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Simplifying Local Government team
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Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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Waimakariri District Council submission on Simplifying Local Government

1. Key Points

- 1.1. The Waimakariri District Council (the Council) thanks the Government for the opportunity to provide a submission on the *proposal for simplifying local government* (the Proposal).
- 1.2. The Council supports the overall intent of the Proposal to modernise the local government sector and welcomes the opportunity to develop a regional solution informed by local knowledge and existing regional priorities.
- 1.3. However, we note that the scale and pace of the Proposal is extremely ambitious and carries a risk of unintended consequences, particularly given the number of concurrent reforms affecting the sector - most notably the resource management reform programme.
- 1.4. The Council considers that to best utilise the opportunity available through this structural review, a concurrent review of the financial instruments available to the sector should be undertaken. We also note that these reforms have the potential to have a significant impact on the workload for elected members, and on local Government funding.
- 1.5. The Council and the Waimakariri community strongly believe that local people are the best placed to develop and deliver solutions for their communities. We are concerned that this proposal may move key decisions away from those that understand the needs of the community and the environment.

2. Waimakariri District

- 2.1. The Waimakariri District spans a diverse range of environments, from the provincial towns of Rangiora, Kaiapoi, Woodend/Pegasus, and Oxford to the remote high country of Lees Valley. The district is home to approximately 74,000 residents, with around 80% living in the eastern part of the district and about 60% concentrated in the four main towns. Waimakariri also has one of the highest proportions of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand, with more than 6,500 lifestyle properties. Sustained growth since the 2010–11 Canterbury earthquakes, alongside projections indicating a population of 100,000 by 2050, continues to shape the district's development pressures and planning priorities.

2.2. Following the earthquakes, the Council worked closely with national agencies, iwi partners, and local communities to rapidly restore critical infrastructure and essential services. Strong emergency response capabilities in flood mitigation and vegetation fire management remain a key focus. Despite ongoing growth and recovery pressures, the Council has maintained prudent fiscal management, with average rates increases (including allowing for the significant costs) of 4.8% over the past decade and an AA (Stable Outlook) credit rating from Fitch. The proposed average rate increase for 2026/27 is 4.91%, with a general average increase (excluding 3 waters) of 2.9% for most ratepayers. The Council's recovery leadership, infrastructure investment, and community focused planning—particularly through the District Plan Review—have been widely recognised by central government and the Office of the Auditor-General.

3. General comments

3.1. The local government sector has been calling for meaningful reform for many years, recognising that the current structure and available funding mechanisms is no longer fit for purpose and requires modernisation to meet the needs of our changing communities.

3.2. The Council views the current local government reform programme as an opportunity to modernise the system, so it is more efficient, sustainable, and reflective of the needs of our communities. As always, our priority is ensuring that the voices of Waimakariri are heard and understood by the most appropriate decision makers.

Appropriate governance and decision-making

3.3. The Council continues to strongly champion localism—the principle that local solutions are best shaped by those closest to the issues. This is a view strongly shared by our community, who have been clear through Three Waters reform that their preference is for local ownership, management and solutions. In our submissions to the Planning Bill, Natural Environment Bill and Emergency Management bill we highlight some areas in which local input into decisions at many levels has resulted in positive outcomes. We welcome the opportunity for a Canterbury Combined Territorial Board (CTB) to develop a regional reorganisation plan (RRP), however, as set out below, we consider that this is most effectively achieved in an environment that allows a clear understanding of how the wider reform package fits together, and how decisions may impact one another.

3.4. Effective governance needs to be supported by a strong understanding of the unique characteristics of our communities and environments. We also acknowledge the reality that Councils have made different asset management decisions since local government reform, and the principle that any future reform should not unfairly prejudice communities that have invested prudently.

Effective change management

3.5. To effectively support the Government's objectives, clarity is essential. The Council notes that Simplifying Local Government is currently a proposal, and we understand that draft legislation will be released in the coming months. While key elements provide a high-level outline of the proposed representation model and assessment criteria for RRP, further detail is required. Without this, the Council cannot fully

evaluate the suitability or implications of these components to ensure that the Government's objectives – and the needs of our local communities – will be appropriately served.

- 3.6. Although delivered individually, the recent reforms produces a matrix style forward work programme for councils that must progress cohesively to avoid unintended consequences and costs for the sector and the communities they serve.
- 3.7. The Council emphasises the importance of fully understanding the implementation requirements, sector interdependencies, and the practical implications of the proposed legislative changes. We encourage active collaboration between central and local government staff to build a shared, practical understanding of how the reforms will be delivered and to support effective, coordinated implementation across the sector.
- 3.8. For example, we note the timing and significant undertaking associated with the Regional Spatial Plan signalled in the Planning Bill. The Spatial Plan is expected to commence this year and will therefore be developed in advance of any new regional reorganisation legislation. This Bill requires councils to have a view on regional reorganisation ahead of the implementation of this programme. This out-of-order sequencing risks a misalignment in outcomes. It also introduces the real possibility of significant rework of spatial planning documents. This underscores the importance of aligning reform timeframes.
- 3.9. To ensure a successful implementation we need to access additional funding levers to ensure we don't pass on any extra costs to our ratepayers during this area of reform. The proposed changes represent a significant undertaking for the local government sector, and adequate resourcing will be essential to manage the interim period and achieve sustainable, long-term outcomes. While the Council supports the intent to improve efficiency, we also recognise that delivering the best reorganisation plan will incur short-term costs - costs that our ratepayers are unlikely to support without corresponding central government investment.
- 3.10. The Council believes a review of the Rating Act and rating methodology should occur at the same time as this process, to better inform decision making. That review should look at fairer ways to share tax revenue across the country. For example, returning the GST collected on rates to councils, effectively removing a tax on a tax, would allow that money to be reinvested back into local communities. This would help reduce the burden on ratepayers and ensure local funds are not redirected to projects outside their districts.

Regional Reorganisation

- 3.11. The Council supports a collaborative approach that benefits from a shared services model for improved efficiency, while still enabling localism, and/or improves existing levels of service. The best way for us to achieve this is to work in partnership with other Canterbury councils to develop the best possible governance arrangements for the region.

- 3.12. Across Canterbury, councils have already begun working differently. Recognising that legacy systems from the 1980s and 1990s were no longer keeping pace with change, we are moving toward greater systems alignment and data collaboration. Standardising platforms and sharing data strengthens both localism and regional cooperation. This integrated approach of one platform is essential and should be endorsed nationwide as a model for modern, connected local government.
- 3.13. Community voice must remain central to this process. Options should be developed and tested in consultation with our communities to ensure decisions reflect local priorities and needs.

Table 1 (Appendix 1) provides responses to the consultation questions.

Our contact for service and questions is Dianna Caird – Senior Policy Analyst, Strategy and Business Unit, dianna.caird@wmk.govt.nz.

Yours faithfully



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Mayor
Waimakariri District Council



Jeff Millward
Chief Executive
Waimakariri District Council

Appendix 1

Table 1 – Waimakariri District Council position on the Simplifying Local Government Proposal

Question	Council response
1. Do you agree there is a need to simplify local government?	Agree
2. What do you think of the proposed approach overall?	<p>The Proposal represents a substantial shift in regional governance and will require strong and effective collaboration between councils. This Council is an active member of both the Greater Christchurch Partnership and the Canterbury Mayoral Forum, which set strategic priorities and provide oversight for regional projects.</p> <p>While councils are well experienced in working collaboratively across the region, the Council notes that undertaking dual governance roles will add complexity. Careful coordination will be required to ensure this does not impact the delivery of services, activities or capital projects across the region.</p> <p>The Proposal should also be aligned with the timing of other Local Government and Resource Management reforms to provide clarity and avoid unnecessary overlap or duplication.</p>
3a. Do you agree with replacing regional councillors with a CTB?	We need to work in partnership with other canterbury councils around what is the best governance structure, systems and processes that are best for canterbury.
3b. What do you like or dislike about the proposal to replace regional councillors with a CTB?	Refer above to 3a.
4. What level of Crown participation in regional decision-making do you prefer?	None.
5. Do you agree that mayors on the CTB should have a proportional vote adjusted for effective representation?	Refer to 3a

Question	Council response
6. What do you like or dislike about the voting proposal for the CTB?	Refer to 3a we would like to work collaboratively all Canterbury Councils.
7. What do you think about the ways that communities crossing regional boundaries could be represented?	This will be determined by the resulting governance structure. There is no point pre-empting any outcomes until those structures and processes are determined.
8. Do you support the proposal to require CTBs to develop regional reorganisation plans?	Refer to 3a
9. What do you think about the criteria proposed for assessing regional reorganisation plans?	The high-level criteria proposed supports the government's focus on delivering efficient and effective public services. The Council would require a greater level of detail before commenting on whether the criteria is fit for purpose to assess a RRP.
10. What do you think about how the proposal provides for iwi/Māori interests and Treaty arrangements?	Our Council has built a constructive relationship with mana whenua, based on the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Canterbury Councils and Ngai Tahu are partnering together on this and other matters for the Canterbury region.