

25 August 2021

Hon Nanaia Mahuta  
Minister of Local Government  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

**[n.mahuta@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:n.mahuta@ministers.govt.nz)**

Tēnā koe e te Minita

### **Three Waters reform – engaging with our communities**

At a zoom meeting on Monday 23 August, all Mayors and Chairs of Otago & Southland (Zone 6) discussed the pace of the Government's three waters reform and the need to engage appropriately with our communities to inform council decisions. As well as engaging with our communities, you will also be aware that important conversations about the reform are continuing between Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and South Island councils within the takiwā.

The three waters reform process is a once-in-a-generation decision for councils and communities. It is also being undertaken at the same time as resource management reform and a review into the future for local government. As such, it is imperative that communities be given adequate time to clearly understand the implications of the three waters proposals that affect them so directly.

The ten Mayors and Chairs of Otago & Southland (Zone 6) are deeply concerned about the lack of information provided to the public regarding the reforms, especially when that is placed alongside the timeframe for a decision to opt out (if a Council chooses to do so) needing to be made some time before the end of this year.

Presently the information provided by Government to the broader community consists of television advertisements that provide virtually no information and a Department of Internal Affairs website that has an overload of highly technical information in a format that is very difficult for a layperson to navigate.

This is leaving individual councils doing their best with limited resources to inform the public about the reforms and the complexity of the choice before us.

We request that the Government pause the reform process to allow communities sufficient time to better understand the significant amount of complex information on which the Government has based its case for change and to allow councils to engage with our communities about it. Without this pause, there is a very real risk that communities will not be able to make informed decisions about the merits of the proposed reform. Rushing the engagement process will simply not provide for good decision-making, and the decisions made as a result could see adverse and costly consequences for communities, councils and the Government for many years to come.

It is very clear to Zone 6 that more time is needed to ensure our communities are as informed as they can be about the shape of the three waters service delivery reform in totality.

We urge the pause to be advised to the public now and remain in place until such time as Councils are satisfied that the reform issue is clearly understood. We believe this is essential in order to properly and authentically engage with our communities on this incredibly important decision.

To ensure we are demonstrating our collective leadership and reflecting the voice of our communities, we will be making a public statement that we have written to you to formally request a pause in this process.

Zone 6 looks forward to your consideration of our request. We would welcome a meeting or other form of engagement with you to further discuss our concerns.

Ngā mihi



Bryan Cadogan  
Mayor, Clutha District  
Chair, Zone 6



Tim Cadogan  
Mayor, Central Otago District



Aaron Hawkins  
Mayor, Dunedin City



Nicol Horrell  
Chair, Environment Southland



Tracy Hicks  
Mayor, Gore District



Tim Shadbolt  
Mayor, Invercargill City



Andrew Noone  
Chair, Otago Regional Council



Jim Boulton  
Mayor, Queenstown Lakes



Gary Tong  
Mayor, Southland District



Gary Kircher  
Mayor, Waitaki District

CC: Local Government New Zealand Zone 5 and 6 Mayors  
Dr Te Maire Tau, Ngāi Tahu