

Simplifying Local Government

Tuesday Club

Background

11 Regional Councils

Regional councils focus on large-scale environmental and resource management across their areas.

Key Responsibilities:

- Land Transport:** Planning and funding for public transport and regional roading networks.
- Biosecurity & Pest Control:** Managing invasive species and protecting natural ecosystems.
- Civil Defence:** Emergency management and disaster preparedness.
- Environmental Management:** Managing water quality, flood protection, and air pollution.

Primary Focus: The Environment

Regional Councils are primarily responsible for managing natural resources like water, air, and coastlines, setting the long-term strategy for the region's environment.

67 Territorial Authorities

Territorial authorities manage the day-to-day services and infrastructure within cities and districts.

Key Responsibilities:

- Local Infrastructure:** Managing local roads, footpaths, wastewater, and water supply.
- Community Services:** Waste collection, parks, libraries, swimming pools, and community centres.
- Regulatory Functions:** Building consents, resource management, and local bylaws.

Breakdown by Type:



6 Unitary Authorities

A Unitary Authority combines the full responsibilities of **both a Regional Council and a Territorial Authority**, serving as a single point of contact for local governance.

A Unique Case: Auckland Council

Auckland Council is one of the 6 unitary authorities, but it is unique, operating as a single **'super-city'** structure governing the entire Auckland region.

The **other 5** unitary authorities are: Gisborne District Council, Nelson City Council, Marlborough District Council, Tasman District Council, and Chatham Islands Council.

What is proposed – in two steps

The proposal restructures regional governance in two major steps



Step 1: Replace Regional Councillors with a Board of Mayors (CTB)

Mayors of all TAs in each region form a Combined Territories Board (CTB) which becomes the governing body for all regional council functions



Step 2: Each Region Must Produce a “Regional Reorganisation Plan”

This plan must map regional and local functions, identify overlaps, and recommend the best future arrangements

Step 1 - Combined Territories Board (CTB)

CTBs will take over the governance for the roles and functions of regional councils

When making decisions, each mayor would have a set number of votes.

Options

1. One Mayor, One Vote
2. Pure Population
3. Proposed - Votes based on population and adjusted to ensure smaller communities receive effective representation.

The independent Local Government Commission would make these adjustments.

Depending on the region, the CTB might be kept, dissolved, or repurposed via regional plans.

Alternative options on the table

Crown Commissioner on the CTB (Mayors + Government Appointee)

- **Observer Only:** Commissioner participates in discussions, no voting power.
- **Veto Power:** Commissioner can override CTB decisions in the national interest. Mayors still vote normally otherwise.
- **Majority Vote:** Commissioner holds more than 50% of total votes. Mayors share the remaining vote allocation.

No CTB at All... Full Crown Commissioners

- Government appoints Crown Commissioners to govern the regional council directly.
- **Commissioners replace regional councillors entirely.**
- They lead the region through the development of the Regional Reorganisation Plan.
- **Local elected members (mayors/councils) have no formal role in regional governance** during this period.

Step 2: “Regional Reorganisation Plan” within two years

This plan must map regional and local functions, identify overlaps, and recommend the best future arrangements

- Map all council functions in the region
- Recommend the best delivery model for each across the region (e.g., shared services, joint council-controlled companies, or amalgamations)
- Require mandatory consultation with communities, iwi, hapū, Māori, and stakeholders in the region
- Minister Bishop indicated that it would be led by Christchurch, Selwyn and Waimakariri.

Plans must be consulted on, independently reviewed by the Local Government Commission, and approved by the Minister.

The plan may retain, dissolve, or repurpose the CTB itself.

Opportunity with some flaws

Christchurch acknowledge the Government's intent to simplify local government and reduce duplication across the region...

...But, the model proposed does not provide a credible pathway to meaningful, durable reform.

It risks weakening rather than strengthening regional governance at a time when Canterbury needs stability, clarity, and long-term direction.

Combined Territories Board (CTB)

Not convinced the CTB model, as proposed, will deliver them for Canterbury.

The CTB is being asked to do too much at once: govern existing regional functions and lead a once-in-a-generation functional redesign of local government.

At same time Mayor must fulfil their roles under S41A LGA 2002

Combining these roles in a single, mayor-led transitional body is a material weakness that risks diluted focus, constrained capability, and insufficient independence for a performance-led review.

The proposed role of the CTB alongside resource management reform is unclear, further stretching scope, timeframes, and capacity at a critical point of change.

Requesting the Government reconsider the CTB's design and composition, including

- whether reform leadership should be separated from ongoing regional governance.

Transitional arrangements must retain flexibility to enable metropolitan-scale analysis and to test unitary or differentiated options, where the evidence supports them.

Ultimately, reform success will depend not on creating a single body, but on whether governance and support arrangements enable a focused, independent, evidence-led functional review.

Transitional process is not appropriate

The proposal creates a transitional governance structure that is temporary, weak, and not designed to deliver long-term change. This is unlikely produce the best outcome for our ratepayers.

- Christchurch carries the largest population, infrastructure load, and risk exposure in the region
- Shifts Christchurch's future into the hands of a mayoral negotiation forum, not a credible decision-making body.
- The process is likely to result in compromise-driven regional plans rather than bold reform that actually fixes Canterbury's structural issues.
- Need a process that delivers outcomes that match the scale and responsibility of a major city – just as districts need process that match their responsibilities
- Do not support being locked into a transition that limits, predetermines, or weakens Christchurch's ability to choose the governance model that is best for our residents and ratepayers.
- Preference is a process that allows it to lead and to design a system that reflects the scale, complexity, and expectations of a major metropolitan centre.
- Must retain flexibility to enable metropolitan-scale analysis and to test unitary or differentiated options, where the evidence supports them.

Momentum matters: we cannot wait until 2027

Canterbury needs progress now. We must be enabled to begin the work immediately, not lose three years to process

The proposed timeframe is too long

- The CTB is not scheduled to be in place until 2027, with the Regional Reorganisation Plan due up to two years after that.
- Waiting for the formal structure would stall momentum at a time when Canterbury's challenges require urgent, coordinated action.

Christchurch needs, and expects, early progress

- Councils must be empowered to start functional analysis, data-sharing, and sub-regional planning now, not after transitional machinery is established.
- Early progress reduces transition risk, improves evidence quality, and ensures the region is not forced into rushed decisions late in the process.
- Canterbury cannot afford a multi-year pause. We need clarity, direction, and active planning from the outset.

Alternative Options

Preferred End- State Scenarios



1. Christchurch-Led Unitary Model

Christchurch combines city and regional functions into one authority.

2. Greater Christchurch City

A single, metropolitan council replacing the three TAs and the regional council.

Recap -What we're concerned with

CTB capacity risk:

One body expected to govern existing regional functions *and* lead major system redesign.

Negotiated outcomes:

Risk the RRP becomes consensus-driven rather than evidence-led.

Metropolitan dilution:

Voting and representation settings may underweight Christchurch's scale, infrastructure load, and risk.

One-size-fits-all approach:

Region-wide solutions could mask real performance issues where systems already operate at metro scale.

Secretariat independence:

Perceived or actual institutional bias would undermine trust in the process.

Cost and risk transfer:

Risk of unfunded mandates or unjustified cross-subsidisation onto Christchurch ratepayers.

Long timelines:

Delays risk loss of momentum and rushed decisions later.

What we want to see

A true functional review:

Function first, form second assessment of what works before deciding structure.

Metro sub-grouping enabled:

Explicit provision for metropolitan workstreams alongside region-wide analysis.

Evidence-led options:

Ability to test multiple models, including metropolitan and unitary options where evidence supports them.

Strong governance settings:

Clear delegation, decision rules, and voting that reflect scale and impact.

Independent secretariat:

Neutral, analytically strong, and not led or owned by any single institution.

Treaty partnership embedded:

Mana whenua involvement from the outset, with existing arrangements protected.

Transparency on cost:

Funding follows function, clear transition costs, and affordability for Christchurch ratepayers.

Early momentum:

Ability to start functional analysis now, not wait years for process.