

7 August 2026

Hon Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government

By email: S.Watts@ministers.govt.nz

Tena Koe

Rangitikei District Council – Additional information to support the Manawatū-Whanganui regional response to the Simplifying Local Government process

I write to provide additional context to the Rangitikei District Council's (Council) position on the Simplifying Local Government process. Council is taking the intended direction of Government seriously and has been proactive in understanding potential amalgamation options for our district. Since May we have:

- Undertaken community engagement.
- Had discussions with iwi/hapu.
- Commissioned technical work on seven options for amalgamation.
- Been involved in many regional discussions about amalgamation options.

After undertaking that work, Council was not in a position to put in a Head Start proposal for reform. There are a number of reasons for that including the timing being too tight for this region as we had not already started amalgamation discussions prior to May; the number of authorities in this region and the diversity of the communities that we each represent; and the location of our district i.e. being so central we have a wide range of options available for amalgamation.

Instead, Council has signed a shared letter and Memorandum of Understanding with the majority of councils in the Manawatū-Whanganui Region, setting out our intended way forward in response to the Government's Simplifying Local Government process. Our Council supports working through a locally led regional process in understanding future amalgamation.

The work programme is designed to move at pace, via a collaborative process. It will develop a shared evidence base, identify district-specific interests and non-negotiables, test regional, sub-regional and relevant cross-boundary options, consider engagement and consultation requirements, and enable each council to make informed decisions with the interests of the people we serve driving the best outcome.

Council notes that Horowhenua District Council and Palmerston North City Council have developed their own letter that they will be submitting to the Government. This proposal focuses on and has named councils that share a part in the Manawatū awa catchment. The Rangitīkei District has not been named, however, we value our connections with Palmerston North City Council and Horowhenua District Council and will be continuing our conversations with them.

While Council acknowledges that a structure focused around the Manawatū awa is one option, this approach neglects the significance of the Rangitīkei River catchment that Rangitīkei and Manawatū districts share. A proposal that separates the Manawatū and Rangitīkei districts in unitary functions risks creating a fragmented management approach for this important awa. The Rangitīkei River is approximately 253km long, and its catchment covers an area of 3,948km², from the headwaters in the Kaimanawa Ranges running through to the west coast settlements of Scott's Ferry and Tangimoana.

Council is clear that we are open to working widely within the Manawatū-Whanganui region. Our connections with Palmerston North City and Horowhenua District are strong through our shared Water Services CCO, Central Districts Water. While districts such as Tararua and Manawatū share similar GDP, populations and rural environments we also have catchment connections with Ruapehu and Whanganui districts, and share Te Waiu o te Ika, the Whangaehu River catchment. There are many iwi in the Horizons region, any future amalgamation should be done with these boundaries also in mind.

The technical work undertaken to-date shows that there is no option for the Rangitīkei District that effectively meets all of the five criteria laid out by the Government. Options that are easier to deliver generally provide poorer results for economy of scale or in supporting the new planning system and vice versa. Therefore, more work and time is needed to identify the best option for the Rangitīkei District and Manawatū- Whanganui Region as a whole.

In summary, Council would like to ask that as the Government proceeds with the reorganisation of local government that they take a holistic, collaborative and well considered approach. Although our region has not put together a Head Start proposal, there is a regionwide willingness to work together to understand and develop the best regional option for reorganisation. Council believes that it is too early to pick a regionwide or subregional option for the Manawatu-Whanganui Region, and we will be working proactively to help shape how the region is structured going forward.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our position further.

Naku noa



Andy Watson
Mayor of the Rangitīkei