

Southland reorganisation options for modelling

The Local Government Commission has identified two potential options for local government in Southland. These options are:

- One Southland-wide unitary council, supported by council-wide local boards.
- Two unitary councils (an Invercargill unitary council; and a Southland-Gore unitary council) each supported by council-wide local boards

The Commission has not yet decided on a preferred option.

A brief explanation of unitary councils and local boards can be found [here](#).

Option 1: One Southland-wide Unitary Council with Local Boards

This option would create **one council for the whole Southland region**, responsible for all regional and local government functions. The council would be supported by a network of **local boards** across Southland.

The council would make decisions on region-wide matters such as planning, transport and infrastructure, environmental management, and funding.

Local boards would represent communities across Southland and would have decision-making powers and allocated funding for local services and priorities, such as parks, community facilities, and local projects.

The Commission has not yet decided the detailed council structure for this option. Important aspects, including representation, governance arrangements and service delivery, will be considered through detailed modelling and upcoming community engagement.

As a starting point, the Commission suggests:

- A council of around 14-16 members, with around half elected from Invercargill, and half elected from the rest of Southland
- Ward-based representation
- Around nine local boards across Southland

Potential benefits for this option include:

- Reduced duplication across councils

- Improved coordination of regional planning and services
- Simpler governance arrangements
- A stronger regional voice on issues affecting Southland

Potential challenges for this option include concerns about:

- local communities having less direct representation
- Centralisation of decision-making
- Maintaining a balance between urban and rural interests

The potential benefits and challenges of this option, including any financial implications, will be explored further through modelling and engagement.

Option 2: Two Unitary Councils with Local Boards

This option would create **two councils**, responsible for both regional and local government functions within their areas:

- An Invercargill-based unitary council
- A Southland/Gore-based unitary council

Each council would make decisions on matters such as planning, transport and infrastructure, environmental management, and funding within the council area.

Each council would be supported by a network of **local boards** across each council, which would provide community representation and have decision-making powers and allocated funding for local services and priorities, such as parks, community facilities, and local projects.

Some functions that affect the wider Southland region, such as emergency management, regional transport planning, flood management, coastal management and biosecurity, would be managed together by the two councils through a **joint committee**.

The Commission has not yet decided the detailed council structure for this option. Important aspects, including representation, governance arrangements and service delivery, will be considered through detailed modelling and upcoming community engagement.

As a starting point, the Commission suggests:

- An Invercargill-based council with around 10-12 elected members, with either ward-based representation, at-large representation, or a mix of the two
- A Southland/Gore-based council with around 12-14 elected members, with ward-based representation
- Around two local boards for the Invercargill-based council
- Around seven local boards for the Southland/Gore-based council

Potential benefits for this option include:

- Maintaining local identity and community connections
- Strong local representation through councils and local boards
- Reduced duplication compared with current arrangements
- Improved coordination and planning within each council area

Potential challenges for this option include concerns about:

- Some duplication of services and decision-making remaining across both councils
- Coordination of regional functions and issues that affect both council areas
- Determining boundaries between the two councils and ensuring that communities of interest are appropriately represented

The potential benefits and challenges of this option, including any financial implications, will be explored further through modelling and engagement.

What happens now?

The Commission:

- Has engaged consultants MartinJenkins, to undertake financial modelling of both options
- Will engage with Southland councils, Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku, key stakeholders and the wider Southland community, to understand views and preferences regarding both options.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a unitary council?

A unitary council is a council that combines the functions and responsibilities of regional councils and district/city councils. This means that a single council is responsible both for regional matters (such as environmental management, flood protection and regional transport planning) and local matters (such as roads, parks, community facilities and local planning).

There are currently five unitary councils in New Zealand: Auckland Council, Gisborne District Council, Marlborough District Council, Nelson City Council and Tasman District Council.

What are local boards?

A local board is a locally elected body representing a defined community within a unitary council area. Local boards focus on local issues and priorities and have decision-making responsibilities and allocated funding for matters relating specifically to their area, such as local services, facilities, and projects.

Local boards provide for local representation and local decision-making, while the council focuses on council-wide matters and regulatory responsibilities.

How are local boards different from community boards?

Community boards are elected bodies with a focus on representing and advocating for their community. They may have decision-making responsibilities where these have been delegated to them by the council, and which may include the delegated power to spend allocated budgets.

Community boards are relatively flexible. Councils can establish or disestablish community boards; or change their boundaries and membership through representation review processes. Councils can also change the decision-making responsibilities and any allocated budgets delegated to community boards at any time.

Local boards are elected bodies that represent defined communities within a unitary council. They have decision-making responsibilities for local matters allocated to them and represent the interests of their communities as part of the wider council structure. They will have an allocated budget to be able to carry out their responsibilities. In general, local boards make decisions on local issues and services, while the council makes decisions on matters that affect the wider region.

Local boards are less flexible to change than community boards. They can only be established or disestablished through a reorganisation process. Changes to membership, and small changes to boundaries can be made through representation review processes, but more significant changes would require a reorganisation process.