



15 March 2017

Chief Executive Officer
Local Government Commission
PO Box 5362
Wellington 6140

By email: info@lgc.govt.nz

Dear Suzanne

Submission on Alternative Arrangements for the West Coast

We write in our capacity as the Mayors of the Buller, Grey and Westland District Councils and the Chair of the West Coast Regional Council, noting that this submission is also supported by the Chair of Development West Coast. As the West Coast Mayors and Chairs Forum we have a strong commitment to working together and cooperating on matters that benefit the West Coast and our economy as a whole.

We would like to thank the Local Government Commission for the opportunity to make this submission and for having extensive dialogue on the reorganisation review process to date. We submit the following for your consideration.

Our region

The West Coast has a number of unique characteristics which sets it apart from the rest of New Zealand.

The West Coast has a small population of 32,600, sparsely scattered over a long and narrow coastline. The length of the region, the same as the distance between Auckland to Wellington, requires careful consideration as to how to provide efficient and effective services and functions to the communities along this narrow strip. Some of our communities already have significant distance to travel to engage with our officers, and we work closely with them to ensure that they feel empowered and included within our local government services.

Of the 23,000 square kilometres or 2,300,000 hectares land area on the West Coast, the Department of Conservation manages 1,964,141 hectares, or approximately 84% of this. This land management has a significant impact on the ratepayer base for the region and the districts. As a result, we have long had to consider how to deliver a multitude of functions in a cost effective and value for money way. This in part, has contributed to a desire to approach shared services between the four Councils, which over the past years had led to a number of efficiencies and cost savings.

Our history

The West Coast has been stereotyped by a history of 'patch protection', considered as parochial and very much focused on individual district matters. While some of this may have occurred in the past, it is no longer the case. Together we are focused on creating a region that is successful, that has communities that are resilient with a diversified economy, supported through efficient local government service delivery.

In 2015 the four West Coast Councils signed a memorandum of understanding to *A Commitment to Regional Efficiency*. The MOU documented the range of collaborative approaches already in place amongst the four Councils and then the future intentions for further collaboration (a copy of the MOU is appended to this submission).

Our future – what do we want to achieve?

We are of the firm belief that a status quo model with enhanced shared services will provide the best format for the delivery of local government functions across the region. Better alignment between the Councils will

make working across the region more streamlined for business, and having more shared service options will provide for more regionally consistent service delivery.

The New Zealand Initiative has undertaken significant investigation into local government structures around the world. Amalgamating councils is not always the answer. The devolution of responsibility to local government has led to remarkable success in the Netherlands, Switzerland as well as the UK. As such, we believe that greater focus on shared services is a much more productive alternative to a Unitary Council.

There are several key projects that are seen to be crucial to a better delivery of services, and which we wish to progress development and implementation. These include:

- **A single district plan across the region**
Unifying the district plans across the West Coast brings many advantages to the region. Not only will it standardize the regulatory framework, creating a more seamless environment to undertake the consenting process within, but it provides further certainty to investors. More importantly the cost of undertaking this, and any potential appeal and court processes, will be minimized. It has also been recognised that there is a lack of resource in the policy space across the District Councils to undertake individual reviews. This process better utilizes staff capacity across the region and ensures we are able to have in place a fit for purpose district plan to cater to the needs of not only the individual districts, but the region as a whole.
- **Unified regulatory services**
There are opportunities to review the delivery of a number of regulatory functions between Councils. This includes consent processing, compliance monitoring and building consent work. Similar to the outcomes of the single district plan, this again provides opportunity to streamline processes, making it easier to work through the consenting process delivering savings in both time and money to investors, businesses and the community generally. Some of this is already occurring in the building area and with some RMA functions delegated to a neighbouring district or the regional council.
- **A shared pool of 'expertise'**
As small Councils it is inherently difficult to fund a number of services adequately on an individual basis. This expertise would add significantly to the capability and capacity of our Councils individually and collectively as these are functions that are generally only found in larger Councils and it is unlikely that as individual entities we would ever have the resources to perform these functions well. The current situation sees many of these functions 'tacked on' to existing roles, performed by those who have little time to undertake them to the level they need to be.

We believe that there is merit in the development of a shared pool of expertise, including but not limited to:

- Human resources (high level strategic advice)
- Risk management
- Health and safety
- Procurement and contracts
- Policy and strategy
- Quality assurance
- Business improvement
- Business development / funding (seeking external funding opportunities)
- Strategic communications
- Information management
- Iwi engagement
- Rates and accounting services

- **WC4 Collaborative Information Systems**
The four West Coast Councils have a strategy and roadmap for proposed information systems projects that will be worked on collaboratively. The aim is to provide a high level of service that meets business needs, while containing costs through a combination of collaborative purchasing and sharing of services and effort where practical. There have been a number of projects that have recently been completed, or are being rolled out in the coming weeks which further highlights how the Councils are already working a collaborative space. These projects include:

- The installation of high speed network connections between the Councils. This enables better communication / collaboration between the Councils and enhanced delivery of online services to the community.
- Based on this new network we are installing a shared phone system that will make it much easier for communication directly between staff from the different Councils. This will be delivered over the next few weeks.
- The next step is to enable a user to have a single logon that will enable access to the computer network at more than one Council. This has become important now we have positions that are shared between Councils and there is increasing interest in pooling of staff resources.
- A single Emergency Management web site has been created for the whole region and will be made public over the next few weeks.
- A regional web map portal has been created using the latest technologies as a joint project for the Buller District Council and West Coast Regional Council. The next step for this is to also display Grey and Westland District map information so it becomes a one-stop-shop.
- The three District Councils have worked together to roll out the Alpha-One system for Building Consents
- Aerial photography for the Buller and Grey Districts has been delivered and work has started on capturing images for Westland District.
- All four Councils have worked together on a 'Request for Information' for the supply of a document management system. A number of proposals have been received and we will now choose a preferred vendor and proceed to implementation.
- The new technologies are already being used for video conferencing considerably reducing the need to travel.

A roadmap of future projects in the IT space has already been developed which includes some key projects such as:

- The implementation of an electronic document management system so that document storage and handling can be much more consistent across Councils.
- The Councils are also working together to use the new network to improve the resiliency of our information systems and disaster recovery ability in the case of an event that affects our systems.

Our future – the pathway forward

We believe that to be successful as a region we need to be present in our communities. The issues that each part of the region faces are diverse and require close consultation and engagement with the community.

As outlined above, and in the appended MOU, the region is already committed to identifying how we can do things together to provide for more efficient and effective local government service delivery. Key to the success of such initiatives relies significantly on the governance that surrounds it. We propose that the Mayors and Chairs forum is the vehicle that can champion and drive forward the collaboration progress between the Councils. We are committed to building on the strong foundation that has been established to date.

We propose the following pathway forward:

- Review and update the memorandum of understanding: A Commitment to Regional Efficiency. Note that this is currently underway following local government elections. This would include ensuring there is a clear purpose and agreed outcomes put in place.
- Have the memorandum endorsed and supported by each of our individual Councils.
- Every year review and undertake a stock take of initiatives that can be put forward for investigation, development and implementation based on its potential to provide increased service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness to the West Coast communities. This may be undertaken in conjunction with Local Government assistance.
- Agree on checks and balances – how we would ensure that initiatives are progressed and that they do not remain as good ideas on a shelf.
- Implement a reporting back mechanism which outlines progress, as well as the successes and failures. This would be shared with our Councils and our communities. Shared services and other collaborations must deliver tangible benefits by way of either improved levels of service, or reduced costs. The

overriding priority is that the benefits should outweigh the costs and the end result must be an improved service/facility for the region's residents.

We would also note the amendments to the Local Government Act, and the inclusion of Section 17A requiring Councils to consider their services and determine the best way to deliver these. This is an activity that Councils throughout New Zealand are undertaking, not just those on the West Coast. We would also note that we support the intent of Section 17A reviews as while it may be a legislative requirement, it is simply good practice

The Section 17A review is another mechanism by which we can identify potential areas for collaboration and other shared services. We consider that many of these have already been identified in what we want to achieve in the future above.

What will success look like?

As we look to our future it is important we consider what success will look like, particularly for our communities. We desire a region where our communities are economically and socially better off, well represented and served. The West Coast will be a region where investors and industry find it straightforward to engage and interact with Councils, with services that are delivered to a high and consistent standard across the region. We are confident that this can be achieved through the approach we have identified.

In summary

In summary we submit that:

- A status quo model with enhanced shared services, an approach that we are already progressing, will provide the best format for the delivery of local government functions across the region.
- To be successful as a region we need to be present in our communities.
- Initiatives to progress collaboration and shared services for the future will rely significantly on the governance of the Mayors and Chairs forum to champion this.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and look forward to hearing both the views of our communities and further discussions with yourself.

Yours sincerely



Garry Howard
Mayor, Buller District Council



Tony Kokshoorn
Mayor, Grey District Council



Andrew Robb
Chair, West Coast Regional Council



Bruce Smith
Mayor, Westland District Council



John Sturgeon
Chair, Development West Coast