support national priorities, strategies and goals (like housing, infrastructure, and competitive business settings)?	All councils in the region agree to establish a 'one-stop-shop' for consents that support infrastructure and housing.
Affordable now and in the future	...provide a financially responsible arrangement that will manage rates increases and support them to manage assets well (e.g., replace pipes before they burst)?	Two very small councils combine into one, which means they have a bigger balance sheet and larger economies of scale. This may allow them to borrow money at a lower cost to replace an unsafe bridge which would otherwise be unaffordable.
Better services	...reorganise local services so they work better and cost less?	All councils in the region establish a single regional roading agency that has more power to bargain with big national roading companies when agreeing contracts.

Regional reorganisation plan criteria		
Criterion	Does the plan...	Example
Clear leadership	...set out who does what and who is responsible across councils?	Combining two very small district councils into one so that one mayor has a stronger voice representing the area to central government.
Local say	...let decisions happen at the right local level? Does the plan provide fair and effective representation of communities of interest?	Two very small councils join together but agree to establish neighbourhood assemblies that have their own budget for parks, libraries, and events.
Treaty arrangements	...show how all Treaty settlement commitments that are administered by councils and other agreements with iwi/Māori will be given effect to and/or improved?	Keeping arrangements for rivers as agreed in Treaty settlements.
Can it be done	...include a realistic plan for putting the plan into action (e.g., how council staff might be moved)?	A step-by-step timeline for establishing the new regional roading agency.

### Why Ministerial approval?

The Minister of Local Government will make decisions on regional reorganisation plans based on the nationally consistent criteria set out above. The Minister will need to consider independent advice from the Local Government Commission before making a decision. This provides an impartial check on whether plans meet statutory requirements for efficiency, representation, and Treaty compliance.

Importantly, Ministerial approval does not bypass community input. Public consultation by the CTB is required before any plan is finalised.

The alternative would be to hold a referendum. This process is costly and slow. Referendums often have low voter turnout and a tendency to favour the status quo. This means only a small proportion of people in the region end up making the decision.

**What do you think?**

Do you support the proposal to require CTBs to develop regional reorganisation plans?

What do you think about the criteria proposed for assessing regional reorganisation plans?



# Part D: Treaty of Waitangi and Māori Representation

## Overview

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The Government has considered the impact of the proposal on Māori rights and interests. The proposal has been designed to not undermine, disrupt, or affect Treaty settlements but is seeking a wide range of views to ensure this is the case.

Under the proposal, CTBs will inherit all the roles, functions, and obligations that regional councils and councillors have now. This will explicitly include provision for carrying over Treaty settlements that place an obligation on a regional council.

Existing arrangements for Māori engagement and participation will continue, including:

- appointments to council committees
- participation in joint committees
- involvement in joint entities established under Treaty settlements, and
- membership of advisory groups.

Further, CTBs will be required to comply with all existing provisions of the Local Government Act 2002, for example:

- establishing and maintaining processes for Māori to contribute to decision making
- ensuring opportunities for consultation with Māori.

## Broader impacts

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### Māori Constituencies

Under the proposed model, regional constituencies of any kind, including Māori constituencies and general constituencies, would no longer exist. This is because regional councillors themselves would be replaced by the mayors in the region appointed as members on the CTB.

The change reflects a broader simplification of regional governance. The mayor of the city or district council would represent voters from the Māori and general rolls.

### Local Acts relating to Māori representation

There are two regional councils with specific legislation for Māori representation:

- Bay of Plenty Regional Council (Māori Constituency Empowering) Act 2001. This Act requires the Bay of Plenty Regional Council to have Māori constituencies for the election of councillors.
- Canterbury Regional Council (Ngāi Tahu Representation) Act 2022. This Act allows Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu to appoint up to two members to the Canterbury Regional Council (Environment Canterbury) with full voting rights.

Both local Acts were designed for a governance model that included elected regional councillors. Under the proposal, there are no regional councillors. The change reflects a broader simplification of regional governance. The mayor of the city or district council would represent voters from both the Māori and general rolls. Territorial authorities that make up the CTB would continue to be able to consider proposing specific Māori representation for their communities in the form of Māori wards at the city or district council level but there would no longer be regional constituencies.

#### **What do you think?**

What do you think about how the proposal provides for iwi/Māori interests and Treaty arrangements?

## Annex A: List of territorial authorities by proposed CTB

<b>Northland</b>	Far North District Council Kaipara District Council Whangarei District Council	<b>Greater Wellington</b>	Carterton District Council Kapiti Coast District Council Lower Hutt City Council Masterton District Council Porirua City Council South Wairarapa District Upper Hutt City Council Wellington City Council
<b>Waikato</b>	Hamilton City Council Hauraki District Council Matamata-Piako District Council Ōtorohanga District Council South Waikato District Council Taupo District Council* Thames-Coromandel District Council Waikato District Council Waipa District Council Waitomo District Council*	<b>West Coast</b>	Buller District Council Grey District Council Westland District Council
<b>Bay of Plenty</b>	Kawerau District Council Ōpōtiki District Council Rotorua Lakes Council* Tauranga City Council Whakatane District Council Western Bay of Plenty District Council	<b>Canterbury</b>	Ashburton District Council Christchurch City Council Hurunui District Council Kaikoura District Council Mackenzie District Council Selwyn District Council Timaru District Council Waimakariri District Council Waimate District Council
<b>Taranaki</b>	New Plymouth District Council South Taranaki District Council Stratford District Council*	<b>Otago</b>	Central Otago District Council Clutha District Council Dunedin City Council Queenstown Lakes District Council Waitaki District Council*
<b>Hawke's Bay</b>	Central Hawke's Bay District Council Hastings District Council Napier City Council Wairoa District Council	<b>Southland</b>	Gore District Council Invercargill City Council Southland District Council
<b>Manawātū-Whanganui</b>	Horowhenua District Council Manawatu District Council Palmerston North City Council Rangitikei District Council* Ruapehu District Council Tararua District Council* Whanganui District Council	<p>* Indicates that the Council is affected by cross-boundary issues (see Part B)</p>	

## Annex B: Case study of voting power

This case study shows how two example voting systems cause issues. You can read about the proposed voting system on pages 14 to 16.

### Scenario

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Imagine a region with **5 mayors** and a total population of **500,000 people**.

- **Metro City:** 350,000 people (Mayor A)
- **Mid-Size Town:** 100,000 people (Mayor B)
- **Rural Town 1:** 25,000 people (Mayor C)
- **Rural Town 2:** 15,000 people (Mayor D)
- **Rural Town 3:** 10,000 people (Mayor E)

### Model 1: "One Mayor, One Vote"

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This is where every mayor gets one vote.

- **How it works:** There are 5 mayors, so any 3 votes can pass a motion.
- **The Scenario:** The three rural towns (C, D, and E) want to use the regional budget for a project that only benefits them. The two big cities (A and B) think it's a waste of money.
- **The Vote:**
  - Metro City (350k): Votes NO
  - Mid-size Town (100k): Votes NO
  - Rural Town 1 (25k): **Votes YES**
  - Rural Town 2 (15k): **Votes YES**
  - Rural Town 3 (10k): **Votes YES**
- **The Result:** The motion **PASSES, 3 votes to 2**.

**Why this is a problem?** The "YES" votes represent a combined total of only **50,000 people**. The "NO" votes represent **450,000 people**.

This system allows mayors representing just **10% of the population** to overrule the mayors representing the other **90%**. Even though all mayors will be required to act in the best interests of the region as a whole, there is a risk of unfair results.

## Model 2: "Pure Population" Vote

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This is where a mayor's voting power is only based on population.

- **How it works:** A motion needs over 50% of the population to pass.
  - Metro City (Mayor A) controls **70%** of the vote
  - Mid-size Town (Mayor B) controls **20%**.
  - The 3 rural towns control **10%** combined.
- **The Scenario:** Metro City wants to use the regional budget for a project that benefits city dwellers. Every single other mayor (B, C, D, and E) thinks it's a terrible idea.
- **The Vote:**
  - Metro City (70%): **Votes YES**
  - Everyone Else (30%): **Votes NO**
- **The Result:** The motion **PASSES, 70% to 30%**.

### Why this is a problem?

Rural communities may feel that the Metro City interests always carry the vote without adequate power for other communities' interests.

## Annex C: Voting for Resource Management Decisions

Some resource management decisions require a different form of decision making (from the CTBs) to ensure the management of common pool resources (such as freshwater) has strong regional governance that isn't fragmented across catchments and that balances urban and rural interests.

Under the proposed model, voting rights within CTBs are largely allocated proportionally based on the population of each territorial authority. They will then be adjusted, following advice from the Local Government Commission, to ensure fair representation for communities of interest.

For certain resource management decisions, a strengthened role for rural districts is needed. This is because these decisions will often affect rural land and rural communities, the protection and allocation of water resources, and flood protection across urban and rural land.

The Government has agreed to replace the Resource Management Act 1991 with two new Acts: the Planning Act and the Natural Environment Act. These Acts will require regional councils to:

- participate in the development of a region-wide **spatial plan chapter** of a combined regional plan, and
- develop and agree a **natural environment plan chapter** of a combined regional plan.

Ministers have decided that CTBs, if established, should be the decision-making body for both these new planning instruments.

Ministers have also decided that the relevant Minister would be able to appoint one member to a CTB for decisions on spatial plans and/or natural environment plans. Those appointees may or may not have voting rights at the Minister's discretion.

Finally, Ministers have decided that the voting arrangements CTBs use to make decisions on these new instruments would require that both:

1. CTB members representing more than 50% of the population support the resolution, **and**
2. more than 50% of CTB members with a voting mandate for decisions on spatial plan chapters and/or natural environment plan chapters, support the resolution.

This two-stage voting arrangement ensures that decisions reflect both population weight and broader district and rural interests. It also ensures that national level interests can have a 'voice' and influence on decisions where necessary.

## Annex D: Change log

Version	Date published	Status	Comment
1.0	25 November 2025	Superseded	
1.1	26 November 2025	<b>Current</b>	Editorial change at page 20 (correction of an example). Editorial change at Annex B (new first paragraph).