Southland Communities of Interest

Southland is a strong regional community containing multiple distinct, nested and overlapping subregional and local communities.

Perceptual communities are most commonly expressed through towns, settlements, history, landscape, whānau, schools, sport and social networks.

Functional communities operate through service centres, employment, education, transport, health, council facilities and environmental systems. Invercargill, Gore, Winton and Te Anau are important service centres, while catchments and coastal systems form a further region-wide functional layer.

These different layers do not always align, and the evidence does not support either a single homogeneous Southland community or a simple, internally uniform urban-rural division.

The analysis below draws on information held by the Commission, including information gained through phases 1 and 2 of the investigation, along with material held on file from previous representation reviews undertaken by the current Southland councils.

Overall synthesis

Layer	Main communities or systems identified	Evidential conclusion
Regional perceptual	Murihiku Southland	Strong regional identity exists alongside, rather than instead of, local identities.
Regional functional	Catchments, coast and marine systems, environmental management, emergency management, transport, health, airport, port and economic systems	Very strong evidence. These systems routinely cross territorial and local-community boundaries.
Cultural and mana whenua	Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku and the interests of Awarua, Hokonui, Ōraka Aparima and Waihōpai Rūnanga	Strong regional and place-based evidence that does not neatly align with administrative boundaries.
Subregional	Fiordland; Northern Southland; Eastern Southland/Gore area; Central Southland/Ōreti; Western Southland; Coastal Southland/Ōraka Aparima; Waihōpai Toetoe/South-eastern Southland; Greater Invercargill functional area	Strong evidence overall, although several boundaries are porous or purpose-dependent.
Local	Rakiura, Bluff, Mataura, Gore, Te Anau-Manapouri, Winton, Riverton/Aparima, Otautau, Tuatapere, Lumsden, Ohai-Nightcaps, Otatara and numerous smaller settlements	Local identity remains one of the most consistently evidenced features of Southland.
Overlapping	Mossburn, Orepuki, Blackmount, Monowai, Wallacetown, Makarewa, Dipton, Athol-Garston and Edendale-Wyndham	Multiple affiliations towards different communities, indicative of potential flexibility in boundaries.

A. Regional communities and functional systems

Community or system	Geography indicated by evidence	Perceptual evidence	Functional evidence	Competing evidence or limitations	Overall finding
Murihiku Southland regional community	Broadly the current Southland regional area. Some functional and social relationships extend into West Otago, Clutha and Queenstown Lakes.	Phase 1 survey respondents expressed belonging to Southland at regional scale while also identifying with districts, towns and neighbourhoods. Phase 2 respondents variously identified with “Southland”, “Murihiku”, “all of Southland” and more local places.	Environmental management, transport, emergency management, health, regional facilities, economic development, port and airport access, natural-resource systems and mana whenua relationships operate regionally.	Regional identity is not exclusive. The evidence consistently shows simultaneous affiliation with smaller communities. This suggests a sense of regional belonging that sits alongside smaller community identities that are equally strongly-held. The Phase 1 survey provides evidence of both levels of identity, but this does not mean that one is held in higher regard than the other.	**Very strong regional layer, coexisting with strong subregional and local communities.**
Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku community of interest and relationships	Murihiku takiwā and the respective interests of Awarua, Hokonui, Ōraka Aparima and Waihōpai Papatipu Rūnanga. These do not map neatly onto council or electoral boundaries.	Cultural relationships involve ancestral land, water, sites, wāhi tapu, taonga, rūnanga and takiwā. Representation review documents identify partial relationships between some electoral areas and takiwā but do not claim equivalence.	Relationships with councils, resource management, freshwater, coast, environment and governance operate regionally and across territorial boundaries.	The available general community surveys contain comparatively limited direct mana whenua evidence. Takiwā should not be inferred from current wards, constituencies or catchments.	**Strong distinct regional and cultural evidence layer. Further direct mana whenua evidence should remain separately identified.**
Four major catchment systems	Waiau, Aparima, Ōreti and Mataura catchments, alongside smaller coastal catchments and receiving coastal environments.	Some respondents identify with Waiau, Waihōpai, Mataura catchments or environments. However, most respondents identify principally with towns, localities or subregions rather than catchments.	Very strong evidence relating to freshwater, floods, upstream-downstream effects, drinking-water sources, discharges, biodiversity, biosecurity, environmental monitoring and mountains-to-sea management.	Catchments are demonstrably functional systems but are not generally established as primary perceptual communities. This may limit the extent to which catchment-based governance proposals should be considered.	**Very strong functional communities or systems; limited-to-moderate perceptual evidence.**
Regional Invercargill service system	Invercargill City and a wider catchment extending into nearby Southland District communities and, for higher-order services, across the region.	Invercargill is a recognised urban community. Surrounding users of city services do not necessarily identify as part of Invercargill.	Southland Hospital, specialist health services, government services, airport, major retail, employment, secondary education, recreation, cultural facilities and regional public transport are concentrated in Invercargill.	Survey and qualitative evidence show strong wider use of Invercargill for services, indicating the importance of Invercargill to the wider region. However, survey and qualitative evidence likewise show strongly-held concerns regarding the potential of Invercargill to dominate the region if smaller community voices are not protected.	**Very strong regional functional centre. This does not establish a correspondingly broad Invercargill perceptual community.**
Urban-rural identity layer	Urban Invercargill and Gore, smaller towns, rural settlements, farming districts and hinterlands throughout Southland.	Strong rural identity occurs throughout both phases, with references to farming, distance, self-reliance, local social networks, roads and small-town life. Urban respondents also identify with Invercargill, Bluff and other urban communities.	Different infrastructure, transport, water, wastewater, rubbish, roads, facilities, rating and service-access patterns are repeatedly described.	The evidence is divided over whether urban and rural interests are incompatible. Many respondents assert fundamental difference; others describe economic, family, environmental and service interdependence and warn against institutionalising a binary. “Rural Southland” contains numerous internally distinct communities.	**Strong identity and policy layer, but not a complete or homogeneous community map.**

B. Subregional communities

Community	Indicative geography	Perceptual aspects	Functional aspects	Competing evidence or uncertainty	Overall finding
Fiordland	Te Anau, Manapouri, Milford/Piopiotahi and the wider Fiordland landscape. Functional connections extend towards Mossburn and parts of western or northern Southland.	Distinct landscape, remoteness, tourism identity, settlement history, lifestyles and sense of separation from other Southland communities.	Te Anau is the main service and employment centre. Tourism, the Milford corridor, emergency resilience, schools, health, housing, transport and visitor infrastructure connect the area.	Mossburn has strong Te Anau-facing functional links but retains a distinct identity and Northern Southland affiliation. Blackmount and Monowai also have relationships in more than one direction. Engagement feedback suggests that Fiordland residents may turn to Invercargill, Gore and Queenstown to seek services.	**Very strong perceptual and functional subregional community.**
Northern Southland	Lumsden, Mossburn, Athol, Garston, Five Rivers and surrounding rural localities. Balfour and nearby areas sit near its eastern interface.	Broad Northern Southland identity based on agriculture, rural history, landscape, schools, sport and social relationships.	Lumsden has a local service role. Athol and Garston orient towards Kingston and Queenstown. Mossburn partly orients towards Te Anau.	Northern Southland is not homogeneous. Athol-Garston, Mossburn and Lumsden have different outward relationships. Transport links northwards to Queenstown, west to Fiordland, east towards Gore and south towards Invercargill suggest that Northern Southland has affinities with a number of different communities.	**Strong broad community with identifiable internal subcommunities and overlapping external links.**
Eastern Southland / Gore-centred area	Gore, Mataura, Waikaka, Waikaia, Riversdale, Balfour, Pukerau and parts of the Edendale-Wyndham area. Some functional relationships extend into West Otago and Clutha.	Gore, Mataura and rural eastern communities such as Riversdale, Te Tipua and Wyndham have identifiable rural and town identities, histories and institutions.	Gore is a service, employment, schooling, health, shopping, recreation and cultural centre for communities beyond Gore District. There are cross-boundary functional relationships, including Gore and rural Southland rural economic and farming interest	Urban Gore, Mataura and surrounding rural localities are not one undifferentiated perceptual community. There are strong functional relationships but differing perceptual identities between urban Gore and the surrounding rural areas, including Mataura. Cross-regional West Otago links are mentioned in engagement feedback, with West Otago communities seeking services from Gore.	**Eastern Southland is a very strong functional area centred on Gore, but extending beyond the current Gore District boundaries. It contains several distinct local perceptual communities.**
Central Southland / Ōreti	Winton and surrounding central plains, including Drummond, Heddon Bush, parts of Dipton, Midlands and Hokonui localities.	Shared rural identity, farming, schools, sport, halls, local facilities and community networks.	Winton is the main centre for schooling, supplies, shopping, employment, sport and services.	Dipton has several affiliations, although the strongest relationship is likely with Winton. Makarewa and Wallacetown have strong Invercargill-facing functions in terms of employment, educational and social activities.	**Strong Winton-centred subregional community, with a less clearly defined southern edge.**
Western Southland	Tuatapere, Blackmount, Monowai, Orepuki, Ohai, Nightcaps, Otautau and surrounding rural areas.	Forestry and mining histories, farming, western identity, local family connections, Waiau valley and western landscape.	Tuatapere and Otautau provide different service-centre functions. School, employment, sport and road networks connect communities, but not uniformly.	Western Southland contains distinct communities. Orepuki connects towards both Tuatapere and Riverton. Blackmount and Monowai connect partly towards Te Anau. Ohai connects towards Tuatapere and Otautau.	**Strong broad subregional grouping, but with porous boundaries and important local distinctions.**

Community	Indicative geography	Perceptual aspects	Functional aspects	Competing evidence or uncertainty	Overall finding
Coastal Southland / Ōraka Aparima	Riverton/Aparima, Colac Bay/Ōraka, Taramoa and nearby coastal and rural communities.	Coastal character, fishing, local history, family ties, recreation, settlement identity and association with Riverton/Aparima.	Riverton is a local service, school, social and recreation centre. Coastal industries and travel connect the area.	Riverton also relies on Invercargill for higher-order services. Orepuki is transitional between coastal and Tuatapere-facing communities. Upper Aparima communities may not share the same coastal identity.	**Strong coastal perceptual and functional community centred on Riverton/Aparima.**
Waihōpai Toetoe / South-eastern Southland	Woodlands, Edendale, Wyndham, Gorge Road, Morton Mains, Tokanui, Fortrose, Waikawa and Catlins-facing communities.	Broad rural identity, coastal and Catlins character in the south-east, community halls, schools and local settlement identities.	Farming, dairy processing, schools, sport, tourism and services connect the area. Western parts orient towards Invercargill, while eastern parts have relationships with Gore.	This is a broad and internally diverse area. The strongest outward centre varies between Invercargill and Gore. Catlins-facing settlements have additional coastal and tourism identity.	**Moderate-to-strong broad community, with strong functional evidence but more varied perceptual evidence.**
Greater Invercargill rural fringe	Makarewa, Wallacetown, Myross Bush, Ryal Bush, Kennington, West Plains and adjacent localities.	These communities retain rural, locality and Southland District identities. Otatara also has a distinct perceptual identity within Invercargill City.	Work, secondary schooling, shopping, health, recreation and major services orient strongly towards Invercargill.	The precise extent of the city-facing community is unclear. Wallacetown was linked variously with Winton, Invercargill-facing communities and out to the coastal area. Functional alignment with Invercargill does not erase rural identity.	**Strong cross-boundary functional community, but mixed perceptual alignment and uncertain outer boundary.**

C. Key local communities

Local community	Geography and defining characteristics	Competing or qualifying evidence	Finding
Rakiura / Stewart Island	Island community centred on Oban, characterised by geographic isolation, weather and transport dependence, fishing, aquaculture, tourism, biosecurity, electricity and distinctive island services.	Environment Southland previous representation reviews have emphasised functional transport links through Bluff and Invercargill. The Community Board preferred separate recognition or Western over Invercargill. Engagement identifies some Riverton/coastal affinity along with a functional dependence on Invercargill for health and transport.	**Very strong distinct perceptual and functional community. Wider affiliation remains mixed and purpose-dependent.**
Bluff	Port and coastal town with distinctive history, economy, geography, institutions and community identity.	Strong functional integration with Invercargill and Rakiura maritime transport. Some respondents view Bluff as historically disadvantaged within Invercargill.	**Very strong local community within a wider Invercargill and maritime functional system.**
Mataura	Mataura township and immediate surrounding community, with distinctive local history, institutions and community board.	Mataura is functionally connected to Gore for sevices and forms part of a wider eastern rural economy. Some evidence suggests a wider Mataura community could include Kaiwera or areas towards Edendale, but that boundary is not settled.	**Very strong local perceptual community with strong Gore-facing functions.**
Gore	Gore urban area and its immediate community, serving a substantially wider rural catchment.	Distinguishing urban Gore from its rural hinterland is important. The town is perceptually distinct, but its functions rely on and serve surrounding agricultural communities.	**Very strong urban community and service centre within Eastern Southland.**
Te Anau-Manapouri	Te Anau and Manapouri basin, extending functionally to Milford and parts of the wider tourism corridor.	Mossburn has strong Te Anau-facing functions but remains distinct. Blackmount and Monowai have only partial Te Anau affiliation.	**Very strong local centre within Fiordland.**
Winton	Winton and its central rural service catchment.	Invercargill supplies a greater array of services, meaning that the strong functional reach of Winton is limited to more immediate communities. Winton's reach is weaker around the city fringe and towards other established centres.	**Strong local community and principal Central Southland service centre.**
Riverton/Aparima	Riverton, Aparima estuary and nearby coastal communities.	Functional relationships with Invercargill remain significant. Orepuki forms an overlapping edge with Tuatapere.	**Strong coastal local community and service centre.**
Otautau	Otautau and nearby Wallace Takitimu rural communities.	Otautau shares connections with Ohai-Nightcaps, Tuatapere, Riverton and Winton. As a result there is a less settled clarity of functional identity.	**Strong local centre within a wider western network.**
Tuatapere	Tuatapere and Waiau valley localities, with links to Blackmount, Monowai and Orepuki.	Tuatapere holds a strong western Southland identity, however surrounding communities are less clear in their relationship. Orepuki partly looks towards Riverton; Blackmount and Monowai partly towards Te Anau.	**Strong western local community with overlapping outer affiliations.**
Lumsden	Lumsden and nearby Northern Southland rural communities.	Lumsden is a strong centre of norther Southland, however wider northern communities also look variously towards Gore, Te Anau, Invercargill and Queenstown for services.	**Strong local centre within internally diverse Northern Southland.**
Ohai-Nightcaps	Ohai, Nightcaps and adjacent former mining and rural communities.	Ohai has relationships towards both Tuatapere and Otautau. The term "Ohai-Nightcaps" arises more consistently than a single preferred wider subregion.	**Strong paired local community, with several wider affiliations.**
Otatara	Semi-rural and lifestyle community west of urban Invercargill.	Otatara remains functionally tied to Invercargill. Previous representation reviews have shown mixed views regarding whether a separate community board was required.	**Moderate-to-strong perceptual local community within the Invercargill functional area.**

D. Communities with overlapping or contested affiliations

Community or area	Evidence pointing one way	Competing evidence	Best-supported interpretation
Mossburn	Te Anau-facing employment, tourism, services and travel patterns; Phase 1 and Phase 2 sometimes include Mossburn within a broader Fiordland-oriented area.	Representation-review evidence identifies a distinct Mossburn history, economy, lifestyle and Northern Southland identity.	**A distinct local community within Northern Southland, with strong Fiordland-facing functional links.**
Orepuki	Historical and social links with Tuatapere and western Southland.	Newer residents and some service and coastal relationships point towards Riverton/Aparima.	**A distinct coastal locality with dual Tuatapere and Riverton affiliations.**
Blackmount and Monowai	Included in the Tuatapere Te Waewae area through rural, historical and western relationships.	Te Anau-facing recreation, service and geographic links; Jericho Hill identified as a separator.	**Western communities with material Fiordland-facing functions.**
Wallacetown	Some representation-review evidence points towards Winton or the coastal/western area.	Schools, employment, commuters and major services point strongly towards Invercargill. The Commission's 2025 Environment Southland determination treated nearby communities as sharing Invercargill-associated interests.	**A rural local community with strong Invercargill-facing functional alignment and secondary western or central links.**
Makarewa	Rural and Ōreti identity; location in Southland District and community-board arrangements.	Strong Invercargill work, school, shopping and service relationships. Phase 2 respondents simultaneously identify as rural and city-connected.	**Rural perceptual identity within the Greater Invercargill functional catchment.**
Dipton	Formal SDC analysis and local feedback favoured Winton and Ōreti.	Earlier engagement identified more than one possible affiliation, including northern relationships.	**Most strongly Winton-facing, but not exclusively so.**
Athol-Garston	Included within broader Northern Southland.	Strong road, service, climatic and economic orientation towards Kingston, Queenstown and Central Otago. The Commission accepted their separate treatment in previous Southland District Council representation review determinations.	**Northern Southland communities with particularly strong extra-regional functional relationships.**
Edendale-Wyndham area	Part of Waihōpai Toetoe and broader South-eastern Southland.	Service and economic relationships point variably towards Gore and Invercargill. Phase 2 respondents identify both "Eastern Southland" and distinct Edendale or Wyndham communities.	**Distinct local communities in a transitional subregion between the Gore and Invercargill functional catchments.**