

PETER SALTER

ANTHEA KEENAN

Local Government Commission
Department of Internal Affairs
PO Box 5362
Wellington 6145

23 June 2015

Dear Sir / Madam

REORGANISATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT WITHIN SOUTH ISLAND WEST COAST REGION:

We make application to involve Government in finding suitable options for a more efficient and economical local governance of Buller, Greymouth and Westland District Councils and West Coast Regional Council.

A petition showing approximately 500 signatures is attached supporting our application. Including, statistical data for total West Coast region (from three District Council statistic data) & news clips.

Over past years there has been general unrest amongst ratepayers on the West Coast as they endure, what seems, unrealistic decisions made by Councils. This is seen by newspaper articles and meetings, culminating in ratepayer's revolt, especially in Westland District.

Consultation, within the present local government set up, of four Councils, has more than often been inadequate. Examples: 1. West Coast Regional Council investing in a controversial 1080 factory in Rolleston, Canterbury. 2. Westland District Council rating change to CV rating with many ratepayers facing increases of 100%. Unsatisfactory and undemocratic decision making and against wishes of ratepayers.

With a small rate base/population and median income of under \$30,000, rates have continued to rise year after year (double digits and up to 32% for some properties in Westland in past years). Westland & Buller District Councils have, in past twelve months, completed rating reviews and even though majority voted against, Westland Council is now applying capital rating with UAGC 30% (now altering it to 20%) which is presently resulting in 20 - 100% increases for a great number of properties. Buller Council voted against Capital rating. Greymouth Council also stayed with Land Value rating. The CV rating system is now confused and unclear to ratepayers.

For some time there has been reason to believe that three district councils and one regional council existing with three Mayors, one Chairman, four Chief Executives, thirty six Councillors and staff being carried by each Council, is extravagant. With each Council carrying out separate district plans, policies, reports etc. there is far too much administration office work and costs i.e. approx. \$15 million in wages for near 20,000 rateable properties or population of just over 32,000 for the region.

It would seem to us that, a simplified and unified Council administration system could be in place to reduce costs, sustain rates and or to maintain the required infrastructure and necessary services here.

West Coast region has farming, mineral, tourism based economy base, however these industries, over the past five years have generally declined: first in mining, also tourism which has left people on the Coast struggling to make ends meet – financial difficulty.

The region, although high in rain fall, has considerable bush and swampy area, dairy farm land & back country, creeks, lakes, rivers, river beds. The distance from Karamea to Haast is similar to that of from Wellington to Auckland. A long, narrow region – little distance from mountains to sea. Although it endures torrential rainfall and river flow, it also boasts beautiful scenery with Southern Alps backdrop.

Much of the area is entrusted to Department of Conservation, for conservation and visitor base, recreational purpose. This government entity also has administration, seemingly repetitive to that of Councils i.e. waste management controls, freedom camping policy.

Ratepayers have observed Council mismanagement and overspent budgets, insufficient procurement. Often there has not been enough shown good planning or economic viability of projects. Council's continue to increase their workload, employ more staff and spend up large out of declining rate paid money. There are meetings and workshops held behind closed doors.

Grey District has also faced decline of extraction industries, in turn economy affected but overall this Council seems to show reasonable and more suitable administration means and as well more in line, suitable and empathetic to ensure ratepayer satisfaction.

Region Statistics:

Westland

Usual resident population	8,304
Land area Km2	11,828
People per Km2	0.7
Median personal income	28,900

Greymouth

Usual resident population	13,371
Land Area Km2	3,475
People per Km2	3.8
Median personal income	26,600

Westport

Usual resident population	10,473
Land Area Km2	7,942
People per Km2	1.3
Median personal income	25,200



Total regional statistics:

Usual resident population	32,148
Land Area Km ²	23,245
People per Km ²	1.93
Median personal income	26,900

Total area of the Westland District (without Grey & Buller area) is 1.188.017 ha with rateable area 140.604 ha. Department of Conservation hold and manage large area of District – unrateable..this too is questionable and we wonder why some of DOC activity is not rateable?

Westland District Council:

Rateable properties	6,538
Number of bridges (not main highway)	269
Roading Km	673 (302 unsealed, 371 sealed)
Operating Revenue	\$ 17,769
Operating Expenditure	\$ 19,527

Greymouth District Council:

Rateable properties	8,652
Number of bridges (not main highway)	226
Roading KM	610 (260 unsealed, 350 sealed)
Operating Revenue	\$ 20,478
Operating Expenditure	\$ 23,997
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Buller District Council:

Rateable properties	7,540
Number of bridges (not main highway)	143
Roading Km	601 (283 unsealed, 318 sealed)
Operating Revenue	\$ 18,764
Operating Expenditure	\$ 23,397

Administration

Auditors have made comment year after year about the financial difficulties and need for stringent controls. The contracting of consultants, another cost to ratepayers, has not solved the problems nor the financial difficulties showing.

Westland and Greymouth District Council along with the West Coast Regional Council and the Department of Conservation have administration offices (4) & bodies within 40 kms of each other. The workloads in many aspects and policy are repeated.

Westland District Council each year is continually late with planning and Annual Financial Reports and even now the Audit Management Reports are not available for the year ended 30 June 2014 – we are already eleven months into another financial year. Rating anomalies are not yet sorted out, yet the rating means is showing huge variances and threat to ratepayers.

Reorganisation

In reorganising the West Coast Region into a more collaborative and efficient administration body, we as ratepayers would foresee better than the existing arrangement.

Good local governance of the region, one Mayor, one CEO, less Councillors but as representation from each District and for the benefit of each District. To, listen to the people, with monthly or two monthly reports from each community.

Most issues within each District on the West Coast are similar and could be better administrated by one team of highly skilled and efficient management, therefore reducing costs.

With high tech computerised systems, the rating information data base for the region along with rate demands for 23,000 rateable properties could be centrally administered by one office.

Two Councils already have extensive roading Companies i.e. Westroads and West Reef, which could be utilised more by Districts, with work on the West Coast, rather than them having to invest in business off the West Coast or having to seek work elsewhere. Hokitika Airport, Greymouth Wharf and Westport Port must be up kept and promoted to fullest capacity by a strong West Coast Council, ensuring quality directorship and efficient returns from Council Controlled organisations.

A united West Coast District Council, would make for solid regional promotion, rather than small and individual District Councils competing against each other.

Department of Conservation also needs to link closely with the Council and to so that West Coast region is spoken for with strength. Visitors and tourists to the area really could be asked to contribute more toward costs incurred i.e. perhaps tourism entry tax to NZ.

Buller, Grey & Westland Districts could each retain their own boundaries, infrastructure maintenance and renewal with emergency servicing bases, which would ensure also that jobs are maintained for that purpose. Core council function as priority. An option could be to ring fence each District's finances if that is more suitable to ratepayers.

We see that by reducing administration costs from each District, the infrastructure budget for each District could be increased and so that townships, smaller communities & rural areas gain their necessary infrastructure or service requirements. One District plan (for the region), with standardised policies suitable for the whole region, cutting back on triplicate time/cost in forming and revision, would sustain.

Overall a united system would bring the West Coast region together, working from a head office base, forming a stronger and more efficient governing body which in turn will give greater security to the ratepayer base needs. Communication and consultation with ratepayers needs to be paramount with prioritisation of workloads. The smaller rate base shows a must for stringency.

It is important that rates are sustained level that West Coast permanent residents can afford and that our local government District Council is one of efficiency – nothing less.

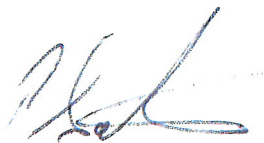
We would hope that Government could describe other suitable options for West Coast unified Council administration, so that ratepayers can be shown the advantages.

Brief Applicant information:

We have both had extensive interest in local community on the West Coast.

Anthea is long term West Coast resident. Past Administrator, of businesses & community organisations. A strong advocate for ratepayers. Stood for Westland District Council, Northern Ward, at last election. She was voted in with highest vote count, only to have to resign a year later, due to undesirable Council administration/environment, without leadership support.

Peter has been in business on the West Coast for 40 yrs, including 25 yrs tourism. Strong opponent of 1080 use. 2014 West Coast Tasman Candidate for 1080 Party rating third behind Labour and National with two thousand five hundred votes and ahead of the Green Party. During that time spoke to many people who supported a Unitary West Coast Council.



Peter Salter

23 /06/2015



Anthea Keenan

23 /6/2015

