

The logo for the Green Party, featuring the word "Green" in a white, stylized serif font. The letter "G" is large and has a leaf-like shape integrated into its upper curve. The background of the entire graphic is a dense, vibrant green fern frond pattern.

Simplifying Local Government

Submissions due 20 Feb 2026

Resources from your Green Local Government Caucus

Authorised by Miriam Ross, Level 5, 108 The Terrace, Wellington

Submission Guide - Protecting Local Government January 2026

The Government recently announced a Simplifying Local Government proposal – all without consulting communities. They have called for submissions closing on 20 February 2026

<https://www.dia.govt.nz/simplifying-local-government>

This guide has been prepared by members of Greens Local Government Caucus with support from MPs.

In a nutshell

The government proposes to remove all elected regional councillors and replace them with eleven “Combined Territories Boards” (CTBs). These would consist of all the mayors in a region, and possibly crown appointees.

Each CTB will have two jobs:

1. Take over the governance of the regional council organisation
2. Over two years, work out a new local government structure for the region - affecting regional, city and district councils.

None of this would apply to Auckland. The remaining unitary authorities (Gisborne, Nelson, Tasman, Marlborough and the Chatham Islands) can choose whether they make a reorganisation plan or not.

We are very concerned that the proposals in their present form would

1. Downgrade environmental protections
2. Weaken community influence in local and regional decisions
3. Minimise obligations to mana whenua and Te Tiriti o Waitangi
4. Endanger public ownership of major assets, such as ports.

This looks like an attack on people and planet, part of a disturbing pattern in the current government’s actions. If you think so too, we encourage you to make a submission.

Submissions on the proposal close on 20 February. The government intends to introduce legislation in mid-2026 and pass it into law in 2027.

We think

Local government is ripe for change, but these proposals will do more harm than good.

Local government is vital to all our lives. For example, Regional Council responsibilities include flood protection, emergency management, freshwater quality and protection of biodiversity. These are matters that do not abide by local council boundaries but have to be dealt with by river catchment or in wider regions. Any changes must take account of this.

Only strong environmental regulators can ensure local services are delivered sustainably and protect environmental values.

There is no need to replace the regional councillors elected in 2025 while new structures are worked out. Doing so will be disruptive to service delivery and distract from the business of reorganising local government.

The essential thing at this stage is to identify the right group to put together plans for new local government arrangements, and ensure community voice is heard in that process. This mandate must include mana whenua and should also include elected councillors, mayors, crown representatives and experts in the field. A citizens or representative assembly could play a part in creating and prioritising options.

The proposal is silent on funding for local government. New Zealand is a major outlier in resourcing local government among OECD nations, with less than 10% of public money in local authorities. The norm is 40%. Unless this is addressed, local councils will struggle to deliver good services regardless of how local government is reorganised.

Whatever is settled on for local government organisation, it should be enduring, not subject to a three-year pendulum. That will require bottom-up development by communities with mana whenua and a high degree of cross-party accord in Parliament.

Specific responses to the proposal

Proposed Step 1: Combined Territories Boards take over governance of regional council organisations

- We do not support this step.
- Removal of elected officials undermines the credibility of New Zealand elections and damages our nation's democratic credentials on the world
- Mayors are not the right people to look after the governance of regional council organisations.
 - Mayors have enough to do in their own districts and cities and have shown no enthusiasm for taking on this extra role
 - Mayors were not elected with this skill set or regional view in mind
- It is unnecessary to create new CTBs to govern regional councils. Regional councillors were elected in October 2025 for this purpose. They should keep doing this role until new local government structures are decided.
- There is a huge amount of change going on for local government with the resource management changes. It makes things even more complicated and uncertain to change the governance of regional councils at the same time.
- Abolishing regional councillors and replacing them with CTBs also does away with iwi and Maori representation on regional councils in councils where this is

Proposed Step 2: Design a new local government structure for the region

- We support the principle of making improvements to local government structures. There is value in changing structures so they work even better for communities and businesses and offer effective environmental management.

- We don't need to come up with suggestions for future structures now, but we do need to identify the appropriate group to make the decisions. The proposed CTB is not the right group.
- Better options would be
 - A group composed of mana whenua, council representatives including mayors and regional council expertise, crown representatives, experts in the field to develop options
 - There must be effective public consultation. This could involve citizens or representative assemblies
 - Mana whenua must be involved from the very beginning and throughout
 - Guide the mandated group with international examples of local governments contributing strongly to successful communities and nations
 - This process must be adequately funded - not another task that central government drops of local councils without any funding attached

Making a submission

Follow the link at <https://www.dia.govt.nz/simplifying-local-government>

You will find 10 online questions and an option to upload a document with your submission

If you choose to answer the specific questions you might consider making these points, in addition to the material above:

- Democratic decision-making must be safeguarded.
- It's essential to come up with consistent, effective models across the country. The proposal appears to allow for a dozen different local government structures around Aotearoa.
- In considering the proposed criteria (question 9), effective environmental protection must be given priority. Some services are better or only possible if delivered across a wider region or by catchment.
- The removal of existing iwi representation should not go ahead via the abolition of regional councillors and creation of CTBs.

There is more detail about each of the questions in the discussion document.

We also encourage you to contact your local mayor and councillors to make your views known, and to ensure your friends and neighbours do the same.

Useful links and further reading

- [Ministerial press release 25.11.2025](#)
- [The proposal and related documents](#)
- For those wanting further reading, there have been previous reviews of local government. [The Future for Local Government](#) reported in 2023 but was shelved by the present government in 2024. It contains a lot of valuable information and suggestions that should not be lost, including on funding issues.