



Submission to Te Arotake I te Anamata mō Ngā
Kaunihera – Review into the Future for Local
Government: He mata whāriki, he matawhānui

1. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to share our feedback on the draft report He mata whāriki, he matawhānui.

Westland District Council (WDC) is a statutory entity based on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand.

Our vision statement is: *We work with the people of Westland to grow and protect our communities, our economy and our unique natural environment.*

The Westland District is approximately 450 km in length and one of the most sparsely populated parts of New Zealand, with an area of 1,186,272 hectares and a population of 8,640 people (2018 Census, Stats NZ). Approximately 33% of the population (2,960) lives in Hokitika. The remaining 66% live in small villages and rural areas such as Ross, Franz Josef and Haast. The district has a focus on the outdoors and outdoor recreation (87% of the land area is DOC land), which is a tourism drawcard, alongside dairy farming, mining and other enterprises.

Westland District Council does not wish to appear before the Panel to speak to this submission.

2. Executive Summary

Westland District Council (WDC) commends the Review Panel (the Panel) on the draft report and the body of work undertaken to reach this point. There is much cross-over in the topics considered by the panel and each area does not stand on its own but relies on a cohesive approach to bring about real change.

WDC supports the majority of the recommendations made by the panel and would like to see these recommendations carried over into the final report. Our recommendations are set out below:

1	That clear expectations are set for Local Government and communities on the standards for deliberative and participatory democracy.
2	That the Panel ensures that Councils retain the right to build on existing frameworks and tailor co-governance solutions.
3	That legislation needs to recognise place-based solutions and local priorities, rather than a national framework for Local Government.
4	Allow communities to prioritise their own issues and empower communities to create solutions.
5	That community anchor institutions be resourced as a hub for government enquiries and these be developed with input from the community as to what services meet the needs of the community and where they are situated.
6	Change in the model for discretionary and competitive funding for delivery of services.
7	To build a trust-based partnership between central and Local Government this must extend beyond the delivery of wellbeing outcomes in communities.
8	Central co-ordination of Central Government requirements to be delivered by Local Government.
9	Central Government should stop creating reactionary regulation and instead work with Local Government and their communities on solutions that suit their locality.

10	That approaches to incorporating te ao Māori and Tiriti based partnership do not necessarily mean retention of Māori wards.
11	Note that socio-economic situations are a barrier to diverse representation.
12	That climate change funding be extended to recognise local inputs to the nation's carbon budget and offer incentives for communities with significant carbon sinks.
13	An intergenerational climate fund is established.
14	Review the auditing requirements for legislative reporting.
15	Subject Central Government-owned property assets to rates and other charges.
16	Support the retention of communities of current interest.
17	A model that supports Local Government to produce the best outcomes for their individual communities.

3. Revitalising citizen-led democracy

The panel has asked respondents to consider the following question: *What might we do more of to increase community understanding about the role of Local Government, and therefore lead to greater civic participation?*

When Local Government is shown to provide value to the community then the community will value Local Government.

WDC agrees with the recommendations outlined by the panel. Citizen-led democracy will result in greater engagement of the community with the work that Local Government undertakes to provide the necessities for modern life. However, with the focus of Local Government moving away from simply overseeing 'core' services, communities will need to be supported to understand how they can interact with and influence Local Government to develop well-being in the community. Introducing standards for deliberative and participatory democracy will aid Local Government to work with the community to bring about this change. This requires Central Government to be clear in their expectations of Local Government.

Developing understanding and knowledge in democracy through civics education will lead to a more engaged and capable citizenry. This is a good thing. Representative sampling is not always representative with the requirement for self-selection leaving behind those who are disengaged with the process of Local Government, minorities or those without vested interests. Giving councils tools to develop place-based solutions and work on local priorities to promote participatory democracy will begin to further engage those who are disengaged.

We support the recommendations around capacity and capability among Local Government to encourage improved engagement with communities, including support for digital engagement across the motu. We urge the Panel to recognise the disparities between councils that have resources for greater technology and engagement teams and the smaller councils who do not have the ability to invest in these. Where digital engagement is required, support for smaller Councils is essential. The Panel should also recognise that digital engagement will not be realistic in all areas, due to factors such as: lack of access to technology and internet, resistance to change, lack of computer literacy and other socio-economic reasons.

Recommendation:

- 1. That clear expectations are set for Local Government and communities on the standards for deliberative and participatory democracy.**

4. Tiriti-based partnership between Māori and Local Government

The Panel has made recommendations to build stronger ties between Māori and Local Government and strengthen the use and recognition of Te Tiriti in Local Government, including a new legislative framework. WDC supports the recommendations of the Panel.

Partnership and co-governance is already strongly embedded in the philosophy of WDC and the Panel should ensure that Councils retain the right to build on existing frameworks and tailor co-governance solutions to suit the people involved.

A Tiriti-based partnership needs to recognise the willingness of iwi to co-design and co-govern and should start from a te ao Māori led approach to achieve success. Simply tweaking the western-based system would be a disservice to mana whenua and their community. The partnership needs to recognise the priorities and seek areas in which there is alignment. This would allow a strategic role for Māori in Local Government. There will be functions in Local Government that lend themselves to be best provided by mana whenua, with support from Local Government.

Recommendation:

- 2. That the Panel ensures that Councils retain the right to build on existing frameworks and tailor co-governance solutions.**

5. Allocating roles and functions in a way that enhances wellbeing

Allocating roles and functions in a non-binary way will require holistic planning and deliberative decision-making. Allowing place-based solutions and local priorities will in turn enhance community wellbeing because the people who live there will want to ensure the best results for their community.

There are opportunities for the 'business of Local Government' – that is the support functions such as IT and finance, to be centralised or to work together across Councils, as is already seen in shared services agreements. This would allow councils at a local level to concentrate on social and community outcomes at the community level, working with the community and other agencies to achieve these goals.

WDC supports the recommendations made by the Panel and the three core principles.

Recommendations:

- 3. That legislation needs to recognise place-based solutions and local priorities, rather than a national framework for Local Government.**
- 4. Allow communities to prioritise their own issues and empower communities to create solutions.**

6. Local government as champion and activator of wellbeing

Empowering communities to prioritise their issues and create solutions will require upskilling and open-minded thinking for everyone involved, from organisational staff, elected members and the communities themselves. This will require resources that many Councils, particularly small ones do not have. Councils will need support to ensure they have the resources to really be the champions and activators of wellbeing. Communities will also have to be sure that elected members really know and understand their communities' wants and needs for such an approach to be successful.

WDC agrees with the Panel's recommendations. Well-resourced community anchor institutions that offer a holistic approach across local and Central Government will support community wellbeing. This in turn could assist in addressing complex inter-generational social issues in the community and by the community. Councils should continue to provide opportunities to the community for upskilling; allowing communities to take the lead in managing areas of wellbeing outside of bureaucracy.

Current models of discretionary and competitive funding for delivery of services are time and resource intensive. They are often inflexible and are not aligned with overall community wellbeing. Introducing models that provide flexibility

and reduce the resource needed to meet reporting targets and standards, thereby assisting the recipient to achieve the goals of the funding would improve community wellbeing. Councils could be a commissioning agent to communities of Central Government funding, working at the local level ensuring the best possible use of funding and resources for the community.

Recommendations:

- 5. That community anchor institutions be resourced as a hub for government enquiries and these be developed with input from the community as to what services meet the needs of the community and where they are situated.**
- 6. Change in the model for discretionary and competitive funding for delivery of services.**

7. A stronger relationship between central and Local Government

Current relationships between central and Local Government are fractured. The imposition of increased workstreams from Central Government without corresponding resourcing, and the separation of complimentary reforms such as Three Waters and the Resource Management Act from Local Government erode trust and cause discontent at Local Government level.

To build a stronger relationship between central and Local Government, there needs to be trust from Central Government that Local Government and their residents have the abilities and knowledge to implement policies that improve their communities. If there is to be a genuine partnership between central and Local Government, this needs to extend beyond the delivery of wellbeing outcomes in communities. Communities will thrive when they can take ownership and create solutions for issues. Reactionary regulation can be unhelpful and does not allow communities to make the best decisions about what will work for them. What works in one place may not work in another, which reduces the success in national frameworks.

Recommendations:

- 7. To build a trust-based partnership between central and Local Government this must extend beyond the delivery of wellbeing outcomes in communities.**
- 8. Central co-ordination of Central Government requirements to be delivered by Local Government.**
- 9. Central Government should stop creating reactionary regulation and instead work with Local Government and their communities on solutions that suit their locality.**

8. Replenishing and building on representative democracy

WDC supports the recommendations made by the Panel, however comments regarding Māori wards are contrary to earlier discussion about taking a te ao Māori approach and Tiriti-based partnership at the council table.

Transferring the responsibilities to the Electoral Commission is sensible. The commission have the experience and tools and resources necessary to conduct fair and robust elections processes. Engaging people in the voting process through civics education and online voting could improve voter turnout.

We note that a major barrier to diverse representation is socio-economic. Deprivation can deny people the skills, ability and financial means to engage with Local Government and represent their community. Reviewing remuneration for Local Government and ongoing support and development could result in more diversity in Local Government.

Recommendations:

- 10. That approaches to incorporating te ao Māori and Tiriti based partnership do not necessarily mean retention of Māori wards.**
- 11. Note that socio-economic situations are a barrier to diverse representation.**

9. Equitable funding and finance

WDC supports the recommendations made by the Panel.

Continued imposition of regulatory requirements without appropriate funding mechanisms or Central Government support needs to be addressed. By including Local Government as part of impact assessments appropriate decisions can be made as to how regulatory inventions will be funded and ensure that regulations that reflect the national public good are fairly funded across councils. This should also be extended to include new legislation.

Climate change is an ongoing challenge that we must all work together to manage. Asking our communities to fund work to mitigate and respond to climate change is difficult in an area where 87% of the area is Department of Conservation (DoC) estate and therefore a significant carbon sink. We ask that climate change funding be extended to recognise local inputs to the nation's carbon budget and offer incentives for communities with significant carbon sinks.

From a fiscal point of view, DoC estate cannot be subject to rates and other charges. For districts that have significant Central Government-owned property assets this is a huge disadvantage to our ratepayers and finances.

Current auditing requirements for Long Term Plans and Annual Reports do not serve the community well. They are expensive and disruptive for lower resourced small councils. While it is important to have a robust method to ensure accountability to the community, the technical nature of an audit and the reports produced are not engaging. This means that the community does not receive the perceived benefit of the audit process.

Recommendations:

- 12. That climate change funding be extended to recognise local inputs to the nation's carbon budget and offer incentives for communities with significant carbon sinks.**
- 13. An intergenerational climate fund is established.**
- 14. Review the auditing requirements for legislative reporting.**
- 15. Subject Central Government-owned property assets to rates and other charges.**

10. System design

Consideration of Local Government reorganisation has been conducted on the West Coast in the last 10 years. In June 2015 the Local Government Commission received an application to review the Local Government arrangements with a view to making changes. As a result, the three district councils, regional council and iwi became responsible for preparing a combined district plan for the region, which is now at the notification stage. Submissions to the commission supported retention of communities of current interest.

Whatever the final model communities need to have someone who is looking after their best interests at a local level. Shared services make sense where these will create positive change, but it should not be at the expense of the communities who need the services.

Recommendation:

- 16. Support the retention of communities of current interest.**

11. System stewardship and support

WDC agrees with the Panel that the current system for stewardship for Local Government is fragmented and needs improvement. Local government and iwi should be encouraged take a lead role in developing a stewardship model alongside Central Government that promotes consistent outcomes for communities. We agree that a national picture that enables efficient sharing of learnings would help to promote progress more generally.

The model needs to support Local Government to produce the best outcomes for their individual communities; recognising that there will be some issues that overlap, such as fiscal limitations for local councils with small ratepayer bases, and other issues that are unique.

Westland faces many issues that impact the wellbeing of the community, including, natural hazard management, environmental restoration, and the retention of biodiversity. These issues are heavily impacted by proposed regulatory changes on Local Government. To manage these issues successfully, system stewardship needs to be cohesive and supportive.

Recommendation:

17. A model that supports Local Government to produce the best outcomes for their individual communities.

12. Conclusion

The draft report is comprehensive and provides a good overview of issues that local and Central Government face as we seek to provide for the ongoing wellbeing of our communities. Of overall importance to WDC is that the outcome is positive for the community and comes with adequate resourcing to effect real change.

We ask that the Panel gives due consideration to the recommendations that we have made in support of the draft report.

WDC does not wish to appear before the Panel to speak to its submission.

Ngā mihi nui,



Simon Bastion, Chief Executive



Helen Lash, Westland District Mayor