



The Northern Action Group Incorporated

10 May 2021

Hon Nanaia Mahuta
Minister of Local Government
Parliament Building
Wellington.

Review of Local Government

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Northern Action Group (NAG) following your recent announcement establishing a panel to help you review what local government does, how it does it, how it pays for it, and the future for local government in New Zealand. The terms of reference for the review expect that the Panel will engage widely with relevant local government stakeholders and includes the public, but does not specifically require any form of public consultation.

With our considerable experience of local government operation (and particularly the way Auckland Council (AC) is working within its current framework) and our experience with the Local Government Act in our proposal for de-amalgamation and subsequent appeal against the Commission's decision, we consider we have learnt much and have much to contribute to such an exercise – to help inform your judgements and to assist the Panel with forming its views and recommendations to you.

While our more prominent public role was around our application to de-amalgamate from AC and to give residents and ratepayers their say in their own local governance - that they were denied in the compulsory amalgamation of 2009 - our work generally has a broader context that is relevant to “fit for purpose”, efficient and effective local government and the fair and equitable representation and participation sought in your review.

In addition to the useful modelling, research and analysis work we did for our application for a separate unitary authority, we have separately contributed to Local government NZ's project on localism, supported arguments for recall elections for elected local government officials to improve accountability and performance (and avoid the need for Ministerial intervention), advocated to AC for a different approach to the formation of subdivisions in our area, and contributed on representation boundaries for the last election to the Electoral Commission.

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Members have individually contributed submissions to the Commissioners considering the resource consent and plan change applications for a new regional landfill in Rodney, highlighting AC's planning inadequacies and failure to meet the challenge of fairly and effectively managing the environmental commons for all of us.

We understand that Local Government is complex and in general people do not manage complexity well. As Mervyn King advocates in "Radical Uncertainty" we have tried throughout to adopt a pragmatic "What is going on here", problem solving approach to addressing inadequacies in governance and performance arising from the structural arrangements applying under current legislation and the associated poor performance of individuals.

Problems include poor community representation and engagement, accountability (or lack of it), ratepayers and residents unaddressed concerns dissatisfaction and consequent apathy, poor communications and coordination, failure to get the devolution balance right, majority abuse of minority areas, prioritization that is not community oriented, and funder and provider disconnects under silo management approaches.

We can see what is not working, what is unfair or inequitable, and can suggest incentives and arrangements that provide workable solutions.

We are clearly stakeholders in the review. We have no grand expectations that our contributions will prevail or be seen to be "right" but we strongly believe that by participating we can inform outcome decisions. Our mandate is to represent the interests of North Rodney residents and ratepayers in seeking to improve the governance of our area and the principles guiding our work have much to offer overall. We are writing to you to ask for the opportunity to engage with yourself and the panel to contribute advice and guidance to which we believe will assist you.

Yours sincerely

William Foster
Chairman
Northern Action Group Inc.

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