

Buller and Westcoast local council governance

Proposed unitary authority for Buller and Westcoast

The land area administered by the Buller/Westcoast Councils covers an area from beyond the start of the Heaphy Track to the Haast Pass. Total travelling time by road of approximately 9 hours.

Those who think that a one council for the Buller/Westcoast will save money and enable an efficient team of staff and councillors to look after the important needs of the Buller and Westcoast people are sadly mistaken and have not done their homework.

A single council is a situation that will not work. There will still be the same amount of work for that of a single council to do as is currently done by the 4 councils.

A one council is more than likely to be centred at Greymouth creating job losses in Westport and Hokitika. These towns along with the other smaller communities in Buller and the Westcoast are seriously struggling with lack of jobs, let alone suitable jobs. One council will only intensify that.

A centre based on Greymouth equals loss of jobs to Hokitika and Westport, less councillors means a bigger area for each councillor to service meaning more councillor time which equals increased cost.

Current councillors are part time councillors; most have full time employment, so spend their personnel time on council business. Fewer councillors would mean more personal time on council business. Therefore it will be extremely difficult for these councillors to maintain this.

Many high calibre people may not be able to take on these larger time consuming roles or may take on these roles and not be able to put the extra work and time into them. The end result with one council is likely to result in a poorer quality leadership, work ethic and end results for the communities of Buller and the Westcoast.

My employment takes me to Queensland Australia where I work in the health service as a Radiographer. The health service area covers 22% of Queensland's land area. I supervise the x-ray staff at 8 x-ray sites scattered throughout this district.

Travelling is a considerable amount of the time spent by myself and other Allied Health staff in providing services throughout the health district. If the scattered sites were closed and all the work done at the base there would be no reduction in the full time equivalent staffing. The services would still need the current number of staff to maintain the provision of services.

There would be no benefit from one council for the Buller and Westcoast districts to be administered for their essential services from one point in a district, which has essential services over a distance of travel equivalent to that from Wellington to Auckland.

To provide an efficient and adequate local body service to the people of Buller and Westcoast we would still need the same number of staff and councillors.

One council centred on Greymouth would mean more travelling time for staff, overnight stays and extra vehicles, all added cost. Along with poor communication coverage throughout most of the Buller and Westcoast, the staff travelling would not be able to be readily contacted, leaving essential and important services without adequate cover.

The current 4 councils have agreed to some shared services and are working towards many more. Retaining the 3 districts councils and integrating the work of the regional council would be a far better and more efficient outcome for the Buller and Westcoast districts.

We would still need the same number of council staff as there would still be the same amount of work to do. Job losses would be to the detriment of providing efficiently the essential services.

The regional councillor's positions would need to be seriously looked at as without these the district councillors would be faced with a bigger workload, to the detriment that I have already outlined (paragraph 5).

Each district council would most likely need 2 extra councillors to uptake this increased work load.

There is no way that reducing the Buller and Westcoast councils to one council will bring any savings. The same amount of work will still be required to be done therefore the same amount of staff and councillors are needed.

The efficiencies are in shared services and common rules and regulations within the 3 district councils. Also these councils need to be resourced so that they can take on the added and different responsibilities of the Regional Council to create a single service point.

John Currie



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