

mahurangi action

alternative application

under Schedule 3 of the Local Government Act 2002

Alternative application by Mahurangi Action Incorporated
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Proposed changes to Auckland Council governance arrangements:

Mahurangi Action Incorporated (Mahurangi Action) hereby applies to the Local Government Commission for the single local board within the Rodney Ward of Auckland Council to be replaced by two local boards:

- 1 a northern local board that conforms with the present Warkworth and Wellsford subdivisions; and
- 2 a southern local board that conforms with the present Dairy Flat and Kumeu subdivisions, of the current Rodney Local Board.

(An annotated map of the proposed local-board areas is appended to this alternative application)

Mahurangi Action further applies for the number of Warkworth subdivision local-board members to be increased from three to four, in order that:

- 1 the northern local board in total has an odd number of board members; and
- 2 in anticipation of population growth in Warkworth, in what Auckland Council has deemed to be one of two satellite growth centres in the rural Auckland region.

Mahurangi Action further applies for consideration of the name Tamahunga to be used for the proposed north-Rodney local board.

Finally, Mahurangi Action applies for a moderate amount more power to be shared with the local boards by the governing body of Auckland Council.

What the proposed changes are seeking to achieve and how the changes would be achieved by the approach proposed in the application:

Mahurangi Action, in proposing this change—the splitting of the Rodney Local Board into two separate local boards, and devolving more power to local boards generally—is seeking to achieve three things:

- 1 increase local representation of the respective proposed local-board areas;
- 2 decrease the sense of alienation that the forced amalgamation produced in communities that generally didn't regard themselves as urban Auckland; and
- 3 increase the power of local-boards to provide effective representation.

Mahurangi Action believes that residents of north Rodney would strongly relate to a north Rodney local board, particularly if meaningfully consulted about a unifying name for the local board area.

Potential improvements that would result from the proposed changes and how they would promote good local government:

The sense of alienation resulting from the forced amalgamation, exacerbated by the Northern Action Group's dogged pursuit, first of union with Kaipara District Council, and then as a separate unitary authority, is uncondusive to good local government.

The creation of a new local board, and one that, along with the other local boards, enjoyed a moderate amount more power than local boards currently are allowed, would send a strong signal to the people of north Rodney that their communities are recognised as having distinctly different issues and needs from the balance of the Auckland region.

Other information Mahurangi Action considers relevant to the commission's consideration of the application:

Mahurangi Action track record

From the commencement of the royal commission process, Mahurangi Action and the *Mahurangi Magazine* have engaged in an open-minded exploration of how Auckland region's governance could be improved. Included in the 30 *Mahurangi Magazine* articles published (listed page 4) is the draft of this alternative application, and a call, on 25 May 2016, for input.

Incontestable need for regional governance

Mahurangi Action's formative experience, and indeed the proximate driver for founding the organisation in 1974, was an example of the need for regional governance. The then Warkworth Town Council was pursuing a localised wastewater treatment solution when it was clear to others, including the special water board tribunal that considered the water right application, that a system that included nearby Mahurangi coastal settlements was preferable, including in respect to safeguarding Mahurangi Harbour oyster-farming operations.

That a legal loophole was exploited by the town council to go it alone then, and that the current proposal of Watercare, 42 years later, is for a combined scheme, only goes to illustrate the need for comprehensive regional governance.

Mahurangi Action's other two areas of focus, landscape protection and sediment mitigation, strongly reinforce its experience of the need for regional governance:

- 1 Acquisition of regional parkland in the 1970s protected the Mahurangi landscape from coastal residential settlement at a time when available town planning mechanisms were minimal; and
- 2 The 10 years of scientific surveys of the Mahurangi Harbour's benthic communities leading up to 2004, and the Mahurangi Action Plan that those studies spawned, were initiated by the Auckland Regional Council and continue under Auckland Council, without which the harbour would have received no help in addressing its sediment accumulation rate, double that of other Auckland catchments.

These three examples, of course, are not a definitive list of regional governance needs, which would include transport and residential planning, to name two of the more obvious.

Auckland's regional governance practice dates from the establishment of Auckland Regional Planning Authority in 1954. Then came the Auckland Regional Authority, with its built-in provisions for the purchase of regional parks, beginning with Wenderholm 50 summers ago, followed by the Auckland Regional Council in 1989, and culminating in the region being constituted a unitary authority, Auckland Council, in 2010. After 62 years of progressively building robust regional governance, and with a population more than three and a half times greater¹, the Northern Action Group notion that the Auckland region could somehow dispense with regional governance is risible—north Rodney, overnight, would be rendered an unfettered developers' El Dorado, à la Mangawhai and its attendant governance debacle.

The evolution of regional governance, however, might have taken a number of different legitimate paths other than the creation of a unitary authority. Certainly, Mahurangi Action was far from convinced that the royal commission had diligently explored options to the monolithic model it ultimately recommended. Specifically, the commissioners ignored Mahurangi Action's humble urging that they consult Professor Brian Dollery of the University of New England, who would later, in 2003, write a report for the Napier City Council² that concluded:

- 1 The proposed amalgamations scenarios advocated in [respect to Hawkes Bay and Northland] are not supported by available empirical evidence and past experience of compulsory council mergers; and

- 2 Shared service arrangements should be considered as an alternative option to forced council amalgamations.

That a forced amalgamation would provoke a backlash was entirely foreseeable. But neither is it cause to prolong the disruption with any form of de-amalgamation, which even the libertarian Fraser Institute finds 'is not often desirable.'³

Giving Auckland governance a fair go

The application by the Northern Action Group is unabashedly dogma-driven and wholly without merit as a governance model for an area that is totally in the thrall of New Zealand's dominant conurbation of Auckland—home to one third of New Zealanders. With significant numbers of residents commuting from north Rodney, and even from Mangawhai north of the Auckland Council boundary, it is clear that functionally, north Rodney is part of the Auckland region.

The massive, undisclosed and on-going cost of creating one unitary authority from one regional and seven city and district councils would be greatly added to, was part of the region to be now split off and another new unitary authority created, before the new governance arrangements have been fully bedded in.

While it was the democratic right of the Northern Action Group actors to oppose Auckland region unification, and to agitate for secession once it occurred, the majority of north-Rodney residents, and organisations such as Mahurangi Action, have been working diligently to obtain the best results from the new structure. As Mahurangi Action stated to the royal commissioners, the time for providing the citizens of the Auckland region with a poll should have been once the commission had identified a number of robust options for the governance of the region. If a poll is now to be held, it should not be held as in response to the piecemeal Northern Action Group application, but should follow a commission of inquiry held say in 2025, allowing a five-electoral-term stabilisation period, provided there was a region-wide public consensus for one.

Name for north Rodney

Aside from its twin coasts, the principal geographic features of [north, in error] Rodney are:

- Tamahunga Range
- Kaipara Harbour (southern part of)
- Mahurangi Harbour

Next in line include South Kaipara Head, Tāwharanui Peninsula, and Cape Rodney. If the Rodney Ward is to have two local boards, the southern local board connection to Cape Rodney would be tenuous in the extreme, making Kaipara or South Kaipara a more natural, and geographically coherent choice. In the proposed north-Rodney local-board area, Mount Tamahunga has a stronger geographic dominance than does Cape Rodney, which shares its coastal sentinel role with four-kilometre farther easterly-jutting Tāwharanui Point.

Mahurangi Action commends Tamahunga as a name for a new local board, which would have an implicit mission to represent Aucklanders north and south the Tamahunga Range to the best of its ability and to engender a sense of shared community in the Auckland region's north.

Two-Rodney-Ward application

The Rodney Ward, with its population of only about 55 000⁴, is currently the best represented ward in the Auckland region. In contrast, the Waitemata & Gulf Ward, which as its name suggests includes Waiheke and Great Barrier Island, is the least, with Councillor Mike Lee currently representing more than 86 000 people⁴. Without doubling the number of councillors to 40, Mahurangi Action can see no democratic way that the present Rodney Ward could be split into two and allowed two councillors, as applied for by the Kumeu–Huapai Residents and Ratepayers Association. Not only would the proposal would give Rodney people three times the representation allowed Waitemata & Gulf Ward residents, it would result in a governing body of 22, which would increase a mayor's opportunity to cast two votes.

Conclusion

Sixty-two years of regional governance has seen the growth of regional services greatly valued and enjoyed by Aucklanders, including a network of regional parks that ensures that inhabitants of the metropolis enjoy similar levels of access to wild places that the balance of New Zealanders, with their typically closer proximity to *national* parks, enjoy.

Any breaking up of the region now—de-amalgamation—would be an historically retrograde step, unless it was accompanied by the reintroduction of a regional tier of government.

In its final submission to the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance⁵, Mahurangi Action supported the model proposed by the then Auckland City Council calling for ‘a menu of options’ for representation at the neighbourhood level⁶. This might have seen, for example, council-supported forums Wellsford- and Warkworth-based, serving that part of the region north and south respectively of the Tamahunga Range.

Short of such flexibility belatedly being introduced, the alternative application of Mahurangi Action Incorporated is for:

- 1 the current Rodney Local Board to be divided into two;
- 2 the current Warkworth and Wellsford subdivisions to form a ‘Tamahunga’ local board;
- 3 the current Warkworth subdivision to elect four local board members; and
- 4 all local boards to enjoy a moderate amount more power than currently allowed.

¹ *New Zealand Official Yearbook* 1954

² *Bigger is Not Always Better* Dollery and Kortt 3 December 2013

³ *De-Amalgamation in Canada – Breaking Up is Hard to Do* Fraser Institute 7 July 2015

⁴ Census Meshblock Dataset Statistics New Zealand 2013

⁵ Local Government (Auckland Council) Bill Submission 930

⁶ Thirty into 1.4 Million Equals One Tamahunga Local Board *Mahurangi Magazine* 10 April 2009

***Mahurangi Magazine* articles about, or mostly about, the region’s governance arrangements**

Mahurangi Action Application for a Tamahunga Local Board

Mahurangi Action to Submit to Building a Better Region

More Support for a Rose for Rodney

A Healthy Dose of Overdue Democracy

As a Name for the Region Auckland is Wrong

Mahurangi Magazine Open Letter to Labour

District Council Desperate Bid for Self-Preservation

Last-Minute Changes Cause to Plan for Celebration

Action Plan is Mahurangi Preparing for the Transition

Electing the Mayor of Mahurangi

Bad Language but Boundary Brilliant

Rodney Didn’t Speak Rodney Roared

Key Calls for a Pūhoi–Makarau Line Uprising

Notion to Exclude Mahurangi Uncalled-For

Auckland Regional Council Media Release Rodney’s Disaster

New Zealand Labour Party Minority View

Letter to Lockwood – Mahurangi Must Remain in Region

Mahurangi Action’s Last Glossy Gasp

Local Government (Auckland Council) Bill Submission 930

Council Barking up the Wrong Rodney Unitary Authority

Taking the Dumb Out of Referendum – Yes and No

Crude Devices and the R-Word

Thirty into 1.4 Million Equals One Tamahunga Local Board

Wanted – Name for New Plan and New Name for Rodney

Twin Streams Floated their Punt

What Time’s the Tide on Saturday 24 January 2060?

Mahurangi Action Submission to the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance

Wanted – Attractive, Well-Developed Models

We Can Get Bitter, or Get Learning

In the Hands of Aucklanders

Proposed two-local-board division of current Rodney Ward area

*Please note that providing suggestions for names for proposed south-Rodney local board is not considered to be the prerogative of Mahurangi Action Incorporated.

