

19 February 2026

Simplifying Local Government – draft proposal consultation
Department of Internal Affairs | Te Tari Taiwhenua
Wellington

VIA EMAIL: simplifyinglocalgovernment@dia.govt.nz

Tēnā koutou

HAWKE'S BAY REGIONAL COUNCIL SUBMISSION ON SIMPLIFYING LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL

Hawke's Bay Regional Council (HBRC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Simplifying Local Government proposal.

We support local reorganisation done well. That means recognising the unique assets, relationships, challenges and economic drivers of each region.

We are actively engaging with our territorial authorities and regional leaders, including through the Mayors and Chairs Forum, on a reorganisation plan for Hawke's Bay.

We believe regional council representation in this conversation is essential. This will ensure governance knowledge and experience of complex regional challenges and regional functions and services is not lost in the design of any new system.

Ngā mihi



Sophie Siers
Councillor, Heretaunga/Hastings
Chair of Hawke's Bay Regional Council

Hawke's Bay Regional Context

Hawke's Bay is a food-producing, export-focused region supported by eight major river catchments, extensive freshwater systems, significant highly productive soils, and critical flood protection infrastructure. The integrated management of land, water and biodiversity underpins both community wellbeing and regional prosperity.

The region is home to 11 iwi groups, 91 hapū and 79 marae. HBRC has long-standing Treaty-based relationships, including the statutory Regional Planning Committee established under the Hawke's Bay Regional Planning Committee Act 2015.

Regional Functions and Services

HBRC is responsible for the integrated management of Hawke's Bay's natural and physical resources, including land, water, air, soil and biodiversity, and for maintaining flood protection infrastructure. We also deliver regional transport planning and public transport services.

Our strategic priorities are reducing flood risk, water security and land and water health including land stability. Following Cyclone Gabrielle, we are delivering a \$256 million multi-year flood resilience programme, alongside maintaining \$450 million of existing infrastructure. These systems are core economic infrastructure for the region.

Key Submission Points

A. Combined Territories Board (CTB) and the importance of a strong regional governance voice

While we support the intent to simplify local government, we believe that the governance body mandated to develop reorganisation plans should include elected regional councillors to ensure democratic legitimacy and continuity of regional expertise.

This is a once in a generation opportunity. The success of this exercise will depend on the appropriate membership, mandate and funding of the CTB.

B. Crown Commissioners

If CTBs proceed, we support inclusion of Crown Commissioners alongside mayors and regional council representatives, with no veto powers. Commissioners should possess strong knowledge of our region.

C. Timing and Sequencing of Reform

Risks to Long-Term Plan delivery

HBRC is preparing its 2027–2037 Long Term Plan, which includes significant intergenerational investment decisions on flood protection and climate resilience. Clarity is required on the mandate of existing councils throughout any transition to ensure continuity of statutory functions, infrastructure delivery and financial decision-making. Reform sequencing must

avoid overlapping transitions that create governance instability, operational risk or uncertainty for communities and investors.

Interaction with Resource Management Reform

Successful implementation of resource management reform depends on strong regional expertise and enduring mana whenua partnership. Clear direction is required on how the Crown will meet Treaty settlement obligations associated with the Regional Planning Committee under any transitional or permanent governance model. Transitional arrangements must also address capacity, capability and conflict of interest risks, ensuring independent technical advice and robust governance processes are maintained during change.

D. Retaining regional capability and long-term infrastructure planning

HBRC supports the Government's "Back to Basics" focus on core infrastructure that underpins economic growth and protects the productive base of regions.

HBRC has demonstrated leadership in this area through early and sustained investment in flood protection, water security and catchment management, including the development of well-established 30-year infrastructure plans. These plans address future regional risks and include secure, stand-alone funding mechanisms to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

E. Process for Reorganisation

If reform proceeds through regional reorganisation plans, Government should provide clear parameters, resourcing and timeframes. Plans should:

- Uphold Te Tiriti and Treaty settlement obligations
- Demonstrate the appropriate scale for delivery of critical functions
- Maintain democratic accountability
- Provide robust assessment of transition costs and operational continuity
- Recognise long-term climate adaptation and infrastructure needs

Conclusion

HBRC remains committed to constructive partnering to design a local government system that strengthens regional capability, protects democratic accountability, and supports long-term resilience and prosperity for Hawke's Bay.

We are ready to engage with central government to refine or test any proposals as they develop.