

# **Tokomaru/Opiki/Palmerston North City Boundary Reorganisation**

Proposed by:

**The Tokopiki Boundary Change Group**

Representative/Contact:

**Arthur Toms**



**To: The Chief Executive Officer  
Local Government Commission**

45 Pipitea Street

PO Box 5362

Wellington 6140

5 November 2018.

Dear Sir

We, the Tokopiki Boundary Change Group, ask that the Commission approve and progress the realignment of the boundary between Horowhenua District and Palmerston North City to include Tokomaru and Opiki in Palmerston North City, according to Section 24(1)(d) of the Local Government Act 2002 as at 1 July 2018.

("Tokopiki" is a portmanteau name for the area around the border between Tokomaru and Opiki)

The 1989 Scheme proposed the inclusion of Tokomaru Village in Palmerston North, along with Bunnythorpe, Ashhurst, and Linton. These last three have been added into the City over recent years, but Tokomaru still remains to be included.

We ask that the Palmerston North City boundary be extended south to include Tokomaru Village as originally envisaged but that the southern boundary of Tokomaru now be retained at Kingston Road 3 Km north of Shannon, as it has been for many years.

We further advocate the inclusion of Opiki, being adjacent to Tokomaru on its western side and also extending to the southern boundary of Palmerston North City, believing that it would be a logical inclusion. Opiki's southern boundary also meets SH57 at the same point

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as Kingston Road, extending west to the Tokomaru and Manawatu Rivers. Maps are at the end of this document.

Inasmuch as it refers to Opiki at all, the Horowhenua District Council refers to it as Tokomaru's "surrounding rural areas" rather than as an entity in its own right. It would therefore seem to make little sense to separate the two.

Both Tokomaru and Opiki residents are supportive of the boundary shift, as further evidenced in this Application.

Opiki and Tokomaru share considerable history, having been involved in the flax industry since before the turn of the twentieth century. Flax was largely grown around Opiki and processed at mills in Tokomaru before being shipped out down the Manawatu River to the port of Foxton. This gave way to a common interest in cropping, sheep and eventually dairy farming as the flax trade dwindled, with road and rail links through Tokomaru.

As mentioned, we ask that the local government boundary between Palmerston North and Horowhenua be moved south to the current boundaries between Opiki/Tokomaru and Shannon, to allow responsibility for Tokomaru and Opiki to move from Horowhenua District Council to the Palmerston North City Council.

This is an extension of Tokomaru's southern boundary from the original mesh-block boundary proposed in 1988. We understand, however, that Opiki's southern boundary continues Okuku Road to the Tokomaru River and thence to the Manawatu River, while Tokomaru is regarded as extending to the junction of Kingston Road with SH 57, some 3 kilometres north of Shannon, east from the end of the road to the top of the Tararua Range where that becomes the eastern boundary. We advocate that the existing southern boundaries of Tokomaru and Opiki become the southern boundary of Palmerston North City.

As it is, Horowhenua divides into three bands.

At the southern end lie Levin, Ohau, Waitarere Beach and other suburban areas.

Foxton and Shannon lie to the north of that, and have some administrative functions. They have more community of interest with Levin than anywhere else, including each other. Poutu Pa, the marae of Te Roopu Taiao o Ngati Whakatere, is on the road between Shannon and Foxton.

North of Shannon, Opiki and Tokomaru sit in relative isolation, certainly from local administration in Levin, but together as historically-linked neighbours on the City boundary.

In 1989 it appears that Opiki and Tokomaru were included in Horowhenua more as a matter of administrative convenience than community of interest, for the sake of making up numbers to justify the administrative existence of the Horowhenua District.

Indeed, the very name of the District suggests a focus on the southern end of this long thin District, named as it was after Lake Horowhenua to the west of Levin.

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Opiki has no connection with Levin, the administrative centre of Horowhenua, while all Tokomaru has in common with Levin is that both formed around stations on the Wellington and Manawatu Railway. If that were a relevant consideration, Paekakariki and Taihape could as validly be considered linked because of their stations on the Main Trunk Line.

Tokomaru lies 29 kilometres north-east of Levin, 21 kilometres south-west of Palmerston North and some 12 kilometres north-east of Shannon. Note that these are “driving” distances and directions, rather than “as the crow flies”.

Opiki lies 17 kilometres south-west of Palmerston North but 30.5 kilometres north-east of Levin. This distance is presumably the distance to the School, as Opiki is principally a collection of farms spreading from the current boundary at the Manawatu River south to Okuku Road where it crosses State Highway 57.

As mentioned, Tokomaru was established around a station on the Wellington and Manawatu Railway. As a result a village of 570 people (at last census) grew principally east of the Main Trunk Railway Line and north of the Tokomaru River, and significant numbers of new houses are being built to the north and south of the village in Williams and Albert Roads.

Tokomaru has rural dwellings and farms to the north-east and south-east of the village, and along Makerua Road (SH 57).

## **Community of Interest**

Tokomaru's emphasis has been changing for it to become a dormitory for Linton, where the Army Camp and Manawatu Prison are located, and Palmerston North. A lot of people have bought houses in Tokomaru and work in Palmerston North, regarding Tokomaru's location as being a good compromise between affordability and access to the City.

Opiki and Tokomaru, partly because of relative distances, have a far greater community of interest with Palmerston North than Levin.

Both centres look to Palmerston North for shopping of all sorts; the only shop in the local area is a dairy/takeaway/Post Shop and mail centre in Tokomaru, which does the best it can but hardly competes with supermarkets, restaurants and other catering establishments. Entertainment, cultural, arts and sports facilities are all in Palmerston North, as are all professional and trade services, doctors and hospitals, transport links and social services.

Our pre-schoolers either attend the local Early Childhood Centre in Tokomaru, or increasingly often parents drop them off at facilities in Palmerston North on their way to and from work. There is a trend, however, for some children from north of the current boundary to attend the well-regarded Opiki and Tokomaru primary schools, as well as local children travelling into Palmerston North with parents who work in the City

Post-primary education at all levels happens in the City, where students can progress through Intermediate and Secondary Schools to Polytechnic and University to PhD level,

Our local primary schools are part of the Fitzherbert cluster, based in Palmerston North.

School buses for high school children from Opiki and Tokomaru only take children to Palmerston North. There are no school buses to Shannon, Levin, Foxton or any other part of Horowhenua.

Local radio, its news and weather information come from Palmerston North, as does the mainstream newspaper.

We are part of the Palmerston North free-calling area, while telephone calls to the rest of Horowhenua are toll calls.

We are fortunate to have access to the City library after an agreement recognising HDC's lack of interest or ability in providing a competent library service in our area.

We are part of the Palmerston North Police District. Our nearest Police presence is at Linton, about five minutes away.

Our rural mail goes to R D 4, Palmerston North.

In the latest consumer survey on public transport (July 2018) from Horizons Regional Council Tokomaru and Opiki are not even on the Horowhenua District map, not even mentioned. The same is true of the Horowhenua District Council's recently-debated and adopted Long Term Plan.

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As it is, the possibility of a shoppers' bus service between Tokomaru and Palmerston North has been mentioned in discussions with the City Mayor.

There is a Health Shuttle service to take patients between Levin and Palmerston North, but this can hardly be considered a bus service in the usual sense.

Levin to Palmerston North buses make one stop in the ten-kilometre length of Opiki.

An August 20<sup>th</sup> 2018 presentation at the Tokomaru Hall on the Council's Long Term Plan by HDC to the TVACA (Tokomaru Village and Community Association) in Tokomaru mentioned the word "Tokomaru" just once. There was no mention of Opiki at all, and when questioned the Council personnel confirmed that Opiki does not feature at all in the LTP. Requests for a copy of the Council's Work Plan for Opiki and Tokomaru have produced no results.

Our employment is not only in the inner City, but also significantly in Linton at the Army Camp and as staff at the Prison. Shannon appears not to feature significantly in our places of employment, Levin virtually not at all.

We go to Palmerston North for medical services, including hospitals both public and private, specialist services and general practitioners.

We do not identify with Levin, or Shannon, and the Horowhenua District Council does not appear to regard us as any important part of its responsibilities. We are, it seems, "out of sight, out of mind".

Tokomaru residents do occasionally go to appointments at the Levin Health Centre; they are almost always asked by reception staff to confirm whether Tokomaru is actually part of Horowhenua.

It is, of course, arguable that these shortcomings in services provided to the Affected Area are specifically reflective of the current Council and its attitudes. However, given the long-established southern bias in the spending habits of the Horowhenua District Council residents could be forgiven for regarding those shortcomings as entrenched over decades.

To repeat, our strong community of interest is with Palmerston North, not Levin, and always has been.

**Community Support for Boundary Reorganisation.**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018 we met with the Palmerston North City Council, as representatives of the Palmerston North City community, to present our case for the boundary change. This was very well received on the day and at the September 24<sup>th</sup> Council public meeting the Mayor and Councillors voted 16-0 to carry the process further – a clean sweep.

We have conducted public meetings in Opiki and Tokomaru to canvass public opinion, with very encouraging results. Show-of-hands support on the night appeared to be around 98% of the residents in the 50-60 strong crowd in Opiki, and about the same proportion of known locals in Tokomaru, where within the 70 or so attendees there were some visitors from neighbouring locations. These may not seem like very high numbers, but ours are small communities. Many spouses could not be there, and other residents could not attend for the usual variety of reasons.

Tokomaru's population is 570, Opiki's 550, according to Statistics New Zealand's latest census figures.

There appears to be a discrepancy with the Electoral Commission's figures; they tell us Tokomaru has 560 enrolled voters, as opposed to around 260 in Opiki. To date this has not been resolved, but we believe we have a strong show of community support.

We have so far collected well over 200 names of supporters for the proposal, and they are still coming in. Given the methods of collection, at public meetings, at Opiki School, at the Tokomaru Store and through some doorknocking, this almost inevitably misses a number of spouses and solo parents at the very least, but we believe that in the circumstances of local body politics this is enough of an indication of support for the process to continue.

If the benchmark were to be 10% of enrolled voters, and a poll were appropriate, we should have needed to collect 82 names to trigger a poll. We are well past that, and as mentioned supportive signatures are still coming in.

We have had discussions with local Maori leadership. TRTONW (Ngati Whakatere), based at Poutu Pa between Shannon and Foxton, is a hapu of Ngati Raukawa, and its relations with Rangitane, the Palmerston North iwi, appear to show historic and present differences in boundaries and interests. However, rohe boundaries and other inter-iwi concerns would be unaffected by this proposal. The majority of iwi Ngati Whakatere live in and around Shannon. They have said firmly that they have no interest in changing their boundary or area of interest. Tokomaru has about 40 Maori-roll voters; according to the Electoral Commission, Opiki has none.

Iwi have received indications of several projects with the Horowhenua District Council over the next several years. Rangitane, Muaupoko, Ngati Raukawa and Ngati Whakatere all have territory and interests that involve Horowhenua but cross District boundaries, and we would expect these to be unaffected. Their areas of interest do not coincide with Local Government District boundaries any more than those coincide with Parliamentary General

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Electorate boundaries. Historical Maori boundaries will not be affected by this boundary change.

Rangitikei MP Ian McKelvie, who independently chaired the public meetings in Opiki and Tokomaru, has given his impressions of the support he observed, in a local newspaper comment column attached to this document. His viewpoint is informed by his experience as ex-Mayor of Manawatu District Council and former Associate Minister of Local Government.

The Local Government Act states that efficient delivery of local government and services is a relevant factor in the Commission's deliberations.

Palmerston North is the major centre in the southern central North Island.

Horowhenua District Council has a history of providing minimal services in Tokomaru, and mostly none in Opiki, frequently citing lack of money. Palmerston North has a much larger establishment without the per-capita debt burden and consequent interest overhead. The overall debt level in Horowhenua is similar to Palmerston North at levels quoted variously at \$120 million for its 32,200 residents. Palmerston North has a debt of \$100 million for 88,500 residents. (That population figure comes from the Palmerston North Mayor.)

We have asked for accurate and current figures from the Horowhenua District Council; these have not so far been forthcoming. However, the figure of \$120 million for the Council debt was mentioned at the TVACA meeting by Cr. Ross Campbell in front of the HDC's Chief Executive David Clapperton, who was present at the meeting and did not disagree with that amount.

The current debt burden in Palmerston North City is also in the region of \$100 million, but for about three times the population. The per capita debt is therefore a third of that in Horowhenua District, and currently dropping, while interest and other debt servicing costs are much lower per capita in the City

Our relative proximity to Palmerston North as distinct from our distance from the smaller Levin means a reduction in vehicle running costs and presumably more productive hours in the day with less travelling time, and the greater number of staff should mean reductions in waiting time for maintenance etc. Opiki has been waiting for years for road maintenance for example, and is being repeatedly told that it is not a high enough priority compared with Levin.

Our experience has highlighted the open nature of local government in the City, with friendly, knowledgeable and cooperative staff. There appears to be free and open discussion round the PNCC Council Table.

**The present Local Government situation in Horowhenua.**

It is not our intention to concentrate on the performance of individual Horowhenua Councils, though the debt has ballooned over the past ten or so years. Published figures for the debt level vary wildly, but even the most favourable reports show a level of debt and interest unsustainable for a community of 17,000 mostly lower-income ratepayers. (Average household income for Horowhenua was quoted at \$21,800 in the 2013 Census, Palmerston North \$27'000, Whole of NZ \$28,500). Palmerston North is predicting its debt to rise to approximately \$300 million as it introduces significant new projects over the next few years, including 140 million on waste water which is estimated to bypass Opiki and Tokomaru should the proposal be successful. Horowhenua is known to have budgeted for its debt to expand to \$200 million over a shorter period.

The City has a roughly 25% lower level of urban rates, but a far lower, and reducing, debt burden per capita means that less is siphoned off in interest, allowing the City to achieve more per rates dollar than Horowhenua.

According to the 2018 League Tables published by the Taxpayers' Union this September, the average residential rate in Horowhenua is currently \$2311. The bulk of these rates will be levied on Levin properties where the valuations are higher than is usual in Tokomaru.

We are advised that Opiki pays the highest rural rates per hectare in the country, for an almost complete lack of council-provided services. Whenever roading maintenance is requested locals are told that they are a very low priority compared with Levin. As a result some of Opiki's roads have been allowed to deteriorate until they are downright dangerous to drive on. Tane Road, which often carries heavy traffic between Highways 56 and 57 whenever flooding closes SH 56 at Opiki, is one particularly bad example; Campbells Road, which joins SH 56 just closer to Shannon than Tane Road, is another.

While it is arguable that nobody is ever satisfied with the level of information flow between governing bodies and the public that elects them, some important principles have been established in legislation in recent decades.

The Official Information Act (OIA) and the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act (LGOIMA) specifically aim to make official information available by default, as distinct from The Official Secrets Act which they superseded.

From the LGOIMA:

**"Principle of availability**

The question whether any official information is to be made available, where that question arises under this Act, shall be determined, except where this Act otherwise expressly requires, in accordance with the purposes of this Act and the principle that the information shall be made available unless there is good reason for withholding it."

Similarly, the Local Government Act requirements that Local Government should be "open, transparent and democratically accountable" (LGA Section 14 (1)(a)(i) ).

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This principle is not, it seems, universally adhered to by at least some Councillors.

Journalist Veronica Harrod wrote this about the Horowhenua Council's involvement in the establishment of the Foxton Medical Centre:

"In a column in a community newspaper last year, Councillor Neville Gimblett said the medical centre land deal, "reinforced that effective growth is a partnership between council, central government and private enterprise....away from the unsettling glare of public commentary."

We deserve better.

### **Anticipated objections**

We expect that the Horowhenua District Council will object to this proposal. It does not appear that there would be any merit in objections concerning Community of Interest (we have none with Levin) or any considerations of shared history (Opiki and Tokomaru, again, have none with Levin but plenty with each other).

There may, however, be objections on the grounds of loss of rates revenue. These should fail on the grounds that the whole of the Miranui Ward is quoted by the HDC financial manager as bringing in approximately 8.38% of Horowhenua's rates, of which it is estimated that Tokomaru and Opiki would contribute approximately two-fifths, or 3.35%. While rates are far from the only income of the Council, this amounts to about \$1.4 million out of a claimed \$43.5 million annually, and should not be a ruinous loss of income, particularly as the Chief Executive has emailed enquirers in both Opiki and Tokomaru to the effect that their rates come nowhere near covering the expense of providing and maintaining their services, and that Levin ratepayers are subsidising them. One enquiry concerned the level of rates for a Tokomaru property with an RV of \$270,000, currently rated at \$2,347 per annum. His claim is that without "harmonisation" Tokomaru residential rates should rise to put that property at around \$4,600 p.a. Neither Opiki nor Tokomaru residents give this assertion any credence given that services in Opiki are virtually non-existent, and those in Tokomaru are minimal and their quoted prices are exaggerated beyond all possibility of belief.

An example of this exaggeration is the Tokomaru Water Treatment Station, an activated charcoal plant which could have been bought in China and landed on the wharf in Wellington for comfortably under \$US10,000 (approximately \$NZ15,000) including freight, ready for installation on the existing site and using the existing tanks and pipes including the line to the sewage ponds on the other side of the railway line. \$NZ185,000 would have bought us a proper reverse osmosis water treatment plant from King Machines, also in China.

However the publicly notified price to the Horowhenua ratepayer, was \$NZ350,000, hooked up to the same pipes on the same site in 2015. This included \$80,000 for the filtered waste ("black water") pipe to the sewage ponds – which was never installed. As expected, the original pipes and tanks were reused.

If the Chief Executive's claim is to be believed, Opiki/Tokomaru moving into Palmerston North should be a highly desirable financial outcome for HDC.

In consequence of the makeup of Horowhenua, the sometimes bewildering management style and decisions, and our lack of community interest with Levin we believe strongly that it is untenable for Tokomaru and Opiki to remain in Horowhenua.

**In summary**

- We do not belong in Horowhenua.
- Our Community of Interest is with Palmerston North. As adjacent communities with a shared history we abut Palmerston North and to all intents and purposes do all our business there.
- Our boundaries are contiguous with Palmerston North.
- Council services can be delivered to Opiki and Tokomaru more efficiently from Palmerston North than from Levin.
- Financial and other management in Horowhenua is not well-conducted, and has not been so for years, in contrast to Palmerston North's greater capability, competence and transparency.
- Loss of rates revenue from Opiki and Tokomaru should not, as far as we can tell, be sufficient to cause Horowhenua severe damage, if indeed any at all. It would, in any event, simply require Horowhenua to cut its coat according to its cloth.
- We believe we have established sufficient support from the community in the Affected Area and the City community representatives on the Palmerston North City Council to indicate enthusiastic support for the proposed move.

### **Specific points from the Act**

7: When Commission may decline to assess reorganisation application

- (a) We do not feel that this application is frivolous, nor is that its intent.
- (c) While it is possible that some detail of the proposed boundary information may be missing we make the point that we are using present boundaries between Tokomaru, Opiki and Shannon as shown on the Miranui Ward map and labelled “Okuku” and “Kingston” and extending as at present to east and west.

### **8 Community Support**

- A poll is not required by the Local Government Act for the purposes of a reorganisation under section 24(1)d. We have assumed that a clean sweep of PNCC Councillors voting to progress this application would be sufficient indication of support in the City, and we are very confident of our support in Opiki and Tokomaru.
- If further evidence of community support is required, we trust that the Commission will give us the opportunity to provide it.

### **18 Representation**

- Horowhenua District Council undertook its Representation Review in July of this year. Given the short time to the next election and the relative simplicity of this application we would expect no change to wards or their councillors. Palmerston North City Councillors are elected as whole-of-council, so we should expect the possibility of better representation than we experience at present.

### **Part 2 Subpart (1) 14 Development of proposal**

- This application does not propose any new local authorities, nor major changes to those currently in place.
- Rohe boundaries are expected to remain unchanged.
- No new local authorities are proposed.

### **Section 17 Appropriate boundaries**

- The boundaries proposed are already in place, and have influenced community of interest in the Affected Area.

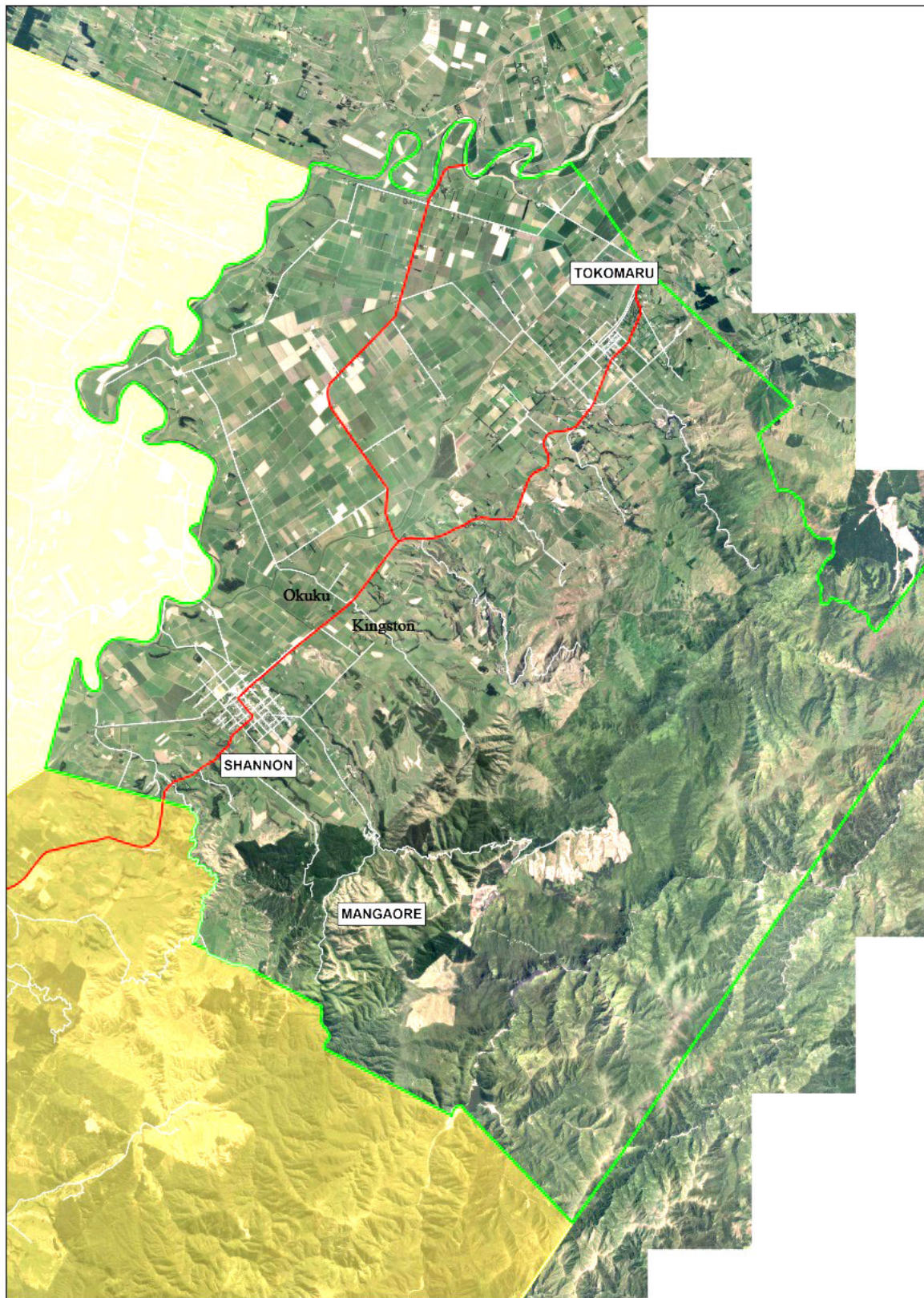
Any other matters arising from the Act appear to be for the Commission to build into its Proposal, and our attempting to pre-empt that could be seen as presumptuous.

Arthur Toms

For the Tokopiki Boundary Reorganisation Group

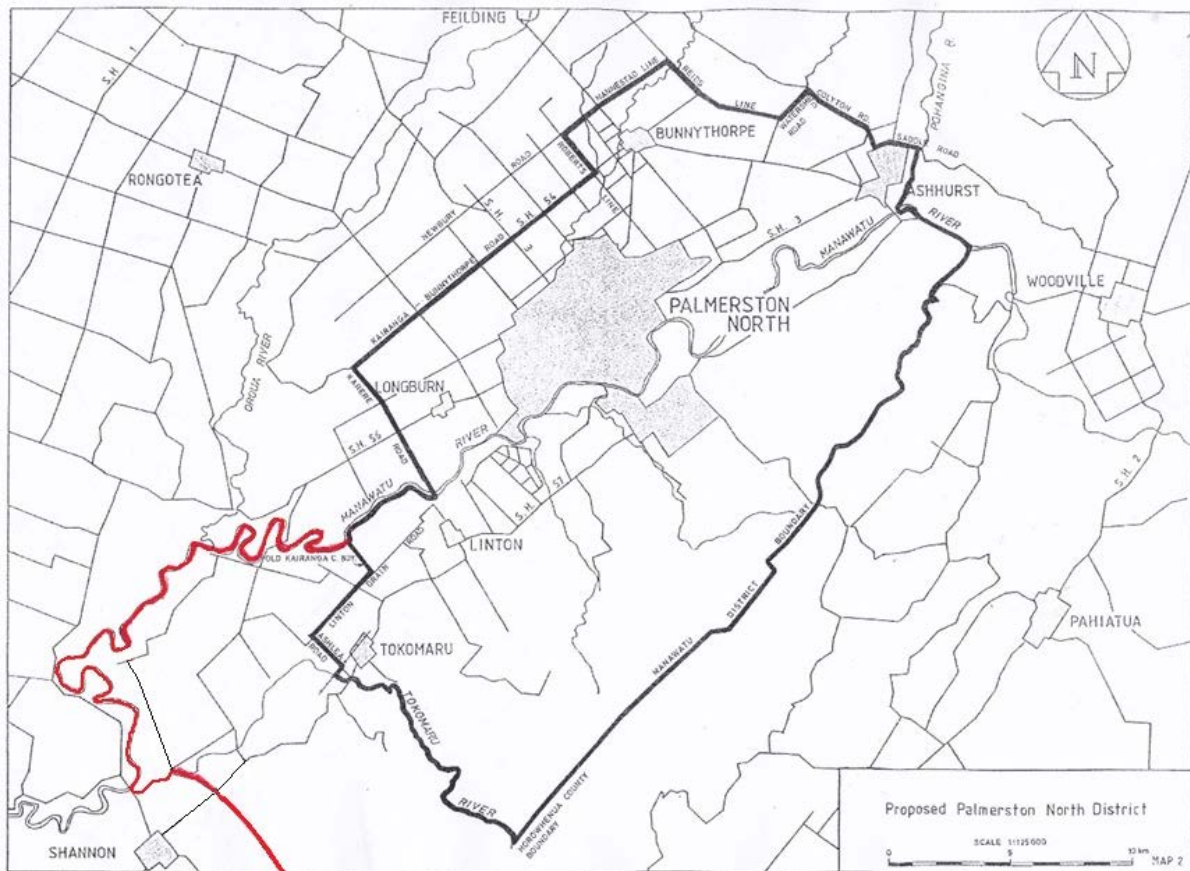
Tokomaru

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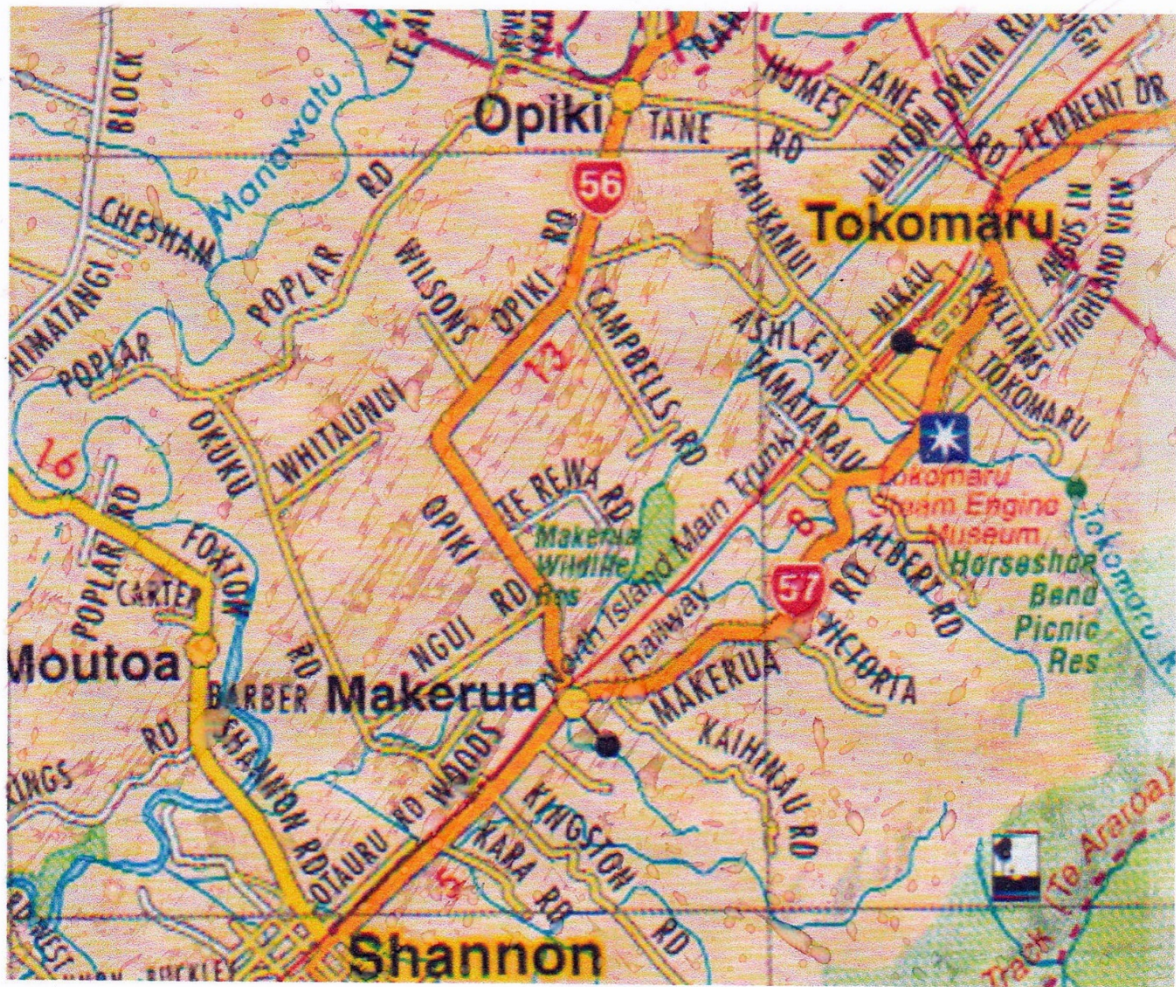


This shows the Miranui Ward, with Okuku and Kingston Roads (Opiki and Tokomaru southern boundaries) labelled, meeting SH57 (red) 3 Km north-east of Shannon.

## Tokomaru/Opiki/Palmerston North City Boundary Reorganisation



The black line shows the boundary of the PNCC area as proposed in 1988, while the red-outlined area shows the proposed new PNCC/HDC boundary at Kingston and Okuku Roads.



Street map of the Opiki and Tokomaru areas.

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