



## **Greater Wellington Regional Council submission on the 'Simplifying Local Government' proposal**

Friday 20 February 2026

Submitted via the DIA consultation portal

<b>DIA question</b>	<b>GW response</b>				
<b>BACKGROUND</b>					
1. Do you agree there is a need to simplify local government?	Strongly agree	Agree 	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2. What do you think of the proposed approach overall?	<p><b>Local Government requires reform</b></p> <p>We, and all the councils within the Greater Wellington region, agree there is a need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the local government system. The current local government system is complex, fragmented, and under increasing pressure from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the significant costs and complexity of adapting to climate change,</li> <li>• the costs of managing growth including core infrastructure,</li> <li>• emergency responses and recovery needs,</li> <li>• increasing regulatory compliance costs,</li> <li>• funding constraints and a lack of funding sources, and</li> <li>• workforce shortages.</li> </ul> <p>We support the intent of this proposal to reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and be responsive to local needs. Multiple reviews of governance and delivery structures in the Wellington region<sup>123</sup> have identified that improvements are required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clarify roles across local, regional and national levels,</li> <li>• strengthen regional coordination,</li> <li>• improve sustainability of funding, and</li> <li>• strengthen consistency with Tiriti Waitangi obligations including Māori representation</li> </ul>				

<sup>1</sup> PriceWaterhouseCooper (2010) Wellington Region Council Governance Review

<sup>2</sup> Working Party on Local Government Reform (2013) [Realising the potential of the Wellington region](#)

<sup>3</sup> Local Government Commission (2014) [Draft Proposal for Reorganisation of Local Government in Wellington](#)

### **We do not support Stage One Combined Territories Boards (CTBs)**

Regional councillors are elected with a clear democratic mandate to govern regional functions such as public transport services, flood protection, biosecurity, environmental management, regional spatial and transport planning, emergency management and climate adaptation. These functions are complex in nature, different to those of Territorial Authorities and require continuity, specialist understanding, and long-term accountability.

Introducing a temporary CTB would create material risk, including

- loss of democratic legitimacy, trust and institutional knowledge
- conflicts of interest and difficulty reaching consensus
- inconsistency with Tiriti o Waitangi including impacts on settlements
- high transition costs, workforce and governance capacity pressures, and operational risk

### **We therefore do not support the use of CTBs as a decision-making body for a region-wide spatial plan chapter and natural environment plan chapter under the resource management reforms.**

As per our feedback on the Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill, we recommend that the new resource management legislation:

- Outlines the minimum requirements for memberships on Spatial Plan Committees to include balanced representation from regional councils, territorial authorities, iwi and hapū, and central government agencies where relevant. This helps ensure that regional priorities, mana whenua representation including what is provided for through binding Treaty settlements, and local needs are appropriately reflected in the strategic direction of growth and environmental planning.
- Specifically allows for alternative structures agreed with mana whenua to fulfil the Spatial Planning Committee Role in order to uphold the equivalent effect of settlements until such time as the Crown renegotiates the redress with willing partners. These may include but are not limited to leveraging existing partnerships such as Te Īpoko Taiao or Urban Growth Partnerships (for example the Wellington Regional Leadership Committee).

**We recommend proceeding directly with the Stage Two regional re-organisation plans**

We recommend that local government reorganisation is delivered through a single, well-designed Stage Two model. This would involve moving directly to the development of regional reorganisation plans, led by democratically elected territorial and regional authority members working in partnership with mana whenua. Regional councillors must be kept in place until a new permanent governance structure is established through a regional reorganisation plan.

The Wellington region is unified, organised and ready to develop a regional plan more efficiently and effectively than through a CTB model. We are well positioned to design a reorganisation plan that is enduring, integrates with other national reforms underway, and supports effective service delivery. This work is already progressing, led through the Wellington Regional Mayoral Forum, and in partnership with mana whenua, to develop and assess options for regional reorganisation.

**We support the use of criteria to assess reorganisation plans if they are strengthened**

We recommend the Government's proposed assessment criteria are strengthened through the inclusion of:

- upholding Te Tiriti including but not limited to Treaty settlements and partnership obligations,
- appropriate scale and function fit,
- efficiency and effectiveness,
- democratic accountability,
- evidence based assessment, including of transition costs & operational continuity,
- alignment with existing local government processes,
- alignment with wider reforms, and
- workforce capability and capacity

**Māori rights and interests, Tiriti partnerships and Māori representation must be protected and strengthened**

The proposal is not Te Tiriti consistent and is expected to limit the ability of our partners to achieve their priorities for their taiao, people and communities and create considerable Tiriti and legal risk for the Crown. This will result in costs, complexity and uncertainty for our partners and for local government. We recommend that the proposal,

	<p>including the process for regional reorganisation plans, is strengthened to align with Tribunal findings and Te Tiriti. The proposal should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• be designed in partnership with whānau, hapū, iwi and interested Māori groups, to:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ protect and strengthen Māori representation and Tiriti based arrangements</li><li>▪ ensure that the equivalent effect of settlement redress is fully upheld</li></ul></li><li>• retain Māori constituency seats</li></ul> <p><b>The Government’s signalled review of regional council functions needs to draw on the experience and expertise of the local government sector and consider the appropriate scale for delivery of services</b></p> <p>Regional Councils currently perform important functions for their communities including public transport services, flood protection, biosecurity, environmental management, regional spatial and transport planning, emergency management, climate adaptation, maritime navigation and regional parks and recreation facilities. Reviews have demonstrated that the most effective scale for delivery of many of these activities is regional.</p> <p>The Government’s upcoming review of the delivery model for these functions needs to consider communities of interest, the need for local variability of outcomes, capability, efficiency and accountability<sup>4</sup>. Assessments must draw on the expertise of regional councils and sector-wide experts to establish system settings that will provide the best outcomes for our communities. Without drawing on this knowledge base, the review risks overlooking critical insights about what works, what doesn’t, and what communities genuinely need.</p> <p><b>The Government’s wider reform program needs to be integrated</b></p> <p>The Government’s various legislative reforms need to be designed alongside each other to achieve integration, clarity and improved outcomes for communities. Misalignment across the reform program could lead to significant risks including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tiriti breaches and associated litigation risk (as detailed in question 11)</li></ul>
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<sup>4</sup> Castalia (2025) [Functions of Regional and Unitary Authorities in New Zealand, Report to Te Uru Kahika](#)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>delays to reform implementation and desired outcomes (e.g. the volume of change will impact local government's ability to implement the reforms).</li> <li>new legislation requiring re-work as a result of subsequent legislative and system changes (e.g. the resource management reform bills create specific roles and responsibilities for regional councils. These roles will need to be reassigned through local government reorganisation)</li> <li>wider system issues unresolved by reform (e.g. financial impacts of stranded assets, outstanding funding issues within the transport system).</li> </ul>				
<b>SIMPLIFYING REGIONAL GOVERNANCE</b>					
3. Do you agree with replacing regional councillors with a CTB?	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. What do you like or dislike about the proposal to replace regional councillors with a CTB?	<p>We do not support replacing regional councillors with a Combined Territories Board (CTB).</p> <p>Regional councillors are elected with a clear democratic mandate to govern regional functions such as public transport, flood protection, biosecurity, environmental management, regional spatial and transport planning, emergency management and climate adaptation. These functions are complex in nature, different to those of Territorial Authorities and require continuity, specialist understanding, and long-term accountability.</p> <p>Introducing a temporary CTB would create material risk, including:</p> <p><b>1. Loss of democratic legitimacy, trust, and institutional knowledge</b></p> <p>The proposed reform timeline is not aligned with democratic cycles. The Councilors are elected for three-year terms and replacing them mid-term with unelected CTB members undermines public trust and democratic accountability. The Productivity Commission's inquiry into local government funding and financing highlighted the importance of predictable, transparent decision-making frameworks and warned against institutional churn that erodes public trust. Regional governance should be stable, enduring, and democratically grounded. Replacement with a short-term transitional body will undermine these outcomes.</p> <p>A lot of detail would need to be worked through to ensure a regional perspective is maintained across the various bodies that regional council has involvement in and consideration given to how the regional council voice is able to be taken account of in the decision-making process. For example, established statutory</p>				

committee arrangements (i.e. the Regional Transport Committee and the Civil Defence and Emergency Management Group), council companies (e.g. WRC Holdings Limited) and other bodies (e.g. the Wellington Regional Stadium Trust).

## **2. Conflicts of interest and difficulty reaching consensus**

Mayors on CTBs face conflicts of interest because their declaration on assuming office requires them to prioritise their own districts, not regional outcomes. Past experience across New Zealand shows that reaching consensus on strategic regional approaches has been slow and difficult where local priorities and interests differ, and sometimes it has not been possible. Mayors participating in a CTB would need to make a separate declaration that they are acting in the interests of the region and submit separate disclosures of interest.

## **3. Inconsistency with Tiriti o Waitangi including impacts on settlements**

As a regional council, we value our 30+ year partnerships with mana whenua and we also have a range of important Treaty settlement commitments. CTBs and the proposed approach to the regional reorganisation plans risk sidelining or destabilising these commitments and the partnership arrangements that were designed to be durable and enduring. CTBs could also undermine binding Treaty settlements in our region, for example, by assuming responsibility for spatial planning and natural environment decisions in a forum without Māori representation, whereas Te Īpoko Taiao which was made permanent through the Kahungunu ki Wairarapa settlement provides for 50/50 Māori–Crown representation on planning matters.

Removing Māori constituency councillors risks undermining Māori political representation and may breach Tiriti principles, as highlighted by the December 2025 Wai 1040 findings relating to local government.

## **4. High transition costs, workforce and governance capacity pressures, and operational risk**

Temporary governance bodies create significant transition costs which are often underestimated. Past reforms, such as Auckland amalgamation in 2010, show that transitions require duplicated induction and training, and often fail to deliver promised efficiencies.

Mayors already have a very full workload and additional governance workload for regional council issues will be impractical and unworkable. There simply isn't enough capacity for mayors to govern all regional work programmes.

	<p>The local government sector already faces shortages in engineering, planning, environmental science and transport. Supporting a CTB while also responding to multiple reforms and maintaining core services would stretch capacity beyond safe operational limits.</p> <p>Emergency management reviews, including those following the Canterbury and Kaikōura earthquakes and Cyclone Gabrielle, consistently emphasise the need for stable regional leadership. Introducing CTBs would divert attention from essential service delivery at a time when regional resilience and preparedness are increasingly critical.</p> <p>We recommend that local government reorganisation is delivered through a single, well-designed Stage Two model. This would involve moving directly to the development of regional reorganisation plans, led by democratically elected territorial and regional authority members working in partnership with mana whenua, with regional councillors remaining in place until a new permanent governance structure is established. The Wellington region is unified, organised and ready to develop a regional plan more efficiently and effectively than through a CTB model. We are well positioned to design a reorganisation plan that is enduring, integrates with other national reforms underway, and supports effective service delivery. This work is already progressing, led through the Wellington Regional Mayoral Forum, and in partnership with mana whenua, to develop and assess options for regional reorganisation.</p> <p>In conclusion, we do not support the introduction of a Combined Territories Board (the CTB). We recommend moving straight to stage two, with regional councillors continuing their existing role and functions and with a Tiriti consistent approach</p> <p>We have not answered question five because we do not support the establishment of CTBs.</p>				
5. What level of Crown participation in regional decision-making do you prefer?	None – only mayors on the CTB	Crown Commissioner on CTB (non-voting)	Crown Commissioner on CTB (with veto power)	Crown Commissioner on CTB (with majority vote)	Crown Commissioners instead of a CTB

ALLOCATING VOTING POWER					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
6. Do you agree that mayors on the CTB should have a proportional vote adjusted for effective representation?				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
7. What do you like or dislike about the voting proposal for the CTB?	<p>As we do not support CTBs, we do not support their use as a decision-making body for a region-wide spatial plan chapter and natural environment plan chapter under the resource management reforms. As per our feedback on the Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill, we recommend that the new resource management legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outlines the minimum requirements for memberships on Spatial Plan Committees to include balanced representation from regional councils, territorial authorities, iwi and hapū, and central government agencies where relevant. This helps ensure that regional priorities, mana whenua representation including what is provided for through binding Treaty settlements, and local needs, are appropriately reflected in the strategic direction of growth and environmental planning.</li> <li>Specifically allows for alternative structures agreed with mana whenua to fulfil the Spatial Planning Committee Role in order to uphold the equivalent effect of settlements until such time as the Crown renegotiates the redress with willing partners. These may include but are not limited to leveraging existing partnerships such as Te Īpoko Taiao or Urban Growth Partnerships (for example the Wellington Regional Leadership Committee).</li> </ul> <p>Proportional voting raises the following issues:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Weakens regional perspective</b> CTB members should be statutorily required to act in the interests of the region as a whole in exercising their decision-making responsibilities; weighted voting would work against that regional perspective.</li> <li><b>2. It creates inequity between territorial authorities</b> Population based weighting risks marginalising smaller councils, even when they share equally in regional issues such as flood protection, public transport, climate adaptation and emergency management.</li> </ol>				

### **3. It is inconsistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations**

Weighted mayoral voting does not reflect the role of mana whenua as Tiriti partners. In addition, removal of the Māori constituency seats constitutes a potential breach of Te Tiriti.

The voting proposal does not include Māori representation, even though CTBs would be making decisions in areas where settlement deeds and acts of Parliament have confirmed that Māori should have 50/50 representation on key decision-making bodies for planning matters. We also note that inserting spatial plans ‘over the top’ of regional planning instruments will undermine the intent of those arrangements (by reducing the discretion of the relevant decisions makers). Further, even if Māori representation is provided for, the proposed RMA replacement legislation constrains our ability to provide equivalency in the new system, including because it no longer prioritises te Tiriti.

We support the principles of democratic legitimacy, upholding the honour of the Crown in giving effect to Te Tiriti, effective representation, and effective governance, and recommend this is achieved through:

- Moving directly to Stage Two by developing regional reorganisation plans, while keeping regional councilors in place until the new permanent governance structure is established
- co-design with mana whenua – whānau, hapū, iwi and interested Māori groups
- durable structures
- transparent accountability

In conclusion, we do not support the proposed CTB voting model. Weighted mayoral voting risks weakening the regional perspective, creating inequity between territorial authorities, and undermining Te Tiriti obligations including settlements. We recommend that local government reorganisation is delivered through a single, well-designed Stage Two model. This would involve moving directly to the development of regional reorganisation plans, led by democratically elected territorial and regional authority members working in partnership with mana whenua, with regional councillors remaining in place until a new permanent governance structure is established. The Wellington region is unified, organised and ready to develop a regional plan more efficiently and effectively than through a CTB model. We are well positioned to design a reorganisation plan that is enduring, integrates with other national reforms underway, and supports effective service delivery. This work is already progressing, led through the Wellington

	Regional Mayoral Forum, and in partnership with mana whenua, to develop and assess options for regional reorganisation.
<b>CROSS BOUNDARY ISSUES</b>	
8. What do you think about the ways that communities crossing regional boundaries could be represented?	<p>We agree that communities do not always align neatly with regional and other administrative boundaries, and that representation arrangements must reflect how people live, travel, work and access services. However, the proposal's current approach, including through CTBs, does not provide a durable or effective way to represent cross boundary communities.</p> <p><b>1. CTBs are not the right mechanism for cross boundary representation</b></p> <p>CTBs are temporary, transitional bodies with unclear mandates and short timeframes. They are not well suited to representing communities whose interests span multiple regions because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their membership is not directly elected,</li> <li>• their accountability is unclear,</li> <li>• they would exist only briefly before being replaced, and</li> <li>• communities would need to re-establish relationships twice.</li> </ul> <p>This is inconsistent with the widely recognised need for long term, stable representation for cross boundary communities.</p> <p><b>2. Regional councils already manage many cross boundary issues effectively</b></p> <p>Evidence from Castalia (2025) shows that many regional functions, such as public transport, flood protection, biosecurity, environmental science and emergency management, inherently operate across territorial boundaries. Regional councils already collaborate extensively with neighbouring regions, territorial authorities, and to varying extents hapū and iwi Māori, to manage these shared issues. Regional councils work collaboratively together through Te Uru Kahika and share best practice approaches. Strengthening these existing mechanisms is more effective than creating temporary new governance bodies without relevant expertise.</p>

### **3. A well designed Stage Two model can better support cross boundary communities**

We consider that the enduring Stage Two governance model (as a result of regional reorganisation plans), not CTBs, is the appropriate place to address cross boundary representation. Flexible, durable and proven approaches include:

- joint committees or shared governance arrangements for specific cross boundary issues,
- shared services or CCOs (e.g., for public transport or hazard management),
- strengthened regional collaboration frameworks,
- formalised partnerships with mana whenua whose rohe span multiple regions.

### **4. Representation must align with how communities experience services**

Communities crossing regional boundaries often share:

- transport networks,
- river catchments and hazard zones,
- economic and labour markets,
- hapū and iwi Māori relationships,
- environmental systems,
- emergency response and recovery outcomes, and
- built infrastructure.

Many cross boundary communities are also linked through iwi rohe and Treaty settlement arrangements that guarantee Māori representation in planning and environmental governance. CTBs do not reflect these arrangements and would weaken Māori decision making rights in cross boundary decision-making.

These are long term, structural realities. Representation arrangements must therefore be reflected in and/or alongside long term governance structures – not transitional bodies.

In conclusion, the proposal does not provide a durable or effective approach to representing communities on issues that cross regional boundaries. We recommend that local government reorganisation be delivered through a single,

	<p>well-designed Stage Two model. This would involve moving directly to the development of regional reorganisation plans, led by democratically elected territorial and regional authority members working in partnership with mana whenua, with regional councillors remaining in place until a new permanent governance structure is established. Regional re-organisation plans should consider proven mechanisms such as joint committees, shared services, CCOs and strengthened regional collaboration frameworks.</p> <p>The Wellington region is unified, organised and ready to develop a regional plan more efficiently and effectively than through a CTB model. We are well positioned to design a reorganisation plan that is enduring, integrates with other national reforms underway, and supports effective service delivery. This work is already progressing, led through the Wellington Regional Mayoral Forum, and in partnership with mana whenua, to develop and assess options for regional reorganisation.</p>				
<b>IMPROVING LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b>					
9. Do you support the proposal to require CTBs to develop regional reorganisation plans?	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. What do you think about the criteria proposed for assessing regional reorganisation plans?	<p>We do not support the proposal to require CTBs to develop regional reorganisation plans because we do not support the establishment of CTBs. We recommend that local government reorganisation is achieved through a single, well-designed Stage Two model. This would involve moving directly to the development of regional reorganisation plans, led by democratically elected territorial and regional authority members working in partnership with mana whenua. Regional councillors must be kept in place until a new permanent governance structure is established through a regional reorganisation plan.</p> <p>The Wellington region is unified, organised and ready to develop a regional plan more efficiently and effectively than through a CTB model. We are well positioned to design a reorganisation plan that is enduring, integrates with other national reforms underway, and supports effective service delivery. This work is already progressing, led through the Wellington Regional Mayoral Forum, and in partnership with mana whenua, to develop and assess options for regional reorganisation.</p>				

	<p>Our support for the criteria proposed for assessing regional reorganisation plans is conditional on them being strengthened by including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Upholding Te Tiriti including but not limited to Treaty settlements and partnership obligations</b> Reorganisation plans must explicitly protect and strengthen Tiriti protections including Māori representation and decision-making rights, upholding Treaty settlements and existing partnership arrangements. Temporary bodies like CTBs, along with the proposed approach to regional reorganisations plans which only require consultation with Māori are not Tiriti consistent and raise legal and reputational risks for the Crown</li> <li>• <b>Appropriate scale and function fit</b> consistent with Castalia's findings that many critical services (flood protection, public transport, biosecurity, environmental science) are most effective when delivered regionally.</li> <li>• <b>Efficiency and effectiveness</b> including the ability to adopt shared services or CCOs where appropriate.</li> <li>• <b>Democratic accountability</b> Reorganisation must maintain clear mandates, transparent decision making and accountability.</li> <li>• <b>Evidence based assessment, including of transition costs &amp; operational continuity</b> Past local government reforms show transition costs are often underestimated. Criteria should require realistic, independently tested costings. Criteria should require demonstration that essential services, especially flood protection, emergency management, public transport and climate adaptation, will not be disrupted. This aligns with lessons from emergency management reviews.</li> <li>• <b>Alignment with existing local government processes</b> Reorganisation plans must align with electoral cycles to strengthen democratic legitimacy and trust. Consideration must be given to Long Term Plan requirements. Introducing CTBs and then replacing them midcycle would require substantial rework of statutory plans, potentially twice. This would generate avoidable cost, confuse communities, and reduce transparency and investment certainty.</li> <li>• <b>Alignment with wider reforms</b></li> </ul>
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	<p>Reorganisation plans must align with other Government reform programmes and support their successful delivery, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource Management Act (RMA) reform</li> <li>• Local Water Done Well reform</li> <li>• Local Government Act amendments (including rates capping)</li> <li>• Civil Defence Emergency Management Act reforms</li> <li>• Proposed transport funding reforms.</li> </ul> <p>• <b>Workforce capability and capacity</b></p> <p>Plans must show how specialist skills will be retained and strengthened. Workforce shortages are a major constraint across the sector.</p> <p>In conclusion, we support the use of criteria to assess reorganisation plans subject to the following inclusions: Upholding Te Tiriti including but not limited to Treaty settlements and partnership obligations, Regional scale and function fit, Efficiency and effectiveness, democratic accountability, evidence based assessment of transition costs &amp; operational continuity, alignment with statutory planning cycles, alignment with wider reforms, and workforce capability and capacity.</p>
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#### **TREATY OF WAITANGI AND MĀORI REPRESENTATION**

<p>11. What do you think about how the proposal provides for iwi/Māori interests and Treaty arrangements?</p>	<p><b>The proposal does not adequately provide for iwi/Māori interests and Tiriti-based arrangements. Māori rights and interests, Tiriti partnerships and Māori representation must be protected and strengthened in the proposal.</b></p> <p>The proposal is not Tiriti consistent. It:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• removes democratically elected Māori constituency seats.</li> <li>• narrows consideration of a broader set of Māori rights and interests to upholding settlements. For example, it does not sufficiently provide for Māori participation in the design of the new local government system, or Māori representation in the new system.</li> <li>• requires CTBs to implement Treaty settlement redress agreed between the Crown and Māori in a new planning system that impacts on equivalency of that redress; and,</li> </ul>
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	<p>Read in conjunction with clause 10 of the proposed Planning Bill and clause 10 of the Natural Environment Bill, delegates to CTBs the responsibility to interpret the intent of Treaty settlement redress agreed between the Crown and Māori, assess its equivalency in the new planning system and then possibly substitute alternatives in regional reorganisation plans (without any requirement for agreement beyond consultation) until such time as the Crown concludes negotiations with willing PSGEs. The Crown is the party to a settlement not local government, and we question whether the Crown could or should delegate this.</p> <p>Even if the proposals are changed such that equivalent Māori representation is assured, under the proposed Resource Management Act (RMA) reforms cultural considerations are not given the same weight as under the RMA. In addition, there are no clear cultural or environmental bottom lines. This means that CTBs, or Te Īpoko Taiao will not have the scope and discretion to protect the environment and cultural values to the extent that they currently can. There may be limited value for Māori in being represented on decision-making bodies that cannot legally apply Māori priorities and deliver desired outcomes. This means local government may be required to implement potential breaches of Te Tiriti.</p> <p>Taken together, we consider the above factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• limit the ability for our partners to achieve their aspirations for their people,</li> <li>• diminish decades of progress developing partnerships to recognise the customary rights of whanau, hapu and iwi</li> <li>• impact on the mātauranga of whānau, hapū and iwi and the skills and time vested to ensure that they can provide the right level of advice and engagement with local government</li> <li>• fail to recognise and incorporate customary lore and the responsibilities of kaitiaki, as expressed through the principle of kaitiakitanga, and</li> <li>• create considerable Tiriti and legal risk for the Crown, which will create costs, complexity and uncertainty for our partners and for local government in implementing reforms.</li> </ul> <p>The findings and recommendations of the Wai 1040 Paparahi o Te Raki Stage 2 Inquiry issued on 17 December 2025 are instructive. The Tribunal has found that failing to provide for Māori representation in local government in Northland constitutes a breach of the Te Tiriti and these findings have broader relevance. Accordingly, the Tribunal findings confirm that any process to simplify local government should therefore:</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be designed in partnership with mana whenua and interested Māori groups</li> <li>• Ensure that the equivalent effect of settlement redress is fully upheld</li> <li>• Protect and strengthen Māori representation and Tiriti based arrangements</li> </ul> <p>The Paparahi findings build on relevant findings in our region in the Wai 863 Wairarapa ki Tararua Report (Vol 3). The Wairarapa Tribunal found that through the LGA 2002, the Crown delegated its Tiriti responsibilities to local government without the corresponding obligations (e.g. to provide for Māori participation in decision-making), in breach of Te Tiriti. The Tribunal recommended the concentration of functions in fewer local authorities to lessen the relationship burden for hapū and iwi, in addition to other recommendations including providing for iwi representation on all authorities and sharing power and delegation in all appropriate circumstances.<sup>5</sup></p> <p>The reorganisation of local government should recognise Māori rights as broader than ‘upholding settlements’ or a right to be consulted and retain Māori constituency councillors. We recommend that the Crown takes a Tiriti-consistent approach to designing and implementing the Simplifying Local Government proposal which would involve the Crown alongside local government, having conversations with hapū, iwi and interested Māori groups around how they wish to: 1) be involved in the design of any new system and 2) represented within or alongside that new system</p>
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<sup>5</sup> Wai 863 Wairarapa ki Tararua Tribunal Report, Vol.3, p. 1062.