



Local Government Commission

Mana Kāwanatanga ā Rohe

Determination
of representation arrangements to apply for the election
of the Tasman District Council until the next
representation review
made on 21 October 2025

Introduction

1. All territorial authorities are required under sections 19H and 19J of the Local Electoral Act 2001 (the Act) to review their representation arrangements at least every six years. Under Section 19R of the Act, the Commission, in addition to consideration of the appeals and objections against a council's final representation proposal, is required to determine all the matters set out in sections 19H and 19J which relate to the representation arrangements for territorial authorities.
2. Having completed its considerations, the Commission issued a determination dated 24 March 2025 that differed from the Tasman District Council's (the Council) final representation proposal.

High Court appeal

3. On 24 April 2025, Tasman Democracy Incorporated (TDI) filed an appeal to the High Court challenging the Commission's determination on five grounds. The appeal was heard by the Court on 25 August 2025. It issued its judgement on 25 September 2025¹.
4. The judgement upheld TDI's fifth ground of appeal, finding that the Commission failed to provide adequate reasons for its decisions on councillor numbers. The Court directed the Commission to reconsider in light of the Court's judgment its decision on the number of councillors allocated to each ward, and across all wards.
5. The judgment noted that the Commission's reconsideration would not affect the 2025 local election and only relates to future arrangements.

¹ Tasman Democracy Incorporated v Local Government Commission [2025] NZHC 2805 [25 September 2025] (<https://www.lgc.govt.nz/assets/Judicial-decisions/Tasman-Democracy-Incorporated-v-Local-Government-Commission-2025.pdf>)

6. The Commission has convened to undertake the reconsideration that it was directed to do in accordance with the High Court's judgment. It considered there was sufficient information in the documentation available to it from the appeal in respect of the Council's 2025 review for the Commission to reconsider its decision without the need for a further hearing.

Commission's determination²

7. In accordance with section 19R of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the Local Government Commission determines that the following representation arrangements will apply for Tasman District Council, until the next representation review is completed:
- a. Tasman District, as delineated on Plan LG-051-2025-W-1 will be divided into wards and will be represented by a Council comprising the mayor and 14 councillors elected as follows, for the reasons set out in the Commission's determination dated 21 October 2025:

Ward	Councillors	Plan delineating area
Te Tai o Aorere Māori Ward	1	LG-051-2025-W-2
Golden Bay General Ward	2	SO 14463
Motueka General Ward	3	SO 14464
Moutere-Waimea General Ward	3	LG-051-2025-W-3
Lakes-Murchison General Ward	1	LG-051-2025-W-4
Richmond General Ward	4	SO 14466

- b. There will be two communities with community boards as follows:

Community/ Community Board	Area	Members*	Appointed members
Golden Bay	Golden Bay General Ward	4	2, representing either Golden Bay General Ward or Te Tai o Aorere Māori Ward
Motueka	Motueka General Ward	4	3, representing either Motueka General Ward or Te Tai o Aorere Māori Ward

*number of members elected by the electors of each subdivision

8. The ratio of population to elected members for each ward will be as follows, for the reasons set out in the Commission's determination dated 21 October 2025:

² Plans referred to in this determination that are preceded by LGC are deposited with the Local Government Commission. Plans preceded by SO are deposited with Land Information New Zealand.

Ward	Population*	Number of members	Population per member	Deviation from district average population per member	% deviation from district average population per member
Golden Bay General	5,590	2	2,795	-1,573	-36.02
Motueka General	12,500	3	4,167	-202	-4.62
Moutere-Waimea General	15,650	3	5,217	848	+19.42
Lakes-Murchison General	3,700	1	3,700	-668	-15.30
Richmond General	19,350	4	4,838	469	+10.74
Total general wards	56,790	13	4,368		
Te Tai o Aorere Māori	2,540	1	2,540		
Total	59,330	14			

*Based on Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates (2018 census base)

9. The community boards will not be subdivided for electoral purposes.
10. Under section 19V(6) of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the Commission upholds the decision of the Council not to comply with section 19V(2) in respect of the following wards:
 - a. The Golden Bay General Ward, as compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest within the isolated community of Golden Bay.
 - b. The Moutere-Waimea General Ward as compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing the Wakefield community of interest, which includes Totara View, between wards.
 - c. The Richmond General Ward, as compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing the Richmond community of interest between wards.
11. Under section 19V(3)(a) of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the Commission determines the Lakes-Murchison General Ward to not comply with section 19V(2) as compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing the Totara View area from the Wakefield community to which it connects for services, facilities and political participation.
12. As required by section 19T(1)(b) and 19W(c) of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the boundaries of the above wards and communities coincide with the boundaries of current statistical meshblock areas determined by Statistics New Zealand and used for Parliamentary electoral purposes.

Background

13. Under sections 19H and 19J of the Local Electoral Act 2001 (the Act) territorial authority representation reviews are to determine the number of councillors to be elected, the basis of election for councillors and, if this includes wards, the boundaries, and names of those wards. Reviews also include whether there are to be community boards and, if so, arrangements for those boards. Representation arrangements are to be determined so as to provide fair and effective representation for individuals and communities.
14. Prior to the 2024/25 review, the Council last reviewed its representation arrangements prior to the 2019 local authority elections. In September 2023 it resolved to establish a Māori ward. Accordingly, it was required to undertake a review prior to the next elections in October 2025.
15. On 5 September 2024 the Council affirmed its decision to establish a Māori ward.

Current representation arrangements

16. Prior to March 2025, the Commission last determined the Council's representation in 2019. In that review, the Commission endorsed the Council's proposal to retain the existing arrangements being a mayor and 13 councillors elected from five wards, largely based on pre-1989 local authority boundaries. The arrangements included the Golden Bay and Motueka community boards, each electing four members.
17. Two wards did not comply with the fair representation requirements of the Act (the +/- 10% rule); the Golden Bay Ward on the grounds that it is an isolated community, and the Moutere-Waimea Ward to avoid creating barriers to participation by splitting recognised communities of interest.

Current review

Preliminary consultation

18. The Council conducted preliminary community engagement via an online survey between November 2023 and January 2024 that generated 16 responses. Councillors attending community association meetings also undertook informal engagement. Between September 2023 and April 2024, the Council held four workshops, including one with community boards, during which it considered four options for ward configurations based on variations of the current arrangements. Through the workshops the Council expressed a preference for maintaining the current ward and membership arrangements for the general electoral population alongside a single District-wide Māori ward electing one councillor.
19. On 17 July 2024 the Council resolved its initial representation proposal for a council comprising the mayor elected at large and 14 councillors elected from five general wards and one Māori ward. The proposal retained the Golden Bay and Motueka communities and community boards.

20. The initial proposed ward arrangements were as follows:

Wards	Population*	Number of members	Population per member	Deviation from district average population per member	% deviation from district average population per member
Golden Bay General	5,590	2	2,795	-1,573	-36.01
Motueka General	12,500	3	4,167	-201	-4.60
Moutere-Waimea General	15,350	3	5,117	749	+17.15
Lakes-Murchison General	3,990	1	3,990	-378	-8.65
Richmond General	19,350	4	4,838	470	+10.76
Total general wards	56,780	13	4,368		
Te Tai o Aorere Māori	2,540	1	2,540		
Total	59,320	14			

*Based on Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates (2018 census base)

21. The Council's proposal retained the Golden Bay and Motueka Community Boards, as set out at paragraph 3.b. above.

Submissions

22. The Council notified its initial representation proposal on 17 July 2024 and received 93 submissions by the deadline date of 29 August 2024.

23. 77 submitters expressed support for specific aspects of the proposal, and 54 opposed aspects of the proposal. A significant number of submissions referred to the Council's decision to establish a Māori ward and were therefore outside of the scope of the representation review.

24. Of the submissions within scope of the review, key themes were:

- Majority support (16 submitters) for retaining two councillors for the Golden Bay General Ward, with three submitters opposing.
- Requests to extend the Motueka General Ward boundary to reflect the Motueka High School zone.
- Requests to incorporate the proposed Moutere-Waimea General ward into the Richmond and Motueka General Wards and increase the number of general ward councillors to 14.
- A request to extend the proposed Richmond General Ward into Moutere-Waimea to comply with fair representation requirements.
- Majority support for retaining the Golden Bay and Motueka Community Boards.

- f. Some support for establishing a community board for Moutere-Waimea.
 - g. Mixed views on establishing a community board for Richmond.
- 25. On 2 October 2024 the Council met to hear and deliberate on submissions. The Council rejected the matters raised in submissions for the following reasons:
 - a. Two councillors are necessary for the Golden Bay General Ward to provide for effective representation of the ward's geographically dispersed communities.
 - b. The proposed boundary of the Motueka General Ward best reflects the communities of interest in the ward, is broadly supported by the community, and provides for effective representation.
 - c. Disestablishing the existing Moutere-Waimea Ward, or altering its boundary with the Richmond General Ward, would divide existing communities of interest. The ward's settlements are predominantly rural and coastal in nature, and do not naturally share common interests with the more urban centres of Richmond or Motueka.
 - d. Community boards: The existing ward structure in Moutere-Waimea and Richmond is well established and accepted by residents and provides for effective representation of these communities.

The Council's final proposal

- 26. At the 2 October 2024 meeting the Council adopted its initial proposal as its final representation proposal.
- 27. The Council publicly notified its final proposal on 22 October 2024, including advice that the following wards did not comply with the fair representation requirement of section 19V(2) of the Act (the +/-10% rule):
 - The Golden Bay General Ward, on the grounds that it is an isolated community under section 19V(3)(a) of the Act;
 - The Moutere Waimea and Richmond General Wards, to avoid dividing communities of interest between wards.
- 28. Due to the non-compliance of these proposed general wards, the Council was required by section 19V(4) of the Act to refer its proposal to the Commission for determination. In addition, the Council received two appeals against the proposal.

Appeals against the Council's final proposal

- 29. The Council referred the appeals to the Commission, in accordance with section 19Q of the Act.
- 30. The appeals raised the following matters:
 - a. Similar alternative general ward configurations, removing the Moutere-Waimea General Ward and redistributing it between the Motueka and Richmond General Wards.
 - b. Increasing the number of general ward councillors.

Hearing

31. The Commission met with the Council and the two appellants at a hearing held online on Wednesday 19th February 2025. The Council was represented at the hearing by Mayor Tim King, Councillor Christeen Mackenzie, and independent contractor Stephen Hill, of electionz.com.
32. The following appellants and objectors appeared at the hearing:
 - a. Melanie Ellis
 - b. Tasman Democracy Inc – represented by Mathais Schaeffner

Matters raised at the hearing

33. Mr Hill outlined the process the Council had followed in carrying out its representation review and reaching its final proposal. Mayor King, Councillor Mackenzie, and Mr Hill expanded on the following points:
 - a. A low response to preliminary engagement (16 responses) meant the Council could not identify strong community preferences for representation.
 - b. Preliminary engagement was mainly carried out online or through written feedback rather than in-person. Councillors attending community association meetings in the Moutere-Waimea Ward also sought feedback and reported low interest in the representation review.
 - c. Community views are best sought through a combination of online engagement and opportunities for residents to provide feedback in their own time through various channels, including informally to ward councillors.
 - d. Neither of the two community boards objected to the Council's proposal.
 - e. Council workshops considered a range of different options for arrangements with 13 or 14 councillors. Options were variously based on the current boundaries, variations to the current boundaries, and merging existing wards to create a different structure.
 - f. The only options that complied with the +/-10% rule comprised three general wards based on merging the existing Golden Bay and Motueka Wards, and the Murchison-Lakes and Moutere-Waimea Wards. The Council did not believe this arrangement reflected communities of interest appropriately.
 - g. The Moutere-Waimea General Ward contains diverse communities, ranging from small rural communities which may only have a community hall, to larger communities with shops and cafes. All have a strong sense of identity evidenced by the lasting nature of their community associations and may feel alienated if combined with a more urban area.
 - h. At the previous review in 2019, the Council received community feedback against transferring Tasman Village and the Motueka Valley into the Motueka Ward. Accordingly, it did not consider it appropriate to consider this again in the current review.

- i. Given the difficulty in achieving both fair and effective representation and the lack of clear community interest in change, the Council felt that the current arrangements best reflected both requirements.
- 34. The appellants raised the following points in opposition to the Council's proposal for the Moutere-Waimea General Ward:
 - a. There is a sense that the current Moutere-Waimea Ward representation focuses on the needs of Māpua, Brightwater, and Wakefield, where half of the Ward's population live. This leaves around 2,000 residents outside of these localities feeling little connection with the wider Moutere-Waimea community.
 - b. Ward boundaries aligning with rural/urban identities prioritise a perceptual dimension of communities of interest. This conflicts with the functional dimension where communities consist of personal and social interaction occurring across urban and rural areas.
 - c. Residents want to vote in the community they feel most connected to. Residents in the Moutere/Tasman part of the Ward connect to Motueka for secondary school, supermarkets, council service centres, community services, recreation facilities, and events, but cannot vote for representatives there. Residents in the Waimea part of the Ward are similarly connected to Richmond.
 - d. Community associations focus on specific projects such as planting projects and do not represent broader community issues or diversity.
 - e. Council's proposal results in three of five wards not complying with the +/-10% rule, meaning 71% of residents do not have fair representation. Removing the Moutere-Waimea General Ward and redistributing its areas to the Motueka and Richmond General Wards would better reflect communities of interest and improve compliance with the fair representation requirements.

Matters for determination by the Commission

- 35. Section 19R of the Act requires the Commission, in addition to consideration of appeals and objections, to determine all the matters set out in section 19H of the Act relating to the representation arrangements for territorial authorities. This interpretation was reinforced by a 2004 High Court decision which found that the Commission's role is not merely supervisory but requires it to form its own view on all the matters which are in scope of the review.
- 36. The matters in the scope of the review are:
 - a. whether the council is to be elected from wards, the district as a whole, or a mixture of the two
 - b. the number of councillors
 - c. if there are to be wards, the area and boundaries of wards and the number of members to be elected from each ward
 - d. whether there are to be community boards

- e. if there are to be community boards, the area and boundaries of their communities, and the membership arrangements for each board
- f. whether wards may be defined and membership distributed between them in a way that does not comply with the +/-10% rule .

Key considerations

37. Based on the legislative requirements, the Commission's *Guidelines for local authorities undertaking representation reviews* (the Guidelines) identify the following three key factors when considering representation proposals:
- communities of interest
 - effective representation of communities of interest
 - fair representation for electors.

Communities of interest

38. The Guidelines identify three dimensions for recognising communities of interest:
- a. *perceptual*: a sense of identity and belonging to a defined area or locality as a result of factors such as distinctive geographical features, local history, demographics, economic and social activities
 - b. *functional*: ability of the area to meet the needs of communities for services such as local schools, shopping areas, community and recreational facilities, employment, transport, and communication links
 - c. *political*: ability to represent the interests of local communities which includes non-council structures such as for local iwi and hapū, residents and ratepayer associations and the range of special interest groups.
39. All three dimensions are important and often interlinked. We note however, that there is often a focus on the perceptual dimension. That is, what councils, communities or individuals intuitively feel are communities of interest. It is not enough to simply state that a community of interest exists because it is felt that it exists; councils must provide evidence of how a sense of identity is reinforced, or how a community is distinct from neighbouring communities.
40. Since Tasman District was established in 1989 five broad communities of interest have been recognised in the District; Golden Bay, Motueka, Lakes-Murchison, Moutere-Waimea, and Richmond.
41. For the current review, the Council considered ward populations, historic factors, and councillors' knowledge to assess communities of interest. At the hearing, the Council also noted that many residents travel across ward boundaries to access services and seek representation from councillors they know, rather than specific ward councillors. While valid, these factors alone are usually insufficient to build a clear picture of current communities of interest in any district or region.
42. We expect that councils' consideration of communities of interest should clearly identify and document:

- how communities rely on different services and facilities to function as part of the wider district, city, or region
 - demographic characteristics of an area (for example age, ethnicity, or deprivation profiles) and how these differ from other areas
 - how particular communities organise themselves and interact with others as part of the wider district, city, or region
43. The Council advised there had been minimal community response to its preliminary engagement survey. Where community input has been minimal, councils' reviews can also be informed by robust analysis of available data such as building consents, transport patterns, use of council facilities and services, and demographic information from Statistics NZ. We have not seen evidence that the Council conducted such an analysis.
44. We understand that the District's 2023 estimated population of 59,320 has grown by around 16% since 2018, with the current Richmond Ward experiencing the highest growth at 22%. Associated residential and infrastructural developments may have influenced settlement, service, and travel patterns, and affected how residents organise socially and politically.
45. Residents' tendencies to access services and representation across ward boundaries suggests that the current ward boundaries, based on a rural/urban split, may no longer reflect meaningful communities of interest for the District's residents. Appellants provided detailed examples supporting this view, such as:
- Residents of Mouere (including Upper and Lower Mouere, Kina, Ruby Bay, Tasman Village) connect with Motueka for the Council service centre, library, supermarkets, community services, recreation facilities, and events.
 - Most Mouere children attend secondary school, sports, cultural and recreational clubs in Motueka.
 - Ngātīmoti and Tasman primary schools have connections with Motueka primary schools rather than those in the Waimea part of the Ward.
 - School bus routes through Ngātīmoti, Dovedale, Upper Mouere, Māpua, and Tasman transport around 300 students into Motueka High School daily.
 - Waimea residents are much more likely to connect with Richmond for secondary schools, shopping, Council services, and recreation.
46. Both appellants described communities of interest in the Mouere-Waimea General Ward with regards to perceptual, functional, and political dimensions using examples that were relevant and compelling. They demonstrated an understanding of communities of interest to a level we also expect from councils undertaking reviews.
47. While we have concerns regarding the Council's analysis of communities of interest, it is also not unusual for communities of interest to be grouped based on commonalities of interest, examples of which were described by the Council. Smaller dispersed settlements often share a similar connection to the closest urban centres in neighbouring wards for work, schooling, facilities, and services.

48. These factors all contribute to identifying arrangements that will provide the most effective representation for communities of interest while balancing fair representation for electors.
49. We acknowledge the engagement pressures on councils and communities. Despite this, many councils engage effectively on representation using methods beyond traditional, largely passive, online surveys. We recommend that the Council, in its next review, proactively engages with Tasman's communities and evaluates other information it holds to produce a ground-up analysis of communities of interest, ensuring its proposal is well-supported by evidence of how communities link and interact.

Fair and effective representation

50. Section 19V of the Act sets out the requirement for the Commission to ensure that electors receive fair representation. Section 19V(2) establishes fair representation as a population per member ratio per ward type (i.e. general or Māori) that does not differ by more than 10% across the district (the +/- 10% rule).
51. In relation to effective representation for communities of interest, section 19T of the Act requires the Commission to ensure that:
 - a. the election of members of the council, in one of the ways specified in section 19H (i.e. at large, wards, or a combination of both) will provide effective representation of communities of interest within the district
 - b. ward boundaries coincide with the boundaries of the current statistical meshblock areas determined by Statistics New Zealand and used for parliamentary electoral purposes
 - c. so far as is practicable, ward boundaries coincide with community boundaries (where they exist).
52. 'Effective representation' is not defined in the Act, but the Commission sees this as requiring consideration of factors including an appropriate number of elected members and an appropriate basis of election of members for the district concerned (at large, wards, or a mix of both).
53. The Guidelines note that what constitutes effective representation will be specific to each local authority but that the following factors should be considered:
 - a. avoiding arrangements that may create barriers to participation, such as at elections by not recognising residents' familiarity and identity with an area
 - b. not splitting recognised communities of interest between electoral subdivisions
 - c. not grouping together two or more communities of interest that share few commonalities of interest
 - d. accessibility, size, and configuration of an area including access to elected members and vice versa.

Total number of members

54. The Guidelines suggest that local authorities consider the total number of members, or a range in the number of members, necessary to provide effective representation for the district as a whole. In other words, the total number of members should not be arrived at solely as the product of the number of members per ward.
55. Tasman District Council is a unitary authority, meaning it performs both territorial and regional functions. Under section 5 of the Local Government Act 2002, unitary authorities are defined as territorial authorities with the responsibilities of a regional council.
56. For representation purposes, the Commission interprets this to mean unitary authorities are subject to the same member limits as territorial authorities, i.e. 5 to 29 councillors (excluding the mayor), as set out in section 19A of the Local Electoral Act. A High Court judgement, *Northern Action 2020*³, supports this interpretation.
57. Tasman District Council has comprised a mayor and 13 councillors elected from five wards since at least 2013. The Council's final proposal for 2025 increased this to 14, adding one Māori ward councillor while retaining the existing ward structure and number of members for general wards.
58. At a workshop early in the representation review process, the Council considered whether population growth might justify an increase in the number of members for general wards ultimately decided only to add a single Māori ward member. At the hearing, the Council explained that there was low community appetite for change on this point.
59. Of 93 submissions on the Council's initial proposal, only TDI proposed a different overall total, being 14 general ward councillors based on a revised general ward structure. Including the Māori ward councillor, this would result in a total of 15 councillors for the District.
60. The Commission's Representation Review Guidelines suggest that total councillor numbers should reflect effective representation needs of the entire district, not simply the sum of ward allocations.
61. The district's size and configuration are key factors in determining total council size. They influence how accessible elected members are to residents, and how effectively members can engage with their communities.
62. Tasman District is reasonably large, covering the north-western part of the South Island. It stretches from the northern tip of the West Coast, takes in Golden Bay, and extends south-east south of Murchison. The eastern boundary extends along the edge of Nelson City and includes part of the Saint Arnaud and Richmond Ranges. The main urban settlements are Richmond and Motueka. Remote settlements are located some distance from the Council's main offices in Richmond, such as Pūponga in Golden Bay being over two hours' drive away.

³ *Northern Action Group Incorporated v Local Government Commission* [2020] NZHC 830 [Northern Action 2020] at [106], fn 91.

63. The District's population has grown by 16% since 2018. However, this growth has been more concentrated around Richmond and does not on its own justify more councillors.
64. The wider statutory responsibilities of a unitary council require councillors to engage with a broader range of community issues and representation needs than their territorial or regional authority counterparts. A comparison with similar unitary authorities is helpful in this regard:

	Tasman District 2025	Nelson City 2022	Marlborough District 2022	Gisborne District 2022
Total population	59,330	54,590	50,420	50,740
Total number of members (general and Māori wards)	14	12	14	13
Councillor-to-resident ratio	4,237	4,549	3,601	3,903

65. The comparison shows that the Council's proposed councillor-to-resident ratio of one councillor per 4,237 residents is higher than Marlborough and Gisborne, but lower than Nelson, indicating in the Commission's view that it is within a reasonable range. Retaining the current 13-member council would have resulted in a ratio of 1:4,564, significantly higher than the Marlborough and Gisborne Districts which have similar geographic considerations. Tasman Democracy's proposal for a 15-member council would lower the ratio to 1:3,955.
66. in the Commission's view the overall number of members should strike a reasonable balance for Tasman District's population, geography, and unitary responsibilities. While there are pockets of geographic separation and some remote, smaller communities, most of the population is concentrated in relatively small geographic urban areas, where accessibility to councillors is easier, limiting the impact of a 14-member council on effective representation overall.
67. Confirmation of the overall number of members should also be balanced against the requirements of individual wards for fair representation for electors and effective representation for communities of interest. We discuss this for each ward in turn below.

Fair and effective representation for Te Tai o Aorere Māori Ward

68. Māori ward councillor numbers are set by formula under Schedule 1A of the Local Electoral Act. Tasman District's population does not meet the threshold for a second Māori councillor. The Commission cannot alter this.

Fair and effective representation for the Golden Bay General Ward

69. Section 19V(3) of the Act provides that, despite subsection (2), if a territorial authority or the Commission considers one or more of certain prescribed conditions apply, wards may be defined and membership distributed between them in a way that does not comply with subsection (2). The prescribed conditions are:
- (a) non-compliance is required for effective representation of communities of interest within island or isolated communities situated within the district of the territorial authority
 - (b) compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing a community of interest between wards
 - (c) compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by uniting within a ward two or more communities of interest with few commonalities of interest.
70. Section 19V(6) provides that on receiving a reference under subsection (4), the Commission must determine whether to:
- (a) uphold the decision of the Council, or
 - (b) alter that decision.
71. The Council's proposal results in over-representation of -36.02% for the Golden Bay Ward on the grounds that it is an isolated community. The proposed non-compliance is an increase from -32.44% determined by the Commission in 2019. The isolation factors previously noted by the Commission were geographical separation from the rest of the District, main road access susceptible to closure due to weather events, slips, etc, and distance to Council offices.
72. During the review process, the Council confirmed that these factors still apply.
73. In relation to the number of elected members required for effective representation of Golden Bay communities, Council workshops highlighted the workload involved for Golden Bay ward councillors, in being accessible to multiple, dispersed communities. A current Golden Bay councillor expressed the view that Golden Bay was larger than one councillor alone could sustain. Golden Bay has 50% more residents than Lakes-Murchison, supporting the need for two councillors.
74. Of 19 initial proposal submissions relating to the Golden Bay General Ward 16, including 12 Golden Bay residents, supported two ward councillors citing the representation challenges created by the ward's geographic isolation, dispersed communities. and rural character. Both appeals supported two councillors for the Golden Bay General Ward on the basis that it can be considered an isolated community.
75. We are satisfied that the proposed Golden Bay area can be considered an isolated community under section 19V(3) of the Act. The Commission upholds the Golden Bay General Ward boundaries proposed by the Council.
76. The Commission also upholds the allocation of two councillors for the Golden Bay General Ward as necessary for effective representation in the context of the isolated and dispersed nature of communities within Golden Bay.

Fair and effective representation for the Motueka General Ward

77. The Motueka General Ward includes some dispersed rural communities, largely within 30 minutes' drive of the ward's main town, Motueka. The Council's proposal for three councillors complies with the fair representation requirements of the Act.
78. Submissions on the Council's initial proposal focussed on extending the ward boundaries rather than councillor numbers. Tasman Democracy's appeal proposed five councillors for an expanded ward, but the Commission's March 2025 determination found insufficient evidence of community views supporting such changes.
79. There is no evidence to suggest a change to the number of ward councillors as proposed by the Council is required. The distances between the more dispersed communities of the ward and Motueka are not extreme. Three councillors suggests an effective level of representation allowing for adequate access of residents to councillors and vice versa.

Fair and effective representation for the Lakes-Murchison General Ward

80. The Council's proposal for one councillor for the Lakes-Murchison General Ward complies with the fair representation requirements of the Act.
81. Communities of interest in the ward include those based around the localities of Murchison (1.5 hours' drive from Richmond) and St Arnaud (45 minutes' drive from Murchison, 1 hour from Richmond). Their distance from the urban centre suggests dedicated ward representation is necessary for reasonable access by the community to an elected representative and vice versa.
82. However, we have reservations about how well the proposed ward boundaries will continue to reflect and group communities of interest. We address these concerns in relation to Totara View and the northern Lakes-Murchison communities below.

Totara View

83. Totara View, a rural residential development with 89 rural lifestyle properties and 300 residents, is located on the southern edge of Wakefield. It falls within in the Lakes-Murchison General Ward, separated from Wakefield by a ward boundary.
84. Totara View connects with Wakefield and Richmond via State Highway 6, with drive times of around 5 and 20 minutes, respectively. The nearest town in the Lakes-Murchison General Ward is Murchison, over an hour's drive away across two mountain ranges.
85. At the hearing Councillor Mackenzie confirmed that Totara View residents look to Wakefield for functional connections such as schooling. Totara View residents also rely on representation structures within Moutere-Waimea, attending Wakefield community association meetings which are also attended by the Lakes-Murchison General Ward councillor.

86. For the purposes of effective representation, ward councillors are responsible for understanding and representing the views and issues of their area at the council table. Relying on them to represent views and issues of communities outside of their ward is unlikely to support effective representation.
87. It is clear that Totara View shares greater commonalities with the Wakefield community of interest than it does with the more distant Lakes and Murchison communities. The Council's proposal limits effective representation by dividing the Wakefield community of interest, which includes Totara View residents, between wards.
88. Accordingly, we determine the boundary between the Moutere-Waimea and the Lakes-Murchison General Wards be altered to include the Totara View development, comprising meshblocks 2354801, 4003945, and 4010495, in the Moutere-Waimea General Ward.
89. This boundary alteration creates over-representation for Lakes-Murchison General Ward of -15.30%. We consider the non-compliance necessary to avoid splitting the Totara View community of interest between wards. Having already identified the need for dedicated representation for other Lakes-Murchison communities, the Commission upholds the Council's proposal for a single councillor for this ward.

Northern Lakes-Murchison communities

90. The Mayor noted, and we agree, that the communities of interest rationale for extending the Moutere-Waimea General Ward boundary to include Totara View could also apply to the area extending further south to the foot of the Hope Ranges. An early Council workshop considered such a change within the context of variations to the existing structure.
91. There are limitations in perpetuating an existing representation structure if communities of interest have evolved. A comprehensive analysis of communities of interest during the next review will either inform a new perspective on ward boundaries or confirm the relevance of the current structure. We recommend this includes careful consideration of the appropriateness of combining communities of interest across significant geographic features like the Hope Ranges.

Fair and effective representation for the Moutere-Waimea General Ward

92. The Council's final proposal for three members for the Moutere-Waimea General Ward results in under-representation for the ward of +17.15%. The boundary alterations related to Totara View discussed above increase under-representation to +19.42%. Both appellants argued that reconfigured ward arrangements would improve both the non-compliance and effective representation for communities of interest.
93. We were impressed with the degree to which appellants engaged with the principles and requirements of representation reviews. They argued that the proposed ward arrangements no longer effectively represent communities of interest because they combine Waimea and Moutere communities, which share few functional connections.

94. The appellants highlighted the strong functional connections between Moutere communities and Motueka and to a lesser extent between Waimea plains localities (Wakefield, Brightwater, and Redwood Valley) and Richmond. These functional connections support their preference for extending the proposed Motueka General Ward to include Moutere communities, and the Richmond General Ward to include Waimea plains communities, removing the Moutere-Waimea General Ward in its entirety.
95. The Council considered similar options early in the review but did not progress them. The Council stated that the existing Moutere-Waimea Ward is a well-established network of rural and coastal settlements with local facilities and community associations, which do not share common interests with the urban centres of Richmond or Motueka.
96. At the hearing, the Council suggested that Moutere-Waimea residents identify more within their ward than with urban Richmond and Motueka Wards but did not provide evidence of this perception. The Council argued that combining rural communities with an urban centre may therefore alienate residents and risk lower voter participation.
97. The Council's observations suggest some commonalities between Moutere-Waimea's communities, supported by feedback from the 2019 review. At that time, the Motueka Valley Association and the Tasman Area Community Association rejected including in the Motueka Ward as they did not feel this was their community of interest. For this review, councillors' informal engagement with community associations generated little feedback.
98. The Council's proposal aims to preserve rural representation, recognising the role of rural sectors in the District's economy and the impact of unitary council decisions on rural communities. Under the Council's FPP electoral system, combining smaller rural settlements with larger towns could skew representation towards the urban areas, compromising rural representation.
99. While the Commission could uphold the broad intent of the appellants' proposals, such large-scale changes require sufficient evidence of community views. Therefore, for at least the 2025 local elections, the Moutere-Waimea General Ward continues to form part of the Council's representation arrangements.
100. We strongly recommend the Council's next review includes early community testing of multiple representation options, including those proposed by the appellants, alongside alternative ways to preserve rural representation. This might include well supported and empowered community boards for rural areas, a model that has proven effective for rural representation in other districts.
101. Having decided to retain the Moutere-Waimea General Ward, we now turn to the question of effective representation. Key factors are the size and geography of the ward, adequate access by residents to their ward councillors and vice versa, and adequate representation for the diverse communities of interest in the ward.

102. Two submissions on the Council's initial proposal supported increasing councillors for this ward to four, to improve compliance with the +/-10% rule and better support representation of the diverse towns and communities within the ward.
103. Increasing membership to four would increase the overall number of councillors to 15. After accounting for the boundary alteration related to Totara View, this would reduce non-compliance of the ward to -11.24% over-representation. However, doing so would also increase non-compliance in other general wards by 1-2 percentage points each, unless this was offset by reducing councillor numbers elsewhere.
104. Reducing councillor numbers in Richmond or Motueka would create significant under-representation for those wards of over +40%. That level of non-compliance would need to be supported by strong evidence. The characteristics of these wards, as described in this determination, do not in the Commission's view provide evidence supporting such large levels of non-compliance. As already discussed, reducing councillor numbers for Golden Bay would limit effective representation for that ward.
105. That leaves the possibility of increasing total councillor numbers to accommodate an additional councillor for Moutere-Waimea. Moutere-Waimea communities cannot be considered geographically separated from the rest of the District, nor particularly remote, having good transport links across the ward. This suggests that accessibility of residents to councillors and vice versa is not a significant issue. In the Commission's view there is no clear justification for increasing total councillor numbers solely to improve compliance for this ward while exacerbating non-compliance for other general wards. The Commission upholds the Council's proposal for three councillors for the Moutere-Waimea General Ward.

Fair and effective representation for the Richmond General Ward

106. The Council's proposal for four councillors results in under-representation for the Richmond General Ward of +10.74% on the grounds that compliance would limit effective representation by dividing the Richmond community of interest, which typically looks to Richmond township for much of its identity, and commercial, social, and recreational activity, between wards.
107. One submission on the Council's initial proposal suggested fewer members given the relatively smaller geographic area of Richmond. A reduction would create under-representation of well over +40%. One submitter suggested five members to reflect projected population growth in the ward. The Commission does not typically determine councillor numbers in anticipation of population growth.
108. The proposed under-representation is an increase from +4.14% in 2019. It equates to 132 people, or 33 people per councillor, beyond the 10% threshold. Richmond's population density suggests this would have minimal impact on ward councillors' access to residents and vice versa.

109. The Richmond General Ward's boundary aligns with the district boundary and the natural boundary of the Waimea River. Addressing non-compliance would require moving the boundary away from the Waimea River, transferring part of Richmond's population into the Moutere-Waimea General Ward.
110. Richmond residents may share some commonalities of interest with nearby Moutere-Waimea communities. However, until the Council has sought appropriate community input at its next review, we believe altering the boundary purely for compliance with the +/-10% rule does not support effective representation.
111. The current number of ward councillors appears to provide effective representation for the Richmond community, and there is in the Commission's view no clear rationale from an effective representation perspective for altering the Council's proposal for four members for the Richmond General Ward. The Commission upholds the Richmond General Ward boundaries proposed by the Council.

Number of members – conclusion

112. Taking into account the overall characteristics of the Tasman District, along with the individual characteristics of each ward, the overall number of 14 members is justified. The Commission determines accordingly.

Community Boards

113. Section 19J of the Act requires every territorial authority, as part of its review of representation arrangements, to determine whether there should be community boards in the district and, if so, the nature of those communities and the structure of the community boards. The territorial authority must make this determination in light of the principle in section 4 of the Act relating to fair and effective representation for individuals and communities.
114. The Council is proposing to retain the existing Golden Bay and Motueka Community Boards, each electing four members. There are no appeals in relation to community boards.
115. Accordingly, we endorse the Council's proposal in relation to this matter.

Commission recommendations

116. Given the evidence provided in the appeals and by the Council at the hearing, and the increasing levels of non-compliance with the +/-10% rule, we believe the Council has a strong mandate to test significant change to its ward arrangements with the community. The Commission strongly recommends the Council takes the opportunity to do so in its next representation review.
117. As part of the next review, we recommend the Council considers the following:
 - (a) undertaking concerted, proactive engagement with communities and evaluating other information it holds to inform a ground-up analysis of communities of interest

- (b) testing representation options with the community at the preliminary stage, including models such as those set out in the appeals to this review and options for preserving rural representation
- (c) the appropriateness of combining communities of interest across significant geographic features such as the Hope Ranges
- (d) supporting engagement on representation options with educational material explaining the purpose of a representation review and the key principles of fair and effective representation.

Conclusion

118. We have made this determination pursuant to section 19R of the Local Electoral Act 2001 and the High Court Judgment *Tasman Democracy Incorporated v Local Government Commission 2025*, having considered the information before the Commission and the requirements of sections 19T, 19W and 19V of the Act.

Local Government Commission

Commissioner Brendan Duffy (Chair)

Commissioner Bonita Bigham

Commissioner Sue Bidrose

21 October 2025