



Questions and Answers

9 June 2015

Background information Wellington and Northland Local Government Reorganisation

How did this process start in Wellington?

In the Wellington region, the Masterton, Carterton and South Wairarapa District Councils applied in May 2013 for a local government reorganisation that would create a stand-alone unitary authority incorporating – in the Wairarapa – the roles of all three district Councils and the Greater Wellington Regional Council.

In June that year, the Greater Wellington Regional Council also applied for a local government reorganisation. The proposal was to establish a single council that would combine the roles of all of the district councils in the region and those of the regional council. This Council would be complemented by a number of local boards with responsibility for managing defined local issues.

How did this process start for Northland?

In Northland, the Far North District Council applied for a local government reorganisation in December 2012 proposing a single unitary authority for the Far North District, with arrangements for the remainder of the region unspecified.

Can the Commission initiate a reorganisation process?

No. Councils, the Minister for Local Government, or any other individual or organisation have the right to apply to the Commission to alter the constitution, structure or boundaries of a local authority under the reorganisation provisions in the Local Government Act 2002. The Commission cannot apply to itself.

What is the decision today?

The Local Government Act enables the Commission to explore options for change with the affected local authorities and others in both regions, including whether other draft proposals can be developed. The option of a single council for either Wellington or Northland region is off the table.

Why was this decision made?

Consultation on the two draft proposals showed there was a lack of community support for single councils across these regions.

Why did the Commission not stop the process?

Consultation on the two draft proposals showed there is support from councils and the community to improve local government. It was clear the community wanted change but less clear as to what option would be supported by most.

The Commission is also of the view that there are opportunities to improve the performance of both Northland and Wellington regions through changes to the way local government is organised. These need to be further explored with the communities.

What will be the benefits of the new, more collaborative approach?

The new approach will enable the development of options that reflect community feedback. The Commission is looking to develop sufficient consensus on the opportunities and challenges in the regions and how good local government can help to manage them.

What will the next options look like?

It is too early to tell, but the views of the Northland and Wellington communities will be important in determining what the options for their region look like. The Commission has a role in facilitating this and responsibility under legislation for producing potential new proposals.

How and when will individuals get a chance to have their say?

The process has not been designed yet, but for the initial phase of identifying challenges and possible options to address these, the Commission will seek to work with councils to put together a process that will engage communities. If either Wellington or Northland proceeds to a new draft proposal, there will be a public consultation process including written submissions and hearings.

What were the main themes from the Wellington consultation?

- 89% of submitters did not support the draft proposal, with opposition strongest in the Hutt Valley;
- Most opposed the proposal because of a preference for the status quo, more localised democracy, and concerns about the risks of large scale change;
- A minority supported the proposal because it would streamline and improve decision-making and set a foundation for future prosperity;
- There was a mood for change to improve local government services in the region; many submissions favoured either smaller-scale mergers or increased use of shared services; and
- Most affected Councils recognised the need for change and submitted options for improvements to the current system.

What were the themes of the Northland process?

- 90% of submitters did not support the draft proposal, with strong opposition in the

Whangarei District;

- Most opposed the proposal because of a preference for the status quo or an enhanced version of it. There was concern that a single unitary authority would not provide for local decision-making, be harder to administer, and potentially trigger an increased rates burden;
- Some concern was also expressed about the loss of environmental regulatory checks and balances if regional functions were placed in the same organisation that delivered services;
- A minority supported the proposal because it would streamline decision-making and provide a more effective basis for economic development in the region;
- Some submitters did indicate support for smaller scale mergers, transferring functions or developing a shared service arrangement between the existing councils;
- All existing councils in the region recognised the need for improvements in both strategic decision-making and the delivery of services.