

Simplifying Local Government

CODC & QLDC discussion

Warren Ulusele
Local Government, Department of Internal Affairs

3 December 2025

THE GOVERNMENT'S PREFERRED OPTION FOR CHANGE

STEP 1: UNIFY REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

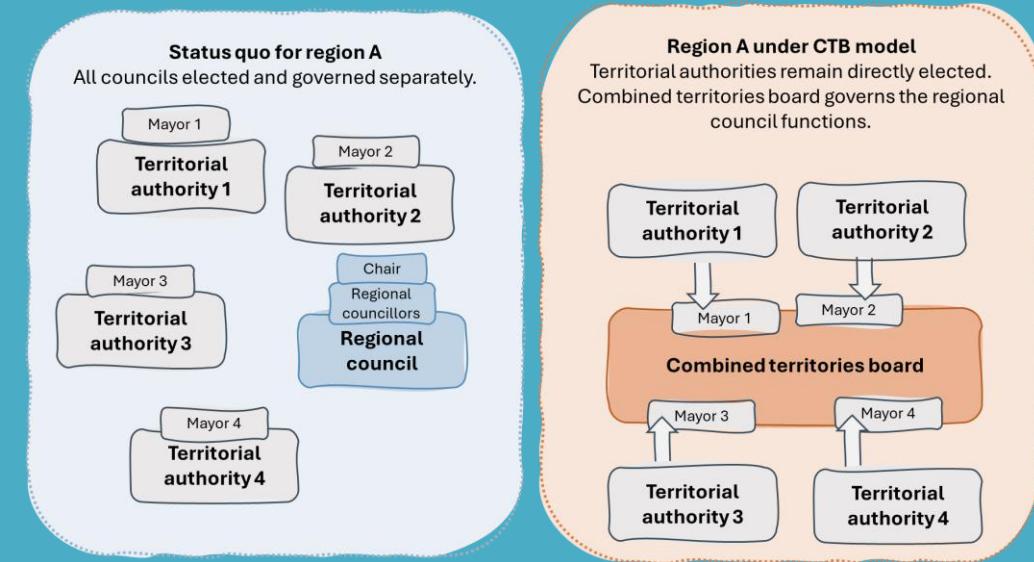
Replace separately elected regional councillors with a ‘combined territories board’ (‘CTB’) of city and district mayors.

Voting power will be moderated by the Local Government Commission to balance population size, effective representation and urban/rural interests.

The regional council organisation is otherwise unchanged, but with new governance.

While this is the preferred option, the proposal document signals alternative models that could be considered....

- For the mayors to be joined on the CTB by a Crown Commissioner (either non-voting, with a majority vote, or with a veto right), or
- For regional councillors to be replaced by Crown Commissioners without any elected representation.



STEP 2: ENABLE LOCALLY-LED REORGANISATIONS

The CTB (or Crown Commissioners) will prepare a ‘regional reorganisation plan’ (‘RRP’) on how to more efficiently and cost-effectively deliver local infrastructure, public services and regulatory functions by all councils within the region.

RRPs will consider amalgamations, shared services agreements, jointly-owned council companies and other relevant models.

Unitary authorities (which already have both regional and territorial authority functions) can opt in to the RRP process, except for Auckland.

RRPs must be delivered within 2 years. They must meet statutory criteria (to be developed), and be consulted on. Key criteria for inclusion in RRP will be affordability.

The Minister of Local Government would be the decision-maker on RRP, with advice from the Local Government Commission and in consultation with other relevant ministers.

▪ **Rapid review of regional council roles and functions**

▪ Starting immediately, relevant government agencies will rapidly review the roles and functions of regional councils to identify if any could be ceased or should be returned to central government.

▪ This review will focus on statutory functions of regional councils.

▪ Any changes to regional council functions would need to be signalled to CTBs before the RRP process starts.

Points to note

- The engagement document seeks public feedback on the proposals. There are 5 options to consider for the **composition of CTBs** – with Cabinet having expressed a clear preference for the first option comprising mayors
- All existing **Treaty settlement arrangements** relating to regional councils remain unchanged. This includes Māori participation on council committees and joint management agreements as provided for in Treaty settlements.
- **Policy decisions** on the content and process for Regional Reorganisation Plans will be made in March 2026 and will inform the draft legislation.
- **Resourcing** – CTBs will use regional council funding to put together their plans. There is currently no separate Government funding accompanying these proposals
- Councils will need to determine the **arrangements that best meet the needs of their regions**. There is no template for this but there will be criteria to inform the plans. Feedback is sought on this.

What happens and when?

- **10 November 2025** - Cabinet agreed to release a draft proposal for simplifying local government, for testing and refining with experts, post settlement governance entities and other stakeholders with an online submission form available.
- **25 November 2025** - Proposal document is released by Ministers (with an online feedback form for public comment).
- **November 2025 – February 2026** -
 - Engagement on the proposal document
 - Rapid review of regional council roles and functions.
- **20 February 2026 – Submissions close on the proposal document**
- **March 2026** – Ministers report back to Cabinet with a final proposal and preliminary view on any transfer/cessation of regional council functions.
- **Mid-2026** – Legislation is introduced and referred to select committee
- **Mid-2027** – Legislation is enacted

** Some timelines have yet to be determined. For instance, how long Regional Councillors will continue to operate which is an area where feedback is sought. Decisions will be made following consultation. However, Ministers have indicated that the 2025 local government elections are likely to be the last to include regional councillors.*

Questions