

Our Ref: NR - 53541  
20 February 2026

Department of Internal Affairs - Te Tari Taiwhenua  
PO Box 805  
Wellington 6140



te kaunihera ā-rohe o  
**matamata-piako**  
district council

Dear Department of Internal Affairs - Te Tari Taiwhenua

### **Submission on Simplifying local government proposal**

1. Matamata-Piako District Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Government's Simplifying Local Government proposal. This submission sets out Council's general comments followed by responses to the consultation questions.

#### **About Matamata-Piako**

2. Matamata-Piako District is a rural/urban local government area in the Waikato Region of New Zealand's North Island, located east of Hamilton, forming part of the central "golden triangle" between Auckland, Hamilton, and Tauranga. Matamata-Piako includes the towns of Matamata, Morrinsville, and Te Aroha, together with a large rural area. The district has a growing population of over 39,000 (June 2025) and an economy centered on dairy, agriculture, and manufacturing.
3. The district features diverse landscapes, including the Kaimai Ranges and the Kopuatai Peat Dome and is known for dairy farming, thoroughbred breeding, and attractions such as Hobbiton, Te Aroha Mineral Spas, and Morrinsville's Herd of Cows.

#### **Context of this submission**

4. The Government has issued a proposal to simplify local government. This proposal would replace elected Regional Councillors with a Combined Territories Board (CTB). The CTB would be required to develop a Regional Reorganisation Plan (RRP) for Ministerial approval.
5. Due to the timing of the consultation period, Council has discussed the proposal but has not formally approved this submission.
6. Council broadly supports the attached letter from Hamilton City Council Mayor Tim Macindoe, on behalf of the Waikato Mayoral Forum. This submission complements the Mayoral Forum view and is accompanied by Matamata-Piako's own feedback.

#### **General comments**

7. Matamata-Piako supports the intent of simplification and functional review, however we have practical concerns about:

- how the process will operate,
  - the governance capacity of the Mayors to cover regional governance,
  - how regional plans will be developed, and
  - where the costs lie, particularly in the context of proposed rates capping.
8. The Government's proposal sets a high-level direction for reform, but the details of the process, governance mechanisms, and expectations for regions still require clarification. We support a credible, evidence-based regional review – with appropriate support, flexibility, and governance settings in place.

### **CTB representation must be fit for purpose**

9. Council supports system reform that improves efficiency, clarity, and value for communities; however, simplification still requires strong and effective governance. Our submission highlights potential unintended consequences that could impact upon local voice, local and regional representation and genuine partnership with iwi/Māori.
10. Regional Councils currently hold critical mandates for natural resource management and other functions. Disestablishing elected Regional Councillors before these responsibilities are firmly embedded in new governance structures risks creating gaps in oversight and a weaker, less integrated planning system.
11. Representation arrangements should reflect land area, local priorities, and risk exposure—not population size alone.
12. Authentic iwi/Māori partnerships are essential to effective governance and operations. The proposal lacks detail on Māori representation, including how iwi/Māori partnership obligations will be upheld once existing regional Māori constituencies are removed. Although RRP's must show how Treaty Settlement commitments and agreements with Māori will be honoured, genuine partnership requires explicit, durable mechanisms that extend beyond Treaty settlements.

### **Mayors' capacity and role**

13. Mayors are elected to represent territorial authorities, not to govern complex regional functions such as environmental regulation or to design an entirely new local government system. The workload already carried by Mayors, including significant reform programmes raises capacity concerns. The expectation that Mayors could simultaneously undertake regional governance and develop RRP's will be demanding and without substantial additional support, creates capacity and workload risks.

### **The two-stage process must support a genuine functional review**

14. A functional review should draw upon, rather than duplicate previous reviews. For example, the Review into the Future for Local Government Review completed in June 2023, examined how our system of local democracy and governance needs to evolve over the next 30 years to improve the wellbeing



of New Zealand communities and the environment, and actively embody Treaty partnership.

15. This report found communities were not well-served by the relationship between central and local government and called for radical overhaul, including the creation of a Crown department to manage the relationship, four-year local election terms, funding increases, and strong partnerships with iwi. All 17 recommendations were rejected by the Government in mid-2024.
16. A systematic review of regional functions is a sensible first step. It provides a methodical way to map out what services are delivered, by whom, and how effectively. This has the potential to create a shared evidence base for future decisions. This approach has the potential to reduce duplication, improve alignment, and clarify responsibilities. Matamata-Piako supports the intent of this. However, the two-stage process must enable a genuine functional review, rather than pre-determine structural assumptions such as amalgamation of Councils or centralisation of Council functions.

### **Sub-regional flexibility is essential**

17. We agree that New Zealand needs a more integrated, efficient, and future-focused system, but do not consider there is a “one size fits all” model. While we are ready to participate constructively in the process, we are concerned about the cost and capacity for Council to partake in the RRP process and the required stakeholder and public engagement.
18. The CTB structure, as proposed, presents risks for effective decision-making:
  - a) A single, region-wide decision-making body may not reflect the very different needs of metropolitan areas and rural communities (e.g. Matamata-Piako District is quite different to Hamilton City).
  - b) Without equal voting rights, the local priorities of Matamata-Piako could be diluted or delayed. Proportional voting risks overweighting Hamilton's scale (population, infrastructure, economic activity).
19. The CTB should have the ability to form sub-groups or working clusters (e.g. Matamata-Piako-Hauraki-Waipā) for issues that naturally operate at sub-regional scale or aligning to existing arrangements such as Waikato Waters Limited.
20. The governance model must allow for different solutions for different functions, rather than enforcing a single “one size fits all” model across the whole region or country. This may include metropolitan, regional, shared service, or delegated arrangements depending on what delivers the best outcomes.
21. Many core functions, such as transport, land use, growth, climate resilience, operate across regional boundaries. Flexible structures should be permitted that allow the CTB to reflect how the system works, not how boundaries were historically drawn.
22. Council expects the process to enable multiple viable pathways, allowing our community to have input and subsequently supporting the Government to confirm the model, or set of models, that genuinely works for the greater Waikato and Matamata-Piako District communities.



## Resourcing and costs

23. The governance salaries for Waikato Regional Councillors is around \$1.1million per year across 14 elected councillors. In the context of an organisation with a total operating expenditure of \$215 million (in 2024/25) this represents a small proportion of overall cost. We question if the removal of the Regional Councillors will result in any meaningful savings.
24. Additional resourcing will be essential to support Mayors, the Local Government Commission (LGC), and the wider –transition process. Without additional resourcing it is unlikely that Mayors will be able to effectively take on Regional Council governance and develop a comprehensive plan for future local government service delivery across the region, while continuing to deliver their existing roles including the significant reforms already underway (particularly resource management, water services, and rates capping).
25. The LGC is proposed to undertake a vital role at least during the two-year RRP development phase, so will also require additional resourcing to enable timely and quality outcomes. Once RRP have been approved, transition support from the Government will be essential for successful implementation.
26. A staged approach should be considered to mitigate district/city councils' capacity risks and enable input from Regional Councillors. For example, a CTB of Mayors (with or without a commissioner) e.g. through the Waikato Mayoral Forum, could be responsible for developing the RRP within two years, while Regional Councillors would continue in their roles for the same period with a mandate to run the day-to-day business of the Regional Council. This would avoid a gap between Waikato Regional Councillors' roles being disestablished and the RRP being implemented.
27. Council is concerned about the costs of our involvement in the RRP and engagement with the community and stakeholders, especially in the context of rates capping. RRP are intended to be comprehensive in their coverage, i.e. encompassing all services and arrangements. The investigation of the costs and benefits of different governance and service delivery options is a time and resource-intensive requirement.
28. To reduce unnecessary duplication and cost, we request that consideration is given to suspending/deferring some existing legislative requirements until the Simplifying Local Government reforms are confirmed. Matamata-Piako and other Councils will be undertaking a representation review, under the Local Electoral Act 2001 over the coming year. This will set our representation arrangements for the 2028 local elections. Representation reviews require a 1–2-year process, including engagement with our communities to identify, develop, and confirm communities of interest and revised electoral boundaries, if required. We note that local authorities are not all aligned to the same representation review cycle, resulting in inconsistent timing across the sector.
29. The upcoming review will need to take into account the 2025 referendum outcome, for the disestablishment of Māori wards and the current non-compliance representation ratios across the wards. These will have an impact upon the shape of the future representation model we adopt.



30. Council is mindful of the risk of confusing our communities, and of the cost to ratepayers, if we undertake a full representation review that may become redundant should the Simplifying Local Government reforms lead to major structural changes in the future.
31. For these reasons, we ask that consideration be given to pausing the requirements for representation review until the Simplifying Local Government reorganisation plans are confirmed and future boundary and representation arrangements are settled. This is on the basis that the status quo representation arrangements apply for the 2028 elections (except for Māori Ward given our referendum outcome).

### **Timing and interactions with wider reforms including Resource Management reforms**

32. Successful achievement of the aims of this proposal will be very difficult without better recognition and sequencing of the raft of local government reforms underway.
33. Council is already responding to the substantial reform agenda currently being advanced by central government. Both the RMA reform programme and this Simplifying Local Government proposal indicate extensive sector wide structural change, with implementation expected over the next 1–3 years. The proposed CTB, in particular, has the potential to make major changes to representation arrangements.
34. Expectations on councils and their communities to navigate the best pathway forward are significant given the complexity and overlapping timeframes of the reform initiatives underway and in the pipeline. This includes Matamata-Piako's shift to Waikato Waters Limited for delivery of water and wastewater services later this year.
35. The resource management system reform and the simplifying local government proposal have timeframe overlaps and some content overlaps, e.g. the new regional plans required by the resource management system reforms would start to be developed by a committee of the Regional Council over the next 1-2 years, then would be taken over by a different group of people (the CTB comprising all Mayors from the region) to complete alongside the RRP.
36. It is proposed that CTBs, if established, should be the decision-making body for regional councils for two new planning instruments - region-wide spatial plan chapter of a combined regional plan, and natural environment plan chapter of a combined regional plan. We seek clarity on aspects of this:
  - a) Will there be provision for iwi representation on the decision-making body for the spatial plan and natural environment chapter?
  - b) Will the proposed approach remove expertise and community voice?
  - c) Will this proposal remove environmental protections the Regional Councils were set up to oversee?
37. Another example is central government have indicated monitoring functions undertaken by local authorities could be nationalised. If current functions



undertaken by local government are to be nationalised then central government should be clear on what these are prior to the RRP.

38. There is a cumulative effect of local government reforms that places pressure on councils. The timeframes to finalise the design of these reforms, including considering the interrelationships between them, and the subsequent implementation need to be carefully considered.
39. To ensure the greatest chance of success, we recommend that:
  - a) the reform is progressed in a manner such that the future arrangements are determined in a timely manner, removing the ongoing uncertainty which has surrounded the local government sector for many years
  - b) transition to the new structural arrangements for the local government sector proceeds in parallel with other reforms impacting on local government where it is practical and efficient to do so.

## **Responses to consultation questions**

### **Background**

#### **1. Do you agree there is a need to simplify local government?**

- Yes, in part. We agree that some system reform is needed, however we strongly question if the first step to addressing this is the removal of the governance layer of Regional Councils. We do not consider this will achieve much, if anything (including the stated intentions of this proposal). We also see this as unlikely to reduce any costs (in fact it may increase costs with Crown Commissioners plus Mayors).
- We suggest local government be reformed by addressing issues of unfunded mandates, unclear and competing national direction, unclear accountabilities, and the fragmentation of functions. To simplify local government, we must look at the entire system of government.
- Costs of compliance, especially around three water activities, are high. Complexity in governance can hinder coordinated planning and service delivery.
- The collaboration and shared services that currently exist across the Waikato region – e.g. Civil Defence Emergency Management, Co-Lab (Waikato Local Authority Shared Services CCO), Waikato Waters CCO and many other areas also needs to be recognised.

#### **2. What do you think of the proposed approach overall?**

- The problem definition would benefit from clearer evidence to ensure reforms achieve the stated purpose of making local government “simpler, more efficient, and better value for money.”
- We highlight that there is a need to differentiate the importance of each region in New Zealand and the contributions they make to the whole.

### **Simplifying regional governance**

#### **3. Do you agree with replacing regional councillors with a CTB?**

- Disagree
- Removing recently elected Regional Councillors raises democratic concerns and risks diluting local and regional voices, especially without robust Māori representation mechanisms. There are 11 Mayors and 14 Regional



Councillors in Waikato; simply swapping one group for the other reduces regional governors unless appointments are added, and the roles are not interchangeable. Mayors already carry full-time responsibilities; adding regional governance and RRP development risks overload.

- Role of Mayors
  - Mayors are elected by local communities to represent district/city interests not for a broader regional oversight role on complex/different issues like environmental regulation or to design an entirely new system of local government.
  - We question the capacity of Mayors to undertake functions at both a local and regional scale. Having just held local elections, we have seven new Mayors in the Waikato region (out of 11) Council acknowledges that while some elected members, including within Matamata-Piako, have prior experience as councillors or mayors, the level of local government experience among newly elected Mayors across the region varies. Coming up to speed with Territorial Authority business, and then regional matters, this would be a big ask.
  - Mayors already fulfil full time roles. The roles presently held by regional governors whilst not full time, still require a significant dedicated resource. Existing Mayoral roles are already very busy, adding Regional Councillor responsibilities will be demanding.
  - Waikato Regional Council currently has approximately 13 committees and at least 3 sub-committees, which if the current governance structure is retained would need to be covered by the Mayors. Additional responsibilities may fall on the Deputy Mayors to cover where the Mayors are covering the regional duties.
- The proposal does not set out how a chair for the CTB would be appointed, and/or whether the chair would have a casting vote for regions where there are an even number of Mayors (11 for the Waikato) and where a vote is tied. We recommend that both of these matters are addressed in the final proposal and legislation. The CTB chair could be elected by CTB members, as per current Regional Council processes. Where a Government-appointed CTB member is in place, we question whether it's intended that they would take up the chair role?

#### Transition

- Transitional provisions are an important consideration that the proposal does not fully address. To move from the existing arrangement to the CTBs is unlikely to make the CTBs successful in their first iteration.
- Also, the reform needs to be mindful of the work of the CTBs and how much decision-making power they will have, particularly as this relates to resource management reform.
- The CTB members will have a tenure that expires in 2028, that is probably the best opportunity to appoint governors who are fully aware of roles and responsibilities and can better appreciate their role and function.
- In looking at the numerous reform proposals, CTBs, who will have responsibilities for developing and making decisions on the Regional Spatial Plan chapter of the Regional Combined Plan, must have this complete (with best endeavours) by the third quarter of 2027; this is of concern. The decisions on the Regional Spatial Plan Chapter, which is a significant component of the resource management system reform framework, should not be made by members with a less than 12-month tenure.



**4. What do you like or dislike about the proposal to replace regional Councillors with a CTB?**

- Dislike. CTBs are likely to place increased accountabilities on Mayors, who already have significant governance and local leadership responsibilities. CTBs could reduce their capacity to engage effectively in local governance.
- There would be an increased expectation placed upon Mayors to govern Regional Council business as usual (existing statutory requirements) and developing the RRP.
- Current regional governance arrangements include Māori constituencies. The CTB proposal does not offer an equivalent mechanism. Removing this structure without the need for a representation review through a public process is of concern.
- Regional Councillors and Mayors have been elected to govern different statutory functions; the roles are not simply interchangeable. Mayors and the communities they represent relate to existing Territorial Authority functions and are not representative of functions and services delivered regionally.

**5. What level of Crown participation in regional decision-making do you prefer?**

1. None – only Mayors on the CTB
  2. Crown Commissioner (non-voting)
  3. Crown Commissioner (veto power)
  4. Crown Commissioner (majority vote)
  5. Crown Commissioners instead of a CTB
- OPTION 1 – Mayors only on the CTB.
  - Alternatively, if there is to be a Crown Commissioner we think they should have non-voting rights (Option 2).
  - Local authorities should remain accountable to their communities. Crown participation, representing national interest, can be addressed through legislation, national instruments, and funding.
  - Crown involvement or appointment of commissioners can be seen as a fundamental challenge to local democracy. Ratepayers are the main funders of council activity and participate in processes to determine where that funding is allocated (or not) and elect the people to make the decisions on what should get funded. Government appointees, who it is assumed will be funded by ratepayers, are not elected by voters.

Allocating voting power

**6. Do you agree that mayors on the CTB should have a proportional vote adjusted for effective representation?**

- No. Proportionality voting risks underrepresenting rural/provincial districts with a large land area like Matamata-Piako and areas with high seasonal populations and elevated hazard exposure (e.g. Thames-Coromandel).
- We do not consider that proportional representation is effectively achieved based solely on the number of residents. Weighting proportionality on populations alone cannot account for other important considerations, such as local issues, projects, growth etc.
- Many issues such as flood protection, coastal management, biodiversity, pest management are not determined by numbers of people in a geographic area.



The use of a proportional vote seems a simplistic tool to use for significant investment decisions and effective representation.

- Proportional voting also ignores natural hazard management currently handled by Regional Councils. Disestablishing Regional Councils without fully embedding this mandate in the new governance model could weaken oversight and integrated risk reduction planning.
- Governance must consider risk exposure, not just population. One vote per CTB member aligns with existing approaches such as Regional Land Transport Committees and Civil Defence Joint Committees.

#### **7. What do you like or dislike about the voting proposal for the CTB?**

- Dislike. Proportional voting ignores local priorities and needs. Recommend one vote per CTB member.
- Although Ministers' decisions have already been made regarding the CTBs taking over responsibility for development of the regional spatial plan and natural environment plan, we note the significant capacity risks for Mayors (and their elected members and supporting staff) if the two sets of legislative changes proceed and are implemented simultaneously as currently signalled.

#### Cross boundary issues

#### **8. What do you think about the ways that communities crossing regional boundaries could be represented?**

- Matamata-Piako District is currently contained entirely in one region (Waikato). We do not have any specific comments on how the small number of districts which have parts of their territory split between two or more regions could be represented.
- We generally prefer the district adoption option (where an isolated population is 'adopted' by a neighbouring district), however this would depend on the size of the isolated population.

#### Improving local government

#### **9. Do you support the proposal to require CTBs to develop regional reorganisation plans?**

- Yes. It makes sense that the CTB, or transitional entity/entities with these functions, have responsibility for the development of regional reorganisation plans, but being mindful of other points raised in our submission, we believe that these should be done in a wider reform context looking at the timing and sequencing of resource management and other reform.
- This support is on the basis that sufficient and appropriately skilled resource is made available (through funding or direct appointment at officer level) to enable this work to be delivered to the standard required to produce an accurate, robust, well-evidenced RRP, within the required timeframe.
- Please also refer to our previous comments on resource and timing risks created by competing demands to deliver on the raft of local government reforms underway, while continuing to focus on the council's 'day job' including Long Term Plan development and delivery.



**10. What do you think about the criteria proposed for assessing regional reorganisation plans?**

- Support in principle. We would recommend the addition of one further criterion, being 'Efficiency of operating model'. Local government needs an operating model that delivers services and infrastructure more efficiently, while maintaining strong local governance and representation by and on behalf of communities.
- Our view is that collaboration will be key to ensuring the future form and function of local government is fit-for-purpose, while not compromising local voices or negatively impacting important considerations such as protecting the environment.

Treaty of Waitangi and Māori Representation

**11. What do you think about how the proposal provides for iwi/Māori interests and Treaty arrangements?**

- We are concerned about the lack of detail in the proposal regarding fulfilment of Treaty Settlement obligations. For reform to be successful, the Treaty Settlement relationship, and associated responsibilities, must be clearly defined. This is the responsibility of the Crown, and ratepayers should not end up funding determination of this relationship as an unintended consequence of local government reform.
- Removing Māori constituencies risks weakening iwi/Māori input into regional governance.
- Governance models must include mechanisms that enable authentic iwi/Māori representation and decision-making.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this proposal. If you have any questions about our response, please contact Manaia Te Wiata, Chief Executive, on 07 884 0060.

Regards



Ash Tanner  
Mayor, Matamata-Piako

**Appendix 1 – Letter from Waikato Mayoral Forum**





OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
HAMILTON

29 January 2026

Hon Simon Watts, Minister of Local Government,  
Hon Chris Bishop, Minister Responsible for RMA Reform,  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160

Tēnā kōrua Minister Watts and Minister Bishop,

### **Local Government Reform – Waikato Mayoral Forum**

Thank you for the opportunity to engage constructively with the Government's local government reform programme. The Waikato Mayoral Forum sees this reform as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address long-standing systemic issues, strengthen local democracy, and ensure local government can continue to deliver for its communities into the future.

The Forum would like to highlight the following matters in relation to our region.

### **The Waikato region is central to New Zealand's economic performance and long-term resilience.**

Projected rapid population growth across Hamilton, Waikato and Waipa, peri-urban settlements, rural towns and villages, and coastal communities will require coordinated and well-funded long-term planning. The region's location as a critical national transport, freight, and logistics corridor supports a diverse economy spanning agriculture, advanced manufacturing, technology, renewable energy, aquaculture, tourism, healthcare, and forestry. Waikato also manages significant natural resources, including river catchments, geothermal assets, 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> of coastal marine area, 1,200 km of coastline, and \$1.1B in flood protection infrastructure. Our strengths are further supported by a growing Māori economic base and the longstanding cultural and regional leadership of the Kingitanga.

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**A focus on partnerships, relationships and collaboration support the current complexity of the region's governance.**

The region's governance environment comprises 12 local authorities, over 40 iwi including six large iwi groups, and more than 200 hapū. Waikato has demonstrated an enduring desire and ability to work collaboratively with central government, including through the Future Proof partnership. We are demonstrating leadership through the formation of two water service entities in response to Local Waters Done Well legislation. Existing regional governance structures such as the Waikato Mayoral Forum, the CE Forum and the Iwi Governance Forum, illustrate proven leadership and implementation capability.

The Forum urges you to consider the following critical points as you progress with this programme of reform.

**Waikato is ready to partner on nationally aligned, enduring reform.**

The government's reform agenda requires a whole-of-government approach with clear alignment across legislative changes, clarity of functions at all levels, and localised decision-making preserved where it best serves communities. Long-term planning for growth, infrastructure, and climate adaptation must be supported.

The Waikato CE Forum has already initiated work on the unique value proposition of local government, its' form and function, and how this can best support communities within an aligned national system.

**Effective reform requires genuine partnership.**

Recent reform processes have at times, minimised local government's role. A bipartisan national vision, shared governance responsibilities, and recognition of the value of local government assets are essential. The Waikato seeks a reset based on trust, shared outcomes, and an equitable partnership.

**Effective reform requires a whole of system approach**

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Reform will only succeed if it is considered as a whole system and not as individual parts. The reform programme will have a significant impact on local government and communities, however it is not clear that a whole of systems approach is being adopted. We urge the government to reconsider the timing, varied decision-making models and funding and financing impacts associated with each element of the reform programme so local government can implement reforms effectively. We also urge the government to consider the overall financial impact on communities as the reform programme includes additional responsibilities for local government, and any move away from LGFA funding is likely to increase the financial burden on communities.

**Transition costs will be significant.**

To ensure successful implementation, central government will need to provide additional funding, enable new financing tools, and allow councils to pause major statutory processes such as long-term plans, audits, and representation reviews, to be able to meet the costs of reform. DIA (Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport – MCERT) will also need to be adequately resourced to work closely with the regions on this reform.

Transitioning to a new system for local government and resource management will be complex and resource intensive. Transitional support will be required to assist the sector to deliver transformation at scale. Any changes to form and functions should be aligned and well sequenced, with implementation timing coordinated so benefits can be realised. Transition timeframes should also take account of significant events such as local and national elections and be clearly communicated so communities and ratepayers understand when changes will occur. Ideally the timeframe would ensure that the reorganisation is concluded within the next triennium, to avoid the risk of re-litigation and re-education of new elected members.

**Longstanding issues on funding of local government must be addressed.**

The purpose of local councils is to do the things that their communities want them to do and are prepared to pay for. Councils should be accountable to those affected by their decisions and from whom they can require funds. Where legislation (including statutory

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national direction) creates functions of national benefit, those mandates should be recognised and funded by central government.

Unfunded mandates, the absence of GST on rates being returned to councils, the lack of Development Contributions/Levies and rates paid by central government on Crown property, needs addressing so there is equitable Crown contribution to local government activity from which it directly benefits.

Reform should also enable a wider set of financial levers and tools, in addition to rates, to improve transparency, efficiency and affordability while maintaining strong local accountability. Without new tools and equitable Crown support, councils will face unsustainable pressures, especially for infrastructure essential to supporting regional and national growth.

**Iwi partnership is fundamental to current and future governance, and decision-making must occur at scales that strengthen democratic practice.**

Te Tiriti obligations must be embedded consistently across the reform programme. Te Tiriti settlements have marked a new era in relationships between the Crown, Mana Whenua and iwi. These relationships, supporting statutory obligations, and Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato are integral to local government in the Waikato and must be given effect to in the new system.

Nationally supported tools for participatory and deliberative democracy will help ensure communities remain engaged and represented and allow room for a community voice in decision-making. This is an opportunity to improve community engagement, enable a strong local voice, and lift efficiency and transparency across the system.

**Protecting and restoring the natural environment is a long-term investment.**

Resource management must reflect rural and urban interests, catchment-scale needs, and Treaty settlement arrangements. Durable, evidence-based, and integrated decision-making frameworks are required.

Protecting and restoring the natural environment is not a cost; it is an investment in New Zealand's long-term economic resilience and prosperity, human health, and international

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standing. Ensuring local government is equipped to safeguard these assets is essential for maintaining prosperity and cultural identity that are inseparable from the natural world. Resource management decisions involve competing demands and must enable local solutions within a nationally consistent framework. Consideration of appropriate catchment management needs to be made, as the legislation is progressed.

**Investment in national standards and systems would reduce fragmentation and inefficiency.**

Central government can materially improve system performance through national technical standards, methodologies, and consistent systems—particularly in consenting.

Under-investment in standards has also increased litigation risk for local decision makers. National standardisation does not automatically mean operational delivery must shift to a national agency; rather it can enable more efficient and consistent local delivery.

To enable more efficient delivery, and therefore better value for ratepayers, standardised tools across the local government sector are essential. Nationally consistent system-design tools – such as shared templates, digital platforms, and standardised operational models would ensure all councils are working from the same foundations, reduce variability, and streamline the transition process.

Shared national systems such as common asset-management platforms, consistent financial and rating system templates, and unified customer-service or digital engagement tools would substantially reduce duplication and improve accuracy and productivity. Sector-wide standardisation is a practical and high-impact way to lift efficiency, lower system costs, and support councils to deliver core services more effectively

**Crown and iwi representation on the Combined Territory Boards is essential.**

The Forum supports Crown representation on the Combined Territories Board through Commissioners with expertise in both local and central government. To uphold a genuine partnership, Commissioners should hold voting rights consistent with other members. Iwi representation on the Board and involvement of the Regional Council Chair will also be essential.

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The Waikato region is committed to working constructively with central government to achieve a resilient, connected Waikato that underpins national prosperity. The Forum is keen to get started.

Nāku iti noa, nā

On behalf of the Waikato Mayoral Forum / Waikato Region

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Macindoe'.

Hon Tim Macindoe  
**Mayor of Hamilton**  
**Chair Waikato Mayoral Forum**

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