



**Media Information**

**16 May 2012**

## **Report outlines future local government options for Wairarapa**

A high-level report into options for the future shape of local government in Wairarapa has found that the most effective and efficient arrangement for the region is likely to be a single Wairarapa Unitary Authority or a Wairarapa District Council.

It also concluded that more detailed analysis is needed on the costs, benefits and risks of the two options.

The report by consultant Morrison Low, commissioned by a joint working party of the mayors, deputy mayors, councillors and chief executives of Carterton, Masterton and South Wairarapa District Councils was released today after being presented to a meeting of all councillors on Tuesday 15 May.

It analysed the advantages, disadvantages and risks of five options for future Wairarapa governance - enhanced status quo, shared services delivered by one or more separate council-controlled organisations, a Wairarapa District Council, a Wairarapa Unitary Authority, and a Greater Wellington Unitary Authority.

Each option was assessed against criteria developed after a joint vision and aims for the region's future were adopted by the three Councils following consultation with 22 stakeholder groups representing iwi, business, farming, environmental, social, health, sporting and arts interests.

Under the district council option a Wairarapa District Council would be formed by amalgamating the three Wairarapa councils. All existing Regional Council functions would continue to be carried out by a Wellington regional council assuming that such an organisation still existed under any new Wellington local government structure.

The Wairarapa unitary authority option would see the three Wairarapa councils form a single council that was also responsible for all regional functions and services within its area. Local community boards would ensure good representation from across the region under this and the amalgamated district council scenario.

The report concluded that an enhanced status quo option that built on the three councils' existing shared service arrangements was unlikely to make a long-term difference to the sustainability of the three councils.

The option of forming one or more separate organisations to deliver shared services on behalf of the three councils had the disadvantage of focusing on single services rather than an integrated and coordinated approach across Wairarapa.

The fifth option, a greater Wellington unitary authority or super city, would put Wairarapa within a single council that included Wellington, Lower Hutt, Hutt, Porirua, Kapiti Coast and Greater Wellington Regional Council.

In a joint statement Carterton mayor Ron Mark, Masterton mayor Garry Daniell and South Wairarapa mayor Adrienne Staples said that local government change in the Wellington region was inevitable in the short to medium-term because legislation to be introduced into Parliament this month would require more effective and efficient councils. "Wairarapa communities of interest now have the chance to be masters of their own destiny and take part in deciding the best local government option for their future."

"No decisions have been made and we've still got more work to do in understanding the cost implications of the various options."

"Once the three councils have had a chance to discuss the report at their meetings over the next week we will agree on the next steps which will include a process to hear the views of Wairarapa residents on the various options. In the meantime we welcome initial comments or feedback on the report." The full report is available at council offices and libraries and on council websites. The three Wairarapa councils have increased their co-operation and shared services in recent years with a range of initiatives including a Combined District Plan, a shared waste management contract and joint rural fire and civil defence operations.

This report released today followed a 2010 governance review jointly commissioned by the Wellington Mayoral Forum which includes the three Wairarapa mayors. Consultation on that review by the Wairarapa district councils last year found there was not appetite for a Wellington super city that included Wairarapa.

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**Further information from:**

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## Background information

**October 2010:** A governance review of Wellington and Wairarapa councils by Price Waterhouse Coopers was commissioned by Wellington Region Mayoral Forum.

**July/August 2011:** The consensus of submissions by Wairarapa people on the Wellington Region Governance Review was that Wairarapa was a separate area from Wellington and there was not appetite for a Wellington super city that included Wairarapa.

**December 2011:** Wairarapa councils made a joint decision to do an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of a range of options for joint local government management and service delivery in Wairarapa (the Morrison Low report).

**February 2012:** The report was commissioned by a working party of the three mayors, deputy mayors, one councillor from each council and the three CEOs. The working group commissioned Morrison Low to undertake this work after receiving almost 30 proposals from various consultants.

**March 2012: *Better Local Government*,** Central Government's eight point reform programme was released. It aims to provide better clarity about councils' roles, stronger governance, improved efficiency and more responsible fiscal management.

Legislation on the first four points will be introduced into Parliament in May 2012 for passing in November 2012.

1. Refocus the purpose of local government
2. Introduce fiscal responsibility requirements (i.e. income, expenditure, debt levels)
3. Strengthen council governance provisions
4. Streamline council reorganisation procedures

The other four points will feed into a second Local Government Reform bill proposed for 2013.

5. Establish a local government efficiency taskforce
6. Develop a framework for central/local government regulatory roles
7. Investigate the efficiency of local government infrastructure provision
8. Review the use of development contributions

Auckland local government has already been reorganised.

Councils around New Zealand are considering how they might best be organised in future. Wellington city and regional councils are included in this and a range of options are being considered by these councils. Some of these involve Wairarapa.