



TE AO MĀRAMA INC.

13 May 2026

Linda Canton - Kaiwhakahaere
Mana Kawanatanga a Rohe Local Government Commission
EJ.Ruthven@lgc.govt.nz / LGC@lgc.govt.nz

Southland Reorganisation Investigation – Phase 1 Feedback Summary – Ngai Tahu ki Murihiku

Tēna koe Linda,

At the initiation of phase 1 of the Commission’s investigation, Ngai Tahu ki Murihiku were invited to provide feedback to the Commissioners regarding their insights and perspectives on:

- What challenges does the current local government structure in Southland present for Te Ao Mārama Incorporated/Papatipu Rūnanga? For mana whenua and the wider Murihiku community?
- What opportunities could local government structural change offer for Te Ao Mārama Incorporated/Papatipu Rūnanga? For mana whenua and the wider Murihiku community?

Te Ao Marama Inc have been mandated by Papatipu Runanga to facilitate input into the Commission’s investigation process, and this is recorded via our letter dated 24 June 2025. To support the Te Ao Marama Inc board in their engagement with the Local Government Commission a process of engagement with key kaumatua and whanau across our takiwā has been undertaken. This has provided key themes and insights some of which were shared verbally with the Commissioners who have at a hui held in Waihopai on 15 December 2025. At that point in time our process had not been completed.

Te Ao Marama Inc were requested by the Commissioner’s to seek endorsement of the release of those insights from papatipu rūnanga once our process had appropriately been completed and endorsed for release. This has now been completed, and the insights and perspectives have been refined to answer the questions above for this first phase. These are **attached** for inclusion in the Phase 1 findings report you are currently preparing for the Commissioners. In Summary, there is a call for bold innovation to set a higher bar for Southland.

We extend an invitation to officials and / or Commissioners for kanohi ki te kanohi korero on the mātauranga provided in our high-level insights if this would assist in clarifying any aspects of Ngai Tahu ki Murihiku feedback.

Dean Whaanga
Kaiwhakahaere Kaupapa Taiao



TE AO
MĀRAMA INC.



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Southland Local Government Reorganisation Investigation 2025 – Ngai Tahu ki Murihiku Feedback: Phase 1

Question:	Summary Insights	Ngai Tahu Settlement considerations
<p>What are the challenges?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fragmented Governance across multiple Councils – with overlaps and gaps in responsibilities creating inefficiencies and frustration in delivery and support for community outcomes and iwi aspirations. - Unclear Roles and Responsibilities and weak inter council collaboration – Council rarely work together effectively on integrated policy development, water management, infrastructure, or consents. Processes are fragmented and responsibilities are unclear. - Weak Communication and Relationship instability – changes in key personal can impact trust and collaboration. At a governance level engagement with mana whenua representation varies. - Historic and ongoing inequities for Ngai Tahu in relation to Council decisions. - Tick-Box compliance instead of genuine engagement – can feel procedural rather than partnership based, decisions can be made without meaning input. - Financial and Resource constraints across Councils affects quality and consistency. Collaboration between entities often happens out of necessity due to resource shortages, rather than because of a shared vision. <p>Whanau pointed to the state of the Taiao (Environment) to determine whether there was a problem.</p> <p>The current system has some strengths but many weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment Southland acts as a Guardian of Te Taiao – this is seen as essential for environmental oversight and science-based policy. 	<p>Structural misalignment with the Ngai Tahu Settlement framework – makes it difficult to give effect to the expectations embedded in the settlement.</p> <p>Inconsistent implementation of Te Tiriti and Settlement commitments across different entities, can fall short of active partnership and good faith intent underpinning the Ngai Tahu Settlement.</p> <p>Ongoing inequities could be contrary to the Settlement redress intent.</p> <p>System performance limits the ability to uphold cultural and environmental responsibilities.</p>

	<p>There is deep concern regarding the future of regional council functions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Charter of Understanding between Councils and Ngai Tahu ki Murihiku is valued as a holistic framework that can live on beyond current legislation and supports Treaty principles. However, it lacks measurable accountability which makes it vulnerable to inconsistency. - Mana whenua representation still variable across Councils – those who have held these roles have been consistent over time, even with variability in resourcing and changing council governance. - Delivery Gap – Strategies and vision exists but implementation often fails in practice. - Urban vs Rural needs misaligned – the current model does not adapt tools for different contexts, rural areas with low growth and urban areas with intensification require different approaches, but this is not reflected in planning approaches. 	
<p>What opportunities could structural change enable?</p>	<p>There was strong alignment regarding what the future could look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Streamlined governance – reduce the number of councils and simplify structures. Many suggest a model that separates strategic oversight from local delivery. - Strategic v Operational Split – A regional entity could handle big-picture planning, Treaty obligations, and environmental resilience (ki uta ki tai), while a place-based entity focuses on implementation and local management. - Maintaining independence of environmental regulation setting and implementation would support transparency and accountability where decision making can be complex. - Shared services with clear accountability – Collaboration should be structured and transparent, with clear roles for setting limits, monitoring compliance, and managing resources. - Future structures must embed meaningful representation and partnership. 	<p>Embedding Settlement obligations into governance design can provide for enduring recognition of mana whenua voice and enable Kaitiakitanga to be exercised.</p> <p>Future models of governance that are based on integrated system focus, ki uta ki tai principles will be effective at upholding both guardianship of the Taiao obligations and community aspirations that local government is charged with.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Innovation and Reform – RMA and LGA reform changes should accelerate collaboration, improve resilience, and raise standards for Ngai Tahu engagement. <p>There is a call for bold innovation to set a higher bar for Southland</p>	
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