



Future local government options for Wairarapa

Questions & Answers - 23 May 2012

Here are some questions and answers about local government in Wairarapa, a study of options for its future, where to find more information, and how to provide some initial comments on a study (May 2012) into future options for the governance of Wairarapa.

Q. What is local government?

A. Local government is the system of locally elected members representing their communities and making decisions on their behalf. Its aim is to ensure the sustainable well-being of those local communities (*source Local Government NZ website*).

Q How is local government in Wairarapa currently organised?

A. Wairarapa is served by three district councils – Masterton, Carterton and South Wairarapa, and the Greater Wellington Regional Council. The district councils have a combined total of three mayors and 27 councillors who are elected every three years. There are also three community boards in the South Wairarapa District. Wairarapa has one elected representative on the Greater Wellington Regional Council.

Q. What is the difference between central and local government?

A. Central government (Parliament) is elected to deal with issues relevant to New Zealand and its people as a nation. Local government enables democratic local decision-making. Local government makes decisions about local issues and services, having regard to local needs and priorities (*source: Local Government NZ website*).

Q. What was the purpose of the study on future local government options for Wairarapa?

A. To provide a high-level analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of a range of local government options for Wairarapa in the future. It was also to determine whether a case exists for further work on a preferred alternative.

Q. Who was involved in the study?

A. The study was carried out by independent consultants Morrison Low who were chosen from 30 applicants. A joint working group of the three Wairarapa district councils (Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Councillors and Chief Executives) guided the project. Twenty-two local stakeholder groups provided input to the process.

Q. How was the study done?

A. There were two stages to the study:

1. Firstly, a joint vision for the region was developed along with a set of agreed aims for joint Council activity. These were agreed and adopted by all three Wairarapa district councils before stage 2 of the study began.
2. Stage 2 involved a high-level assessment of the advantages, disadvantages and risks of five options for future Wairarapa governance and service delivery.

Q. What options did the study identify for the future governance of Wairarapa?

A. Five options were identified and assessed:

1. **Three separate councils as now, more shared services** - 3 separate district councils sharing services such as water, building control, asset management and roading.
2. **Services delivered by forming one or more organisations separate to councils**, or Council-Controlled Organisations (CCOs) to deliver shared services on behalf of the 3 district councils.
3. **Wairarapa District Council** - amalgamation of the 3 district councils
4. **Wairarapa Unitary Council** - amalgamation of the 3 district councils and also responsible for all regional council functions and services within its area.
5. **Greater Wellington Unitary Authority** - amalgamating all 9 councils in the Wellington and Wairarapa regions.

Q. How might different communities within Wairarapa be represented under the options studied?

A. Any loss of representation would need to be balanced with a system that provided for affordable local decision making. For this reason the study recommended the use of wards to ensure all communities of interest are represented. It assumed a two-tier model of representation (described below) in the Wairarapa District Council, Wairarapa Unitary Council and the Greater Wellington Unitary Authority (super city) options.

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| Shared Services | No change to representation |
| One or more CCOs | No change to representation |
| Wairarapa District Council | Around 12 District Councillors, 1 Mayor Several Community/Local Boards & Maori advisory boards with significant decision-making responsibility 1 Regional Councillor |
| Wairarapa Unitary Council | Around 12 Councillors, 1 Mayor Several Community/Local boards & Maori advisory boards with significant decision-making responsibility |
| Greater Wellington Unitary Authority (super city) | One Councillor from Wairarapa One or more Community/Local Boards with significant decision-making responsibility |

Q. What is a 'unitary authority'?

A. A unitary authority is a council that is responsible for all local government within its geographical area. This includes both district and regional council functions.

Q. How were the different options assessed?

A. Each option was assessed against these criteria: affordability; transparent governance; fairness of representation; ability to deliver and operate good quality infrastructure and services at lowest cost; ability to deliver Wairarapa's well-being; risk management; and the ability to enhance, advance or improve on the status quo.

Q. What did the report conclude?

A. The report found that the most effective and efficient future local government arrangements for Wairarapa are likely to be a **Wairarapa Unitary Authority** or a **Wairarapa District Council**. It concluded that the coordinated approach that these options provide is likely to provide significant benefits for Wairarapa.

Q. Why are councils thinking about changing the way they are organised?

A. Local government across New Zealand is in the process of change. The amalgamation of Auckland in 2010 and central government's *Better Local Government* reform (March 2012) has councils considering how they are governed and what services they provide, how they work together and what are the best forms of local government in their areas under a new set of rules.

Q. Why is change needed?

A. Through its *Better Local Government* reform programme, central government aims to provide clarity around the role of councils, stronger governance, improved efficiency and more responsible fiscal management.

Q. When is this likely to happen?

A. The government has indicated that it would like change sooner rather than later. It is possible that this could be before the next local body election in October 2013. Auckland has already become a single authority. Other councils are looking at their options.

Q. What options are councils in the Wellington region considering for their futures?

A. Greater Wellington Regional Council's intention is to set up an independent panel to recommend the future governance arrangements for the Wellington region.

A. Wellington City Council intends to survey residents in the Wellington region including Wairarapa for their views on local government reform and four options proposed by Wellington City. Two of these options involve Wairarapa being governed by a Wairarapa Unitary Authority.

A. Other councils in the Wellington region are considering their preferred views on possible governance options for the region.

Q. Aren't the three Wairarapa Councils already working together?

A. Yes. South Wairarapa, Carterton and Masterton District Councils have a track record of cooperation over a number of years. This includes a Combined District Plan and shared services such as waste management, rural fire and civil defence operations.

Q. Wasn't there a similar review and consultation on this subject done in 2010/2011? What is different now?

A. Yes. A review of Wellington regional governance was done and Wairarapa people had the chance to submit their views on this. Wairarapa councils decided that a lot more information was needed about Wairarapa's options. It then commissioned the Morrison Low report in February this year.