



## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION MANA KĀWANATANGA Ā ROHE**

### **Media Release**

**17 June 2013**

### **Local Government Commission decisions on Wairarapa application**

The application by Wairarapa councils to reorganise local government has progressed through another step.

The Local Government Commission has made several decisions relating to the application by Masterton, Carterton and South Wairarapa District Councils to form a unitary authority which would also assume responsibilities of the Greater Wellington Regional Council in the Wairarapa.

The Wairarapa councils' application proposes a unitary authority comprising a mayor and twelve councillors, elected from seven wards to ensure good geographical distribution and local participation. It also proposes the use of committees to address matters of special interest, such as Māori issues and rural issues.

The Commission has declared the districts of Masterton, Carterton and South Wairarapa; a small part of Tararua District currently within Wellington Region but proposed to be transferred to Manawatu-Wanganui Region; and the balance of the Wellington Region are affected areas under the application.

The Commission decided the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) would be materially affected in terms of its operational scale, scope and capability under the proposed application.

Eighty-eight GWRC staff are based in Masterton, 21 per cent of Council employees. The area of land GWRC administers would reduce by 72 per cent, affecting environmental and flood management operations. The changes could affect GWRC's ability to attract and retain specialist staff, which would impact on the capacity of GWRC.

In other decisions, the Commission has agreed to assess the application. It is satisfied there is demonstrable community support in the district of each affected territorial authority for local government reorganisation in Wellington Region. The legislation does not require evidence of majority support.

The Commission will continue to assess levels of community support for reorganisation in the Wellington Region and for particular options that may be identified during the process. At each step in this process the Commission will need to continue to satisfy itself on the existence of demonstrable community support.

The Commission has also decided to defer public notification of the application and to defer calling for alternative applications, pending the expected receipt and consideration of a further reorganisation application(s) relating to the Wellington Region.

The GWRC has advised the Commission it intends lodging a reorganisation application. The Commission will await this application and consider whether it meets necessary requirements. If so, the Commission will concurrently undertake the public notification of both the Wairarapa and Wellington applications.

## **Background**

The next stages of the process are as follows (legislative terms in bold):

- The Commission will await the application from the Greater Wellington Regional Council and determine whether it meets necessary requirements.
- The Commission will issue a public notice stating it has received the applications and invite **alternative applications**. Alternative applications are not the same as a public submission. The opportunity for public submissions occurs at a later stage. Alternative applications must contain information about changes or improvements rather than merely arguing for the status quo.
- The Commission will consider the **alternative applications** alongside the original applications and alongside **existing arrangements** (the status quo).
- The Commission will identify **reasonably practicable options** for local government in the affected area. One of these options must be the status quo.
- The Commission will determine its **preferred option**. The preferred option must have regard to a local authority's resources and communities of interest.
- If it does not select the status quo as its preferred option, the Commission will prepare a **draft proposal**. It will publicly notify the draft proposal and call for public submissions.
- It must also **seek the views** of affected local authorities, iwi and a range of statutory agencies, including the Auditor General; the Ministry for the Environment; the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment; Te Puni Kokiri, and Inland Revenue.
- The Commission **must consider** each submission and **may hold hearings** and undertake further **consultations** before deciding whether to proceed.
- If it does decide to proceed, the Commission will prepare a **final proposal** and publicly notify it. A period of 60 working days will be allowed for responses, for example a **petition to require a poll**.
- A petition of **10% or more of affected electors** in any one of the affected districts is able to trigger a poll.
- If **more than 50%** of valid votes support the proposal, or if no poll is called for, the final proposal will be implemented and the proposed changes will take place. If the

proposal attracts support from 50% or fewer of those voting, the reorganisation proposal will lapse.

In any event, no change would be made before the next local authority elections in October 2013. Guidelines on the reorganisation process are available at [www.lgc.govt.nz](http://www.lgc.govt.nz)

There are five unitary authorities in New Zealand: Auckland, Gisborne, Marlborough, Nelson and Tasman. Auckland is the most recent council to combine the two levels of local authority functions. The others became unitary authorities at varying times: Gisborne 1989; and Marlborough, Nelson and Tasman in 1992. The Chatham Islands Council also effectively operates as a unitary authority, as it is not within a region.

All other local authorities in the country work under a two tier framework of regional and district councils which have separate regulatory and planning responsibilities.

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### **Note for editors**

*The Local Government Commission is an independent body tasked with making decisions on local authority electoral matters and all applications relating to changes to existing boundaries, functions and areas of local authorities.*

*Its members are Basil Morrison, Grant Kirby and Anne Carter. They are appointed by the Minister of Local Government.*

*The legislation governing reorganisation of local authorities, Schedule 3 of the Local Government Act 2002, can be accessed [here](#).*