



20 February 2026

Department of Internal Affairs
Wellington

Via online Submission Portal

Otago Regional Council Submission on the Simplifying Local Government Proposal

Otago Regional Council (ORC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Government's *Simplifying Local Government* proposal. ORC supports the Government's intent to reshape local government in New Zealand and is committed to working constructively to help shape a strong, sustainable model of local governance for the future.

The proposal released by the Government combines two quite different functions within a single body:

- (a) governing existing regional council responsibilities, and
- (b) designing a new local government system through the Regional Reorganisation Plan (RRP)

ORC believes the experience and expertise of regional councillors should be maintained for the governance of existing regional council responsibilities. In addition, ORC believes the inclusion of regional council knowledge and expertise within the re-organisation process, will be critical to achieving a successful outcome and transition.

Accordingly, ORC considers that business-as-usual regional council governance functions should remain with regional councillors, who currently hold a regional mandate from the community.

ORC considers that designing a future system is a separate and specialised task. That work is best undertaken through an independent or alternative process. Existing local government reorganisation processes already contain much of the core machinery needed, including participants, consultation requirements, timeframes, and implementation pathways, and these could be adapted to support the RRP process and ensure that the priorities of the Government are achieved within the desired timeframes.

The next Local government election would be a good time to begin the new structure for governance and the transition phase for operational activities. Retaining regional councillors as part of the ongoing regional council business as usual activities, would also enable them to be part of the reorganisation processes, which we think is important as outlined above.

Importantly, ORC considers that the reorganisation process should not be constrained by existing regional boundaries. Looking beyond current lines on a map would enable fresh thinking and allow governance arrangements to better reflect catchment-scale issues, environmental systems that span regions, infrastructure management and communities of interest that do not align neatly with current structures.

At the very least, the Government should provide an expectation that the reorganisation bodies must have cross-boundary discussions about issues as outlined above.

Two examples of regional collaboration currently underway in Otago include Grow Well Whaiora and the Otago Regional Transport Committee. These provide useful context for the Government around what has worked and what doesn't in a regional collaboration process.

Finally, ORC emphasises that this work must be aligned with the broader reform landscape. Local government reform does not stand alone; it intersects with resource management reform, emergency management reform, rates capping and climate adaptation planning. Regular changes to national direction and Government policy settings have generated significant workloads and created a resource burden on regional councils. Ensuring these programmes are connected, coherent and workable as a whole package will be essential to achieving an enduring and effective future system.

ORC appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission and will welcome opportunities for continued engagement as the reforms progress.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hilary Calvert', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hilary Calvert
Chairperson, Otago Regional Council