



LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION MANA KĀWANATANGA Ā ROHE

Media Release

21 June 2013

Reform of local government in the Wellington Region

An application for reform of local authorities in the wider Wellington Region has been received by the Local Government Commission.

The Commission's Chief Executive Officer Donald Riezebos was today handed a reorganisation application by Fran Wilde, Chair of the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC).

The Commission received a related application from three Wairarapa District Councils on 22 May. Those councils proposed changes to their structure and powers with the formation of a unitary authority which would assume the responsibilities of the GWRC in the Wairarapa area.

Mr Riezebos said the Commission had deferred some decisions on the Wairarapa application until it received the GWRC document.

"The Commission has been waiting for the Regional Council application in order to consider the reorganisation of Wairarapa and Wellington councils alongside each other, in the same process and timeframe", Mr Riezebos said.

"It makes more sense for the Commission, local authorities, ratepayers, residents and affected groups to know they are dealing with one process. The Commission will make this as efficient and straightforward as possible for all parties. There will be opportunities for public involvement at several steps along the way."

Mr Riezebos said the Commission will now carry out a preliminary assessment of the GWRC application to ensure it meets legislative requirements. "The Commission anticipates being able to consider issuing a formal public notice and to call for alternative applications within the next month."

Mr Riezebos stressed an alternative application is not the same as a public submission.

"The call for alternative applications is not an opportunity for individuals or groups to make a submission that merely argues for the status quo. An alternative application is expected to propose changes or improvements to local authority structures and to demonstrate the benefits and efficiencies of such change."

Alternative applications will be considered along with the original reorganisation applications and alongside the status quo.

The delivery of the GWRC application means the Local Government Commission is now considering reorganisation applications affecting the wider Northland, Hawkes Bay and Wellington regions. The affected areas involve 22 local authorities and an estimated population of more than 786,000 people.

Background

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

- The Local Government Commission will determine whether the GWRC application meets legislative requirements.
- The Commission will issue a public notice stating it has received the application 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 application and alongside **existing arrangements** (the status quo).
- The Commission identifies **reasonably practicable options** for local government in the affected area. One of these options must be the status quo.
- The Commission determines 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 prepares a **draft proposal**. It publicly notifies the draft proposal and calls 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 prepares a **final proposal** and publicly notifies 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

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.

Media enquiries

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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.

The Commissioners 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](#).