

Joint Submission of the Wellington Mayoral Forum

Simplifying Local Government – A Draft Proposal

27 February 2026

1. Introduction

The Wellington Regional Mayoral Forum (the Forum) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government's draft proposal to simplify local government. Thank you for accepting our late submission.

This submission reflects the common positions of eight of the nine member councils of the Forum:

- Greater Wellington Regional Council
- Hutt City Council
- Kapiti Coast District Council
- Masterton District Council
- Porirua City Council
- South Wairarapa District Council
- Upper Hutt City Council
- Wellington City Council.

The Forum acknowledges the intent of Government to simplify local government and create a system better able to respond to future challenges. The Forum submits this response as a single regional voice based on the areas where all participating councils have clear agreement.

2. Support for the intent

The Forum supports the intent to simplify, streamline, and strengthen local government. Local government is under increasing pressure from climate change, resilience demands, ageing infrastructure, housing need, changing demographics, growing regulatory requirements, and significant cost pressures.

Reform that improves system-wide coordination, clarity, and the ability of councils to respond to future challenges is welcomed.

3. Upholding local democracy and community voice

Across the region there is strong agreement that reform must protect, and ideally strengthen, democratic accountability and community voice.

All councils agree that:

- communities must retain a direct relationship with their elected representatives

- existing democratic mandates should not be interrupted
- reforms must not diminish local representation or reduce the responsiveness and accountability of decision-makers
- communities must continue to have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions about future local government structures.

These principles are essential to maintaining public trust in local government.

4. Position on the Combined Territories Board proposal

The Forum does not support the proposal to replace elected regional councillors with a Combined Territories Board (CTB) made up of territorial authority mayors.

All councils share the following concerns regarding the proposed CTB model:

- removal of directly elected regional representation
- a reduction in democratic legitimacy
- placement of mayors in roles that conflict with their existing local mandates
- unsustainable additional workload for mayors
- loss of regional specialist capability and institutional knowledge
- insufficient clarity about resourcing, accountability, and cost
- absence of formal Māori representation
- risk of unmandated structural change or amalgamation.

For these reasons, the Forum does not support the CTB model as proposed.

5. Preference for locally led, flexible, and evidence-based pathways

The Forum supports a reform process that:

- allows regions to develop their own reorganisation plans
- builds on the strong collaborative structures that already exist in the Wellington region
- enables different regions to adopt structures that suit their geography, population, and community preferences
- begins with a clear understanding of the problems to be solved before proposing structural solutions
- ensures that any transition is coordinated with other major changes and reforms currently affecting local government (for example, resource management, rates capping, water services, and climate adaptation).

6. Commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori representation

The Forum agrees that giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi must be a core part of any future local government model.

All councils support:

- formal Māori representation in future governance arrangements
- the protection of existing Māori wards and Māori representation structures
- the involvement of iwi and hapū as partners in any future reorganisation or regional planning processes.

These commitments are essential to ensuring that local governance reflects Te Tiriti obligations and supports strong relationships with mana whenua.

7. Resourcing and funding requirements

The Forum agrees that adequate resourcing and funding is essential for any changes to be workable.

All councils note that:

- the proposal does not explain how new governance arrangements or transitional processes will be funded, and
- there is a risk that costs could fall disproportionately on local ratepayers.

Councils also face significant capacity pressures due to multiple overlapping reforms.

Clear and sufficient resourcing, both financial and workforce, is necessary to support effective implementation.

8. Clarity on roles, responsibilities, and transition processes

The Forum agrees that further detail is required on how roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities will operate during and after any transition.

All councils identify the need for clarity on how:

- responsibilities will be divided between regional and local functions
- accountability will be maintained throughout transition
- regional specialist capability and institutional knowledge will be retained
- effective community representation will be reflected in future arrangements
- transition processes will align with ongoing statutory work and other national reform programmes.

All councils also emphasise the importance of maintaining clear, locally elected decision-making throughout any transitional arrangements.

This clarity is necessary to understand the full implications of the proposal and to ensure that any transition supports stable and effective local governance.

8. Conclusion

The Wellington Regional Mayoral Forum supports the goal of simplifying local government but does not support the Combined Territories Board model as proposed.

The Forum encourages the Government to work with regions, iwi, and communities to develop a more flexible, locally led, and democratically robust pathway for reform, one that strengthens accountability, gives effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and builds on the strong regional collaboration already in place.

The Forum welcomes continued engagement with the Department as this work progresses.

Signed,



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