

Māori seats for regional council

To enhance the role of Māori in local government, legislation provides for the option to establish Māori seats. In October 2020, Northland Regional Council voted to establish Māori seats for the 2022 regional council elections, though this decision can be overturned by a public poll. This fact sheet aims to answer some of the common questions people may have about the process.

What is a Māori seat?

It is where electors on the Māori roll vote for a candidate from the Māori constituency(s). Electors on the general roll vote for candidates from the general constituency(s).

Why did council vote to establish Māori seats?

With more than a third of Northlanders being Māori and no Māori councillors for several terms, council want to guarantee Māori a place at the decision-making table. Council considers that Māori seats will improve democracy and better reflect the needs and aspirations of our entire community.

After a number of workshops and having heard from many people representing different viewpoints on the debate, council voted in favour of establishing Māori seats. Read more in our 20 October council meeting agenda: <http://northland.infocouncil.biz/>

What can stop the creation of Māori seats?

Under current legislation, the public can demand a **poll** be held. The demand for a poll needs to be supported by more than 5% of electors (in Northland, just over 6000 people).

The results of the subsequent public poll are binding and can overturn council's decision.

What makes a poll demand valid?

For a demand for a poll to be valid, it must be:

- In writing asking that the council conduct a poll;
- Be signed by the person stating their name and address;
- Be received by Northland Regional Council at 36 Water St Whangarei by 5pm 22 February 2021.

The demand can just be signed by one person saying they want a poll, or a petition with many people saying they want a poll.

Do I need to be on the electoral roll to demand or participate in a poll?

Yes. You need to be enrolled as a resident and/or ratepayer of Northland. If you're not on the electoral roll already, you can enrol. Electoral Roll enrolments and updates are managed by the Electoral Commission. www.vote.nz/enrol

Can council help me sign a petition?

No. If someone wants to sign a petition, we can't help as we are the organisation that would be receiving the petition.

Is the 5% poll demand requirement going to remain?

Incoming Local Government Minister Nanaia Mahuta has signalled her intention to remove the requirement for public polls, and is reported to have described it as an anomaly that had held back widespread Māori representation.

Until that happens, councils are bound by the current legislation that is in place.

How much would a poll cost?

Polls are not cheap. If required, it's expected to cost ratepayers about \$240,000.

What's the deadline for demanding a poll?

Demands for a poll must be received by 5pm on 22 February 2021.

When would the poll be, if it happens?

If a demand for a poll is successful (i.e. it's supported by more than 5% of electors), a poll must be held not later than 89 days after the electoral officer receives notice that the council has received a valid demand. It must be completed by 21 May 2021.

Would the total number of councillors increase if Māori seats happen?

Not necessarily. Council will do a review of its representation arrangements by 31 August 2021 and that will determine the total number of councillors.

Would it still be one vote per person with Māori seats?

Yes. Regardless of which electoral roll a person is on they are only able to cast one vote at local body election time. Those on the Maori roll are able to vote for those standing in the Māori constituency and those on the

general roll can vote for those standing in the general constituencies.

Would having Māori seats cost more?

Not in terms of what they get paid – it doesn't change the total pool of money allocated for paying council's elected representatives. If the number of councillors goes up, each councillor will be paid less.

Would Māori seats just represent Māori at the council table?

No. Māori elected to designated Māori seats will sign the same oath as other councillors; at the decision table they will represent and make decisions for the good of all Northlanders, not just tangata whenua.

If the poll happens, what would be asked?

It'd just be a simple yes or no question on whether Māori seats should be established or not.

Who would run the poll?

Independent election services would run the poll.

If a poll returned a "no" decision, what would that mean?

As poll results are binding for two elections, council would not be able to reconsider establishing Māori seats again until 2028.

If the poll returned a "yes" decision, what would happen?

Council would develop and consult on the specifics of Māori seats as part of its wider representation review in 2021, ready for the next election in 2022.

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