

Hon Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister for Housing and Infrastructure
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

9 August 2026

Kia ora kōrua Ministers Watts and Bishop,

Wellington Region Head Start Proposal

We are writing on behalf of Hutt City Council, Porirua City Council, South Wairarapa District Council, and Wellington City Council to submit the attached Wellington Region Head Start proposal. We believe this proposal meets the requirements you have set.

The councils of the Wellington Region have a long history of working together to address issues that transcend local boundaries, including growth management, infrastructure planning, waste management, transport, economic development, resilience, emergency management, catchment management, and environmental stewardship. We remain committed to doing so, no matter the outcome of this process.

This proposal is one of two that will be submitted by councils within the Wellington region. This proposal is a region-wide unitary proposal supported by Hutt City Council, Porirua City Council, South Wairarapa District Council, and Wellington City Council, councils that together represent more than 73% of the region's population and 86% of the region's GDP. The second proposal is for a Wairarapa unitary proposal supported by Carterton District Council and Masterton District Council (this will be submitted separately to this proposal). These proposals reflect the positions of the individual councils involved. Kāpiti Coast District Council and Upper Hutt City Council have not agreed to be part of this proposal, and on their behalf we convey their request for some form of offramp from the Head Start pathway.

The proposal of our four councils reflects constructive and collaborative discussions between all councils in the region. While there is not a single agreed view across all councils, we have worked in good faith to identify areas of common ground and to faithfully represent the perspectives of participating councils.

The joint position of all councils in the region as agreed by the Mayoral Forum is attached to this letter.

Our proposal seeks to establish local government structures for the whole region that strengthen a unified voice while collectively delivering for growth, the environment, and all communities. The proposal will amplify shared regional priorities underpinned by a strong integrated planning system. It will enable us to partner more effectively, retain local voice and include mana whenua in decision-making consistent with our Treaty partnerships.

We are seeking local government reform that meets the below principles:

- Improves effectiveness and efficiency in supporting population and economic growth, and environmental protection
- Provides for effective local representation
- Includes mana whenua in governance, consistent with Treaty settlements and obligations
- Promotes and enhances the region's reputation as a place of opportunity, creativity and innovation, and
- Ensures affordability for ratepayers and long-term financial sustainability.

To support the successful implementation of any future arrangements emerging from the Head Start pathway, we request that the Government:

1. Provide a clear transition pathway and financial support mechanisms similar to those provided to support the establishment of Auckland Council.
2. Align local government, spatial planning, and environmental reform programmes to avoid competing change processes and enable a smooth transition pathway.
3. Allow for the 2027-37 Long Term Plan requirements to be reduced, and the related audit requirements paused, reflecting the transition period that would be taking place.
4. Provide support to deliver the 2028 elections through the Electoral Commission.
5. Pause statutory representation reviews.
6. Create mechanisms for joint Crown-local governance and investment in regional transport infrastructure.
7. On behalf of some participating councils, a Government-funded referendum is requested.

We appreciate the opportunity provided through the Head Start pathway to consider how local government can best serve the communities of the Wellington region into the future. There are many details yet to be worked through. We consider these are best addressed in the next phase, should this proposal be selected to advance. We look forward to continuing our engagement with you and your officials as proposals are assessed and refined.

Through Te Kāhui Whakarehunga our mana whenua partners in the region have established the foundation of the whare we would build together through local

government reform. The Kāhui sets out detail with respect to how mana whenua wish to partner and participate in this process with councils moving forward, while respecting councils' mandates to take decisions on reform, as we respect the mandate of iwi in our region. A letter setting out their position is attached.

Our mana whenua partners put it clearly – “This is not a restructure of councils. It is a rare chance to build something new, and to build it well. The decisions in front of us are mokopuna decisions. The people who will live longest inside what we choose are not yet in any of our rooms, and they will not ask which council held which preference in 2026. They will ask whether we built them a region that works, a whare they can afford, wai they can swim in, whenua that is cared for and a partnership that endures. If we make our choices with their faces before us, the politics of the moment get smaller and the work gets clearer.”

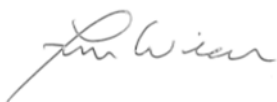
Yours sincerely,



Mayor HW Fauono Ken Laban
Hutt City Council



Mayor HW Anita Baker
Porirua City Council



Mayor HW Hon Dame Fran Wilde DNZM QSO
South Wairarapa District Council



Mayor HW Hon Andrew Little
Wellington City Council

Joint statement on Head Start by the Wellington-Wairarapa Region Mayoral Forum

Reflected below is the joint position statement agreed at the Mayoral Forum meeting held on Friday 7 August 2026:

1. The Wellington region was already working together and remains committed to doing so regardless of the Head Start process.
2. The discussions are constructive.
3. Mana whenua partnership at all layers and Māori representation is fundamental and we remain committed to their continued involvement now and into the future.
4. Not every council agrees and their views are respected and will be conveyed faithfully.
5. Two proposals will come from councils of the region, one a region-wide proposal (supported by Wellington City Council, Hutt City Council, Porirua City Council, South Wairarapa District Council), another for a Wairarapa proposal (supported by Carterton District Council and Masterton District Council). The proposals will convey the positions of individual councils and we will request of Government that the door remains open for alternative arrangements for Kāpiti Coast District Council and Upper Hutt City Council.
6. Cover letters will include the region's principles as bottom lines, individual position statements and any joint requests of Government.

This position statement was agreed by the mayors of Carterton District, Kāpiti Coast District, Hutt City, Masterton District, Porirua City, South Wairarapa District, Upper Hutt City, and Wellington City councils.

TE KĀHUI WHAKAREHUNGA

29 July 2026

To the Mayors, Chairs and Councillors of the councils of Te Upoko o Te Ika.

He kupu ki ngā kaunihera o Te Upoko o Te Ika

*Kei te pū
Kei te weu
Kei te aka
Kei te tāmore
Tēnā te ruruku ka ū
Tēnā te ruruku ka mau
Tēnei te ruruku o Te Kāhui Whakarehunga*

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Each of your councils will soon decide its position on the Head Start proposal. Your mandates are your own, and we respect them without reservation, as you do ours.

Through this process, as iwi and hapū, we have built something together: shared principles, a picture of the takiwā, and a way of working that did not exist a year ago. We have affirmed that:

- settlements and existing arrangements must be protected;
- Māori wards must be provided at all tiers (regional and local);
- partnership arrangements will be co-designed with iwi throughout the detailed design process;
- subsidiarity must be a core pillar;
- alignment of iwi and council boundaries should be sought, as able;
- councils operate, ultimately, within our takiwā;
- a mana whenua forum akin to Houkura be provided for; and
- Tiriti principles must be tied through all layers.

That is the foundation of the whare we would build together. Provided as an Annex to this letter the Kāhui sets out further detail with respect to how mana whenua wish to partner and participate in this process with Councils moving forward.

Much of what this Government has done has brought the ire of iwi, and this reform is no exception. We hold some alignment with its intent. The process has been imperfect, and the Crown of late has not been the partner that Te Tiriti promises. But our long journey with the Crown has taught us a discipline: frustration is not a strategy. We play the long game, for our iwi,

our uri, matāwaka and all of the people of this region, and for the whenua and wai that sustain us.

We would lift our eyes together. This is not a restructure of councils. It is a rare chance to build something new, and to build it well. The decisions in front of us are mokopuna decisions. The people who will live longest inside what we choose are not yet in any of our rooms, and they will not ask which council held which preference in 2026. They will ask whether we built them a region that works: a whare they can afford, wai they can swim in, whenua that is cared for, and a partnership that endures. If we make our choices with their faces before us, the politics of the moment get smaller and the work gets clearer.

The proposal before you reflects one region, and we know councils hold their own preferences on the form the amalgamation should take. That is not a breach of kotahitanga. It is rangatiratanga at work, and we honour it. And each iwi and hapū grouping within Te Kāhui Whakarehunga, similarly hold to their own rangatiratanga and their own perspectives on the form and shape of the region. However, on the form itself we offer no comment at this time, other than this: whatever the shape, our principles must hold within every layer and whatever form the reorganisation our takiwā takes. And we are clear on one thing in every scenario: this region should be holding the pen on its own future, and holding it together. Whatever shape you promote, promote it at the shared table. Iwi and hapū do not move when boundaries do. This is our takiwā.

Whatever you decide, our kotahitanga continues. One council or several, the iwi of this takiwā will stand together in each, carrying an aligned kaupapa. But we say one thing without softening it: the shape of this takiwā must not be decided about us, without us. That is the one outcome we could not accept.

So let us hold each other up. Where a council carries a hard decision, we will not make it harder for the sake of it. Where mana whenua carry concerns, we ask the same of you. Kotahitanga is not the absence of difference. It is the way difference is carried so that everyone arrives. Working together, we can reach outcomes for our people and our places that none of us can reach alone.

Nā mātou noa, nā

Te Kāhui Whakarehunga



Helmut Modlik
Tumu Whakarae | CEO
Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira



Kura Moeahu
Tiamana
Te Rūnanganui o Te Āti Awa ki te Upoko o te Ika a Māui



Sonya Rimene
Te Turu Chair
Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā Trust



Te Whatanui Winiata
Chair
Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika



Piri Te Tau
Chair
Rangitāne o Wairarapa Trust



Heitia Raureti
Tumuaki/Chair
Ngā Hapū o Ōtaki



Ray Hall
Group CEO
Te Pātaka o Rongokako
Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa Tamaki-nui-a-Rua Settlement Trust



Helena Gerretzen Parata
Tumuaki/Chair
Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai Charitable Trust

TE KĀHUI WHAKAREHUNGA

Annex: our principles in practical form

These are the expectations of Te Kāhui Whakarehunga for any future model, whatever form the region chooses. Whatever the shape, we expect the new arrangements to provide:

1. The partnership named in the purpose of the establishing legislation and constitution, not carried in a schedule at the back.
2. Every Treaty settlement and existing arrangement carried through with equivalent effect, expressly, including those that name existing councils, strengthened where the new system would otherwise deliver less, and whatever boundaries are finally drawn.
3. The partnership carried into the entities the council owns or controls, the water entities among them, so no iwi holds two tables for the same awa.
4. Te Upoko Taiao, or a successor with the same level and scope of participation, continued through the natural resources and planning functions.
5. Māori wards durably provided for within the representation arrangements, at both regional and local levels.
6. A mana whenua body mandated by iwi, one seat per iwi, settled and unsettled on the same footing, participating in decision-making through the new entity's structures, and provided for in the establishing legislation rather than by resolution.
7. The iwi and hapū of each rohe at the table wherever decisions touch their whenua and their wai.
8. Mana whenua participation properly resourced, so partnership does not depend on what iwi can afford to donate.
9. Local decision-making that is real, delegated with authority and secured in the legislation.
10. The relationships that sit beyond settlements, marae, hapū and mātāwaka institutions, Māori land trusts and incorporations, and Māori data, information and mātauranga interests, carried through on no lesser terms.
11. Iwi recognised as economic partners in the growth of the region, as investors, developers and employers, not only as cultural voices.
12. Mana whenua as active participants in the transition itself, including the care of its people and culture through the change.
13. Arrangements that can grow: reviewed together over time, independently reported on with a response required, with room held for settlements still to come, and participation arrangements entered when iwi and hapū seek them, whatever form the law of the day gives them.
14. And the partnership arrangements not finalised without the agreement of the iwi of this region.

Tēnā te ruruku ka ū. Tēnā te ruruku ka mau.