



PUTTING THE LOCAL BACK IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
OPTIONS FOR NORTHLAND



WHAT IS THIS
CONSULTATION
ABOUT?

HOW MIGHT
THINGS CHANGE?

WHAT DOES IT
MATTER TO ME?

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Foreword from The Chief Executive Te kupu whakataki no te Kaiwhakahaere Matua



David Edmunds

Kia Ora

Local government has not had such a high profile in New Zealand since 1989 when the Far North District Council was formed as a result of sweeping reforms that changed the face of how councils looked and worked.

The major Super City initiative now taking shape in Auckland has focused new attention on local government throughout the country with widespread speculation that this is just the beginning of a new wave of change.

The Far North District Council wants to be at the forefront of this change and many of you have let us know that you support this approach.

We see it as an opportunity to show leadership and influence the destiny of our district, rather than having it determined by people who have no understanding of how big the Far North is, what's important to us, and how we like to live.

Key to this is our belief that the existing arrangement does not necessarily work very well. The recent independent report completed by McKinlay Douglas Limited, at the request of the Mayoral Forum, recommends

This would take out one tier of local government. Far North District Council has on several occasions signalled its intention to explore the possibility: presently encompassed by Far North District Council

Decisions would be made by people who live in the Far North for people who live in the Far North and the strength of this local voice would. Among other benefits there would be

Discussions about how local government may look in the future in the Far North are preliminary. No decisions have been made. At this stage, we just want to know what you think about and how you imagine these could be configured.

As well as making submissions before the you are invited to meet with your elected representatives at one of six venues around the district next month. Details are inside this booklet and will be advertised in local newspapers.

We look forward to hearing from you.

David Edmunds
Chief Executive

Important Questions and Answers Nga patai me nga whakautu hirahira

WHAT IS THIS CONSULTATION ABOUT? He aha ke tenei akoakonga e korerohia nei?

The time is ripe to consider how local government in Northland should be organised for the future. Big changes are happening down the road as the Auckland Super City takes shape. Meanwhile a recent report commissioned by the district council mayors in Northland from independent policy advisers McKinlay Douglas Ltd. (MDL) - has said that changes are needed to make Northland local government fit for purpose for the future. There is an opportunity to change things for the better. Far North District Council (FNDC) wants to hear your views on whether change is needed and what it might look like.

WHAT DOES IT MATTER TO ME? Hei aha nga mea e paana kia au?

Ok so local government structures are not the most gripping subject in the world. But look at it this way: council services touch all our lives – and our pockets – every day. So it's important that things are organised as cost-effectively and efficiently as possible to make sure you get best value for all the Council services you receive. Right now we cannot be certain that's the case.



Important Questions and Answers Nga patai me nga whakautu hirahira

HOW DO THINGS WORK NOW?

Pehea nga whakahaeretanga e mahitia naianei?

There are currently four councils in Northland – three district councils (Far North, Whangarei and Kaipara), plus the Northland Regional Council (NRC). This arrangement has been in place since 1989.

District councils are responsible for delivering most local government services including roads, water, wastewater, refuse and recycling, stormwater drainage, district facilities, footpaths, public toilets, libraries, recreation, building and planning services.

Regional councils focus more on environmental management. This includes setting the planning and resource management framework within which district councils have to operate, managing the use of natural resources, responsibility for rivers, the marine environment and flood control, plus pollution control, biosecurity measures, and regional transport planning.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH WHAT WE'VE GOT? He aha ke te he i nga mea kei a tatou?

It has been suggested that there are too many fingers in the local government pie and this means it may not work as well as it could for the Far North. Here are some of the views being expressed:

- It's confusing for you the customer having to deal with two different councils and not knowing who to talk to about what
- Some people believe local government in Northland is too Whangarei-centric
- It is difficult for the regional council based outside our district to keep on top of all the big issues for the Far North
- The region is just too big and too diverse to be treated as a single entity. Take roading: the issues in the Far North are very different from those in Whangarei. Lumping us all in together means the unique challenges facing the Far North may fail to get sufficient of an airing with decision makers in Wellington
- The politics sometimes don't work well with differing views at regional and district council levels about what's best
- Too many plans, too much complexity, duplication and bureaucracy – there is a need to simplify and move to a more straightforward structure of local government.

HOW MIGHT THINGS CHANGE? Me pehea nga take ka tini?

The MDL report identified several options ranging from the status quo to a change based on the creation of one or more "unitary councils" i.e. doing away with the current regional and district councils and replacing them with councils exercising combined regional and district functions. Unitary councils already operate in a number of other parts of New Zealand (Gisborne, Tasman, Marlborough and Nelson).

Here are some of the options:

- If a single unitary council were established it would most probably cover the whole of the Northland area
- The Far North and Whangarei District Councils favour the creation of two or more unitary councils. For example, the two authority option could comprise a Far North Unitary Council and a combination of the current Whangarei and Kaipara Districts into a second unitary council
- A three unitary council model based on the existing three district councils is unlikely because Kaipara is likely to lack the critical mass to be established as a unitary authority in its own right. The three unitary model could however be viable if there was a possibility of Kaipara joining with part of the existing Rodney District. This would ultimately hinge upon plans for the Super City but would offer the potential benefit of unifying administration of the Kaipara Harbour.

The MDL report concluded that the two most viable options would be either a single unitary council for Northland or two unitary councils based respectively on the Far North and a combination of Whangarei and Kaipara.

WILL UNITARY COUNCILS BE BETTER FOR THE CUSTOMER?

Tena pea ko te Kaunihera Unitary mo te nota e pai rawa mo nga kaiutu?

You will probably be aware from FNDC's plans and from local media coverage that improving customer service at reduced costs to the ratepayer is a key priority for this Council. A major improvement in consents processing times, as recently reported in the press, is just one example of what's being achieved.

The current arrangements are confusing for the customer, with a lot of uncertainty about which council is responsible for what. FNDC fields many complaints and requests for service about issues like flood protection, which are the responsibility of the regional council.





Important Questions and Answers Nga patai me nga whakautu hirahira

Under unitary councils any confusion would be removed and there would be a one-stop shop for all your local government business. What's more there would be a consistency of approach, putting an end to different standards imposed by different bodies.

HOW WILL IT AFFECT MY RATES? Pehea te whakaawe o oku reiti?

Perhaps the first point to make is that under a unitary structure you'd be clear where your rates were going and what you were getting for them. Under the current arrangements district councils collect rates on behalf of NRC, so it may be more difficult to work out who you are paying for what.

It has been suggested that another of the drawbacks of the current arrangements is that Far North ratepayers may be contributing to significant regional projects outside the district – such as the new rugby stadium and the rail link to Marsden Point - when there are more pressing spending needs closer to home, like river management and flood protection. This is an argument for the greater transparency and accountability that unitary councils would bring.

The MDL report contains no detailed financial analysis but indicates that local government restructuring internationally has generally resulted in little or no cost savings. FNDC would take issue with that assumption for a number of reasons:

- There would be clear cost savings from the abolition of a layer of bureaucracy – no more duplication - one set of offices not two, one set of plans not two, and so on
- It would be cheaper for ratepayers only to deal with one unitary council rather than separate regional and district councils.

Similarly FNDC also believes savings would be achievable by challenging some of the standards set by NRC that cost communities more. For example, FNDC may have to spend up to \$1m to obtain a resource consent from NRC for the proposed Kerikeri Sewerage System. Similarly the regional council's requirements for the Kaeo wastewater treatment plant would add \$50,000 a year to operating costs. The Ministry of Health is not prepared to subsidise the cost of such requirements. These are among a number of examples that call into question the balance being struck between standards setting and costs to the community.

It has to be acknowledged that a Far North Unitary Council would incur additional costs in some respects, for example there would be significant costs in administering environmental responsibilities related to the Far North's extensive coastline. But remember that the regional council already has budgets devoted to these sorts of functions and the Far North would expect to gain its fair share if the regional council were abolished. NRC also has significant assets, such as port shares and regional development funds. These too would be expected to be disbursed to successor unitary councils.

Overall FNDC believes that the benefits of a shift to a unitary structure would outweigh the impact of additional costs arising from reorganisation. More detailed analysis would be undertaken to confirm this prior to any final reorganisation proposal being put forward.

WHAT WILL WORK BEST FOR MĀORI? He aha ke nga mahi pai e whakarite mo te Māori?

FNDC is already embarked on a comprehensive programme of work to support Māori Engagement and Development. This work is endorsed and supported by Iwi leaders locally and would continue under a Far North Unitary Council.

In addition to that FNDC has also already signalled potential support for the establishment of Māori wards by directly electing representatives to the new unitary authority. In a district with nearly half its population of Māori descent this would be an important element of future community development. A move to a unitary council structure may be the quickest route to the achievement of direct Māori representation.

WHAT ABOUT THE COMMUNITY BOARDS? Pehea nga Tari Hapori?

Council sees Community Boards as its eyes and ears on the ground and over the last few years has moved to delegate more responsibilities to them. This reflects Council's view that board members with strong local knowledge and connections are best placed to decide on many of the issues affecting their patch. Under any of the unitary council options this approach of putting the Boards in the driving seat locally would be expected to continue.

WHAT IS BEST FOR THE ENVIRONMENT? He aha nga mea pai mo te tai ao?

FNDC acknowledges the regional council's specialist skills and knowledge in the area of environmental management but notes that there have been concerns regarding resource management in certain areas:

- The MDL report indicates the regional council may not have previously attached sufficient priority to managing freshwater quality for recreational purposes
- The regional council may be focusing on the wrong priorities in terms of water quality – such as the requirement for costly remedial works at the Taipa wastewater treatment plant whilst downstream effluent appears to receive less focus. The impact of other users in contributing to water pollution is an issue to be addressed in many parts of the Far North
- Flood relief work in Kaitiāia and Kaeo has been slow to progress and has not always connected effectively with local people. FNDC has been disappointed by NRC's reluctance to follow its lead in making additional funding available to assist badly affected householders in Kaeo



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- **Monitoring – for pest management purposes and for conditions attached to consents – is another function that a council based in Whangarei will always struggle to carry out effectively across an area the size of Northland.**

A locally based unitary council would arguably bring greater focus to these sorts of issues.

WHO REGULATES THE REGULATORS? Ko wai ko te whakarite nga kai mau o te mana?

FNDC recognises the possibility **of a conflict of interest** under a unitary authority arrangement whereby the same council may be responsible for granting and then monitoring a consent for one of its own activities. However this does not seem to be an issue for existing unitary councils or the proposed Super City. Alternatively, Council would support an Environmental Protection Authority role to oversee unitary councils' monitoring and enforcement. If established as a unitary council FNDC would also intend to continue its existing practice of using independent commissioners to hear notified consents.

DOESN'T NORTHLAND SOMETIMES NEED TO SPEAK WITH A UNITED VOICE? Kahore kotahi nga korereo o te Nota wetahi wa?

It's fair to say that there are some issues that may be better approached from a **regional perspective rather** than a local one. Government departments and the New Zealand Transport Agency, for example, find it easier to plan and allocate resources on a wider area basis. **But there's no reason why that couldn't work with two or more unitary councils.**

There are already many good examples of joint working between district council, government, and other agencies like the police and health boards. There is an argument that a Far North Unitary Council would be better placed to punch its weight in such collaborative forums. In any case, the main driver behind local government structures should be what suits local communities not what suits government departments.

Economic development, which is critical to the future success of our district, is another area where collaborative working with others – the business community and Tangata Whenua – is going to be the best approach for the future. FNDC's aim of developing a consensus on exploring the minerals potential of our district is a good example of this approach in practice.

WOULD FNDC BE UP TO THE TASK? Taia te FNDC te mau nga mahi?

A few years ago it might have been a big ask to expect FNDC to take on the additional functions of a unitary council as well as providing good levels of service in its own core business areas. **But services in the Far North have shown improvement**

in recent years and the organisation is now in better shape to contemplate an expanded role.

The MDL report identifies a number of opportunities for **improving the efficiency and effectiveness** of local council services. These include:

- Development of **"shared services"** arrangements whereby managerial and administrative functions are pooled with other organisations to lower overhead costs
- Closer joint working with the **power companies** on key **infrastructure projects**
- Establishment of arm's-length **council controlled organisations** to provide greater accountability for provision of services such as planning and to make best use of highly skilled but scarce staff resources.

FNDC is open to these sorts of approaches – what matters is what works best for local people provided that proper accountability can be maintained. We are already embarked on a shared services initiative that will deliver budget savings over the next few years.

The specialist environmental management roles currently undertaken by NRC would be new ground for a Far North Unitary Council and suitably qualified staff would need to be recruited to undertake such functions. A proportion of the existing NRC funding would be available to support this and, where possible, Council would look to offset additional costs from savings elsewhere.





Important Information Regarding Consultation Te Reo Māori

Do You Want to Know More? Kei te hiahia koe te mohio etahi atu mea?

Council is organising a series of **public meetings** to enable further discussion of the issues and options around local government reorganisation. These are scheduled as follows:

Scheduled Meetings:

KERIKERI	St. John's Hall	Wednesday 14 April, 2010
KAIKOHE	Chambers, FNDC	Thursday 15 April, 2010
KAITAIA	Kaitaia Community Centre	Tuesday 20 April, 2010
MANGONUI	Mangonui Hall	Wednesday 21 April, 2010
PAIHIA	Paihia Memorial Hall	Wednesday 21 April, 2010
OPONONI	Opononi Hall	Wednesday 21 April, 2010

All meetings are scheduled to run between **5:30pm and 6:30pm.**

An **independent report** 'Local Government Options for Northland' has been released for this public consultation. The report is also known as the '**McKinlay Douglas Report**'. You can download a copy of the full report on the Unitary Authority page at www.fndc.govt.nz or view a copy at your local library or council service centre.

Would You Like to Have Your Say? Kei te hiahia koe te korero ki?

This is a preliminary discussion paper and no final decisions have yet been made on this key issue. Your feedback will be important in determining what Council does next. Please take a few minutes to tell us your views.

You can have your say by:

- Completing and returning the attached submission form by post, or by dropping it into any Council office or service centre
- Going online to <http://fndc-consult.limehouse.com/portal> to register and fill in the submission form. You can also access the form on the Unitary Authority page at www.fndc.govt.nz.

The deadline for return of completed submissions is 5:00pm on 30 April 2010.

What Happens Next? He aha kei muri ake nei?

This is really only the **first step along the road towards changing local government in Northland. If community feedback indicates a groundswell of opinion in favour of moving to two or more unitary authorities then Council will look to work with other councils in Northland to bring about that change.**

If all four councils agree on an option a reorganisation proposal can be forwarded directly to the Local Government Commission with a request to commence the statutory process, which would involve a referendum undertaken by the Commission.

If all four councils cannot agree a proposal could still be put to the Commission if it is supported by 10% of the electors of each of the affected local government areas. The Commission would advertise the proposal and invite submissions. In the light of feedback received it may then draw up a draft reorganisation scheme for further consultation. Following that the Commission would decide whether to proceed to the final stage, which would be a poll of electors in each affected area, with a requirement of more than 50% support for the scheme to come into effect.

Another alternative to the above would be for the Minister of Local Government to initiate a reorganisation proposal, removing the need for the 10% petition. This is thought unlikely in the short term given Government's focus on the Super City implementation.

Whatever happens Council will aim to keep local communities in the Far North fully informed as this important debate continues. So keep an eye on the local press and an ear to the radio for further information.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: Thank you to Fred Sadler for his support and assistance with all Te Reo Māori translations.



Submission Form Pepe whakaki

Submitter No.

SUBMITTER DETAILS (Please print clearly)

FULL NAME:

POSTAL ADDRESS:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

PRESENTATION OF SUBMISSION (Please tick as appropriate)
I/we wish to speak in support of my/our submission:

If yes, I/we would like to be heard at the following venue (please select one):

Hearings will be held in front of an independent commissioner in June 2010 and submitters requesting a hearing will be advised of details in due course.

ORGANISATION:

(If applicable)

PHONE NUMBER:

SIGNATURE:

YES

NO

Kaikohe

Dargaville

Whangarei

FreePost Authority Number 6124



**Far North
District Council**
www.fndc.co.nz



Local Government Structures Consultation
Far North District Council
Private Bag 752
Kaikohe 0440

USEFUL INFORMATION

Hints for filling out this form: Keep to the point, summarise your main points early in your submission, use short sentences or bullet points, use simple language and be as clear as possible.

How to get your submission form back to us: Drop it off in person at your local service centre or library, post it to Far North District Council, Private Bag 752, Memorial Avenue, Kaikohe 0440 or fax it to us on 09 401 5363.

You can also register and fill in a submission form online at <http://fndc-consult.limehouse.com/portal>. Alternatively, you can access the submission form through www.fndc.govt.nz/your-council/unitary-authority, then clicking the link to the Local Government Structures Consultation. **Please note the Consultation closes at 5:00pm on 30 April 2010.**

What happens next: Your submission will be logged and summarised. You will receive an acknowledgement letter and confirmation of a hearing date and time, if you have requested to be heard. The Hearings will be held in front of an independent commissioner at a date and time to be confirmed.

Privacy Act - Please be aware when providing personal information that this Submission Form is part of the public consultation process for the Local Government Structures Consultation 2010. As such, all submissions and attached documents are copied and made available to Councillors as well as the public, as part of the consultation process.

