

# HAWKE'S BAY TOGETHER

Local government reform that works for our region



**Marcus Buddo**

A generational opportunity to build a  
prosperous, united region

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Change is needed now, the status quo is not sustainable .....	6
What we are trying to achieve: .....	9
The impact of economies of scale:.....	9
Possible Ward System & Council Map .....	10
Overview .....	11
Explanation of the new system: .....	11
Mayor .....	13
Councillors.....	14
Wards.....	15
Community Boards: .....	16
Separate Rating Areas: .....	17
Appendix .....	18
Table of local governance numbers.....	18
Māori Wards .....	18
Elected Member Remuneration .....	18
Proposed ward population table (2023):.....	19
Under/over representation by current council boundaries at different councillor numbers: .....	19
Current and historic over/under-representation in the Hastings-Havelock Ward: .....	19
Table of payments for senior positions in Hawke's Bay local government:.....	20
Rates increases & Hawke's Bay debt tables.....	21
Bibliography.....	22

**This is a living document designed to be updated through community feedback. Please email [marcusbuddo@gmail.com](mailto:marcusbuddo@gmail.com) to give feedback, suggestions or improvements.**

### *About the Author*

*The author is Marcus Buddo. Buddo has a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in Economics and Political Science & International Relations, as well as a Bachelor of Health Sciences. He is a certified RMA Commissioner and chair of the Hawke's Bay Rural Advisory Group. He was elected councillor at Hastings District Council from 2022-25, chairing the District Development Committee. He was elected to the Rural Community Board of the Hastings District Council from 2019-22.*

# Executive Summary

For the first time since 1989, New Zealand faces a generational opportunity to restructure local government. The case is clear in Hawke's Bay. The region's current situation is financially unsustainable and organisationally fragmented. A population of just 180,000 is currently governed by five separate councils run by and five distinct executive leadership teams. We elect 60 people, leading to a very low 3000 people per elected official.

The effects of the five-council model on local ratepayers are clear:

- **Rates Increases:** Driven by duplication and the fallout of Cyclone Gabrielle, rates have risen by a regional average of 42% between 2022 and 2025, outpacing inflation.
- **Debt Burden:** Total regional debt reached \$730 million by December 2025 and is projected to surpass \$1 billion by 2030.
- **Regulatory Friction:** Businesses and residents face conflicting local regulations and plans, from three separate Future Development Strategies instead of one, to mismatched liquor licensing hours and fragmented ownership of roadside drainage.

To establish a simple, cost-effective, accountable, and unified framework, this proposal argues for the amalgamation of the Napier City Council, Hastings District Council, Central Hawke's Bay District Council, and Hawke's Bay Regional Council. Due to geographical isolation, distinct catchments, lower impact of efficiencies of scale and separate job markets, the Wairoa District will be excluded from this merger.

The new council will feature a streamlined and competent governance structure including:

- **A single regional leader:** One mayor elected via a Single Transferable Vote (STV), ensuring a clear public mandate and incentivising candidates to campaign across all urban and rural communities.
- **Streamlined governance:** A reduction down to 10 councillors in single-member wards. Elevating these positions to full-time roles properly compensated will attract highly qualified candidates and ensure direct accountability to constituents. A governance budget via an Office of the Mayor will separate bureaucracy and politics, improving decision-making and advocacy by elected members.
- **Ensuring local representation:** Geographically isolated areas will be supported by Community Boards to maintain local voice. Separate Rating Areas will allow ringfencing of existing debt and rating obligations.

The plan benefits ratepayers through lower rates and better efficiencies, improving accountability of politicians, and reduces the complexity of dealing with five separate councils. It achieves this by eliminating duplicate administrations, harmonising district plans, aligning river catchment systems, and allowing Hawke's Bay to speak with a single voice to central government.

This is our region's opportunity to choose prosperity together. It is time that Hawke's Bay came together as the powerhouse it is and faced the future united and together.

# Introduction

For the first time since 1989 local government reform is formally being discussed. For the first time in nearly 40 years, we as a country have an opportunity to create a better system. Nowhere is the case for reform more obvious than Hawke's Bay, with 180,000 people governed by five councils, 60 elected members, including 52 councillors, four community board members and four mayors<sup>1</sup>.

The clearest cases for amalgamation are the Napier and Hastings councils that share the Heretaunga Plains and govern most of the Hawke's Bay population and economy. Central Hawke's Bay is close by, culturally similar, and shares a job market and catchments with Napier/Hastings. It has a clear case to be included in an amalgamation.

Wairoa is different. It is geographically distant, culturally different and does not share a job market with the rest of Hawke's Bay. The only shared catchment is the lower Mohaka River. Wairoa should be free to choose between political independence, shared services with Gisborne or Hawke's Bay or amalgamation.

We are currently over governed with about 3000 people per elected member across the region. This makes coordination and ensuring a high level of competence challenging. The current salary structure does not provide a full-time income, reducing the pool of candidates and exacerbating information imbalances with staff.

Reorganisation is an opportunity to achieve great things for HB such as lower rates, greater efficiencies, better advocacy, reducing friction when doing business and simplifying the experience of local government by the public.

It would also reduce the number of councillors and mayors. The benefit of this is making coordination easier, full-time councillors who are better able to be active in their communities and represent them, and more competent candidates attracted to the role. It would also even the playing field between full-time staff and councillors who are currently only part-time.

A new council of 10 councillors and one mayor for the region is ideal. This would ensure well paid, competent elected members, who are full time and able to properly represent their constituents. A single mayor should act as leader for the region, giving that person a clear mandate from the public. The mayor should be elected through a proportional system (single-transferable-vote<sup>2</sup>) to ensure a mayor cannot win by simply focussing their electioneering on only the urban areas. The elected members should have a separate budget for advice and staff though an Office of the Mayor like in Auckland, to give governance independence from the bureaucracy of council<sup>3</sup>.

To ensure effective representation across the wider Hawkes Bay, Community boards should be established where there are very geographically separated communities such as Central Hawke's Bay, and rural areas surrounding Napier and Hastings. The coast and horticultural areas could also be considered. These part-time elected positions would work with their councillor to ensure appropriate representation for these smaller, sparser populations where

---

<sup>1</sup> See appendix.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stv.govt.nz/index.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> <https://governance.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/4-roles-responsibilities-and-relationships/the-mayor-of-auckland/office-of-the-mayor>

travel time is a barrier to meeting with constituents, or where a clear community of interest exists.

Finally, separate rating areas should be considered to 'ring-fence' existing debt and infrastructure obligations. This 'ring-fencing' currently exists within the Hastings District Council and has shown the policy to be very simple, effective and robust across many decades.

This structure will ensure effective representation, simple and long-lasting council structures, and most importantly, leadership that continues to be accountable to the community.

It is the change that will allow our region to keep costs down, coordinate work, reduce duplication, make local government easier for the public to understand and very importantly, to speak with one voice and truly represent Hawkes Bay in Wellington.

# Change is needed now, the status quo is not sustainable

Local government has clear issues. The sector has been advocating for reform<sup>4</sup>, ratepayers see their rates climb faster than the rate of inflation<sup>5</sup>, central government deals with council disfunction across the country<sup>6</sup>. The status quo is clearly not sustainable or working, and significant change to the sector is urgently needed.

The Auckland amalgamation has saved ratepayers \$2.2billion in the 10 years from 2010-2020 as a comparison<sup>7</sup>, and average residential rates in Auckland are \$848 less than in Hastings<sup>8</sup>.

## *Rates and Debt*

Our debt as a region has reached \$730m as of December 2025<sup>9</sup> and is projected to increase to well over \$1b by 2030. Across Hawke's Bay there are 70,632 households<sup>10</sup>, therefore this debt equates to \$10,335.00 per household. Rates have increased by an average of 42% from 2022-2025<sup>11</sup>, well over inflation and putting huge pressure on households.

The current system seems incapable of delivering the effective cost cutting and efficiencies that local politicians have campaigned on. Households and ratepayers are suffering as a result.

## *Amalgamation is happening already*

The amalgamation of council water departments through Local Waters Done Well is explicitly happening because of Central Government involvement. Councils could not deliver high-quality services or enough efficiencies on their own<sup>12</sup> so the government had to step in. This was started with the Labour led Government and completed with the National led Government

This forced water amalgamation has reduced accountability to the ratepayer as they are now represented by unelected directors. Amalgamation would address this drawback, as there would be one elected council holding its water entity to account, rather than three.

## *Working together as a region*

As a region, our politicians seem chronically incapable of working constructively together. The Future Development Strategy (2025-2055) was meant to be a single plan for the next 30 years of development across the Heretaunga Plains. It was designed and implemented by Hastings,

---

<sup>4</sup> Most directly via the Future for Local Government Review: <https://www.dia.govt.nz/Future-for-Local-Government-Review> & <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/521409/government-rejects-future-for-local-government-review-recommendations>

<sup>5</sup> See appendix.

<sup>6</sup> Tauranga & Gore are famous examples: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/local-government/123605113/tauranga-city-council-to-be-replaced-by-commissioner> & <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/567021/scandal-division-and-rumours-gore-district-council-s-tumultuous-term>

<sup>7</sup> <https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2020/11/2-billion-value-of-savings-over-10-years/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/auckland-council-2026/> & [https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/hastings-district-council-2026/?profile\\_year=2026&profile\\_tab=demographics-rates](https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/hastings-district-council-2026/?profile_year=2026&profile_tab=demographics-rates)

<sup>9</sup> See appendix for table.

<sup>10</sup> [https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/hawkes-bay-regional-council-2026/?profile\\_year=2026&profile\\_tab=demographics-rates](https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/hawkes-bay-regional-council-2026/?profile_year=2026&profile_tab=demographics-rates)

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/rates\\_dashboard\\_2025](https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/rates_dashboard_2025)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.hbwater.nz/what-is-local-water-done-well/>

Napier and Regional councils together. Incredibly instead of a single plan, the region now has three different documents, one for each council<sup>13</sup>.

Regional coordination within the region has been hugely challenging. The Matariki (Regional) Governance Group was specifically created to address this problem, and yet there was no real improvement in coordination.

Matariki (Regional) Governance Group tried to bring together the five leaders of our councils, their chief executives, alongside iwi and hapu groups<sup>14</sup> and other significant regional entities as required. The public is largely unaware of this group, and it exists outside of normal public oversight or scrutiny. This is a concern, but it has been unable to make any impactful decisions and so there is nothing to scrutinise<sup>15</sup>. If the best attempt of the current system to organise has been such a failure, it is hard to see what else could be done within the current system to make coordination work. Amalgamation is the only real answer.

### *Rules, regulations and zoning*

Anyone trying to build, invest or do business in our region will recognise that each council has its own rules and regulations and interpretations. These differences cost business time, money and energy to navigate.

Take alcohol rules; in Napier bars close at 3am, in Hastings at 2am<sup>16</sup>. There are many different zones across the councils, each with different rules and limits, as well as the different district plans that set out standards landowners need to comply with<sup>17</sup>. When the additional layer and different responsibilities of regional council are added the result is a very confusing and frustrating mire of bureaucracy.

Most roadside drains are owned by the local district council, but some are owned by regional council. Who does the local resident phone? When they go to one council they are told to go to the other, yet at the other council they get sent back to the first council. Same ratepayer, paying rates to two different organisations yet the councils still argue about who is responsible. The confusion is a handbrake on effective and efficient local government, slows down economy, confuses the local ratepayers and prevents positive action across our region.

A simplified system would be more efficient from a ratepayer's perspective.

### *Resource Management Act*

Finally, the changes coming to the Resource Management Act will require some reordering of how local government works. This must happen no matter whether amalgamations occur<sup>18</sup>. It is partially this realisation that has pushed the Government to encourage, and if needed force, councils to reorganise.

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/housing-strategy-for-napier-and-hastings-finalised-after-more-than-two-years/7K5AX6235VBZXBBGXPV33SRAY/> & [www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Document-Library/Strategies/Hastings-and-Napier-Future-Development-Strategy/Future-Development-Strategy.pdf](http://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Document-Library/Strategies/Hastings-and-Napier-Future-Development-Strategy/Future-Development-Strategy.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hbrc.govt.nz/hawkes-bay/economic-development/matariki-hbreds/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://baybuzz.co.nz/who-really-runs-hawkes-bay/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/10/06/hastings-bars-forced-to-close-an-hour-earlier-than-napier/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/12/09/govt-reveals-big-consenting-reforms-once-in-a-generation-shift/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-system-make-planning-easier-everyone>

As both major political parties have pursued changes to the RMA, we are assured that council structures will have to change.

*The status quo is not working*

It is too complicated, has significant duplication (x5 councils), is unaccountable and clearly inefficient. Defending the current situation would doom our region to more years of high rates rises and mediocre improvement. When this is coupled with the changes to the RMA, it is clear that local government look very different in the near future.

*The questions we must answer*

- What is the best solution and the best structure?
- What would provide the greatest benefits and reduced costs?

## What we are trying to achieve:

Our goal is the creation of a local government system that is representative, preserves local decision making, allows Hawke's Bay to speak with one voice, while providing a cost effective and simple to navigate framework for ratepayers. All decisions about change should be aimed at achieving this goal.

The primary mechanism for rates reductions will be by removing duplicated services (x5 councils) and creating a more efficient system.

Reducing the multiple regulations (x5 councils) that create barriers to people wanting to invest, build and do business in our region is also achievable.

## The impact of economies of scale:

We currently have five councils. We have five different plans, five sets of zones, five different ownerships for overlapping infrastructure. Reducing the friction to business and people that work and invest across these entities cannot be underestimated in unlocking the economic potential of our region. It also fosters greater capability in delivering council services and infrastructure across the region, where there is currently considerable difference in council delivery capability.

Five councils mean five leadership teams made up of five chief executives and five sets of senior staff, most of whom fulfil very similar functions at each of the councils.

The current cost of the five upper managements is calculated to be between \$20 million and \$31 million per year across 67 individuals<sup>19</sup>.

Quite clearly, there would need to be a reduction in the number of executives in an amalgamation of councils. Reducing to one CEO and leadership team will achieve significant savings. Staff savings would extend further than just senior management. Evidence from previous amalgamations and company mergers suggest that reduced headcount and salary optimisation is an efficiency driver<sup>20</sup>. Some evidence suggests that companies who merged employ in total 30% less people five years after a merger. Hawke's Bay councils spent \$434million on people costs in 2024<sup>21</sup>, providing ample room for savings. A larger entity should also be more competitive in securing good pricing, and in generating more efficiencies overall.

The real-world example of Auckland has been a partial success. The merger certainly simplified the public's experience of council, and having one mayor has been extremely successful in improving advocacy to central Government in Wellington and has brought benefits across the city. Auckland Council calculates the benefit of amalgamation to ratepayers to have been \$2b since 2010.

The following sections detail what a successful amalgamation could be for our region.

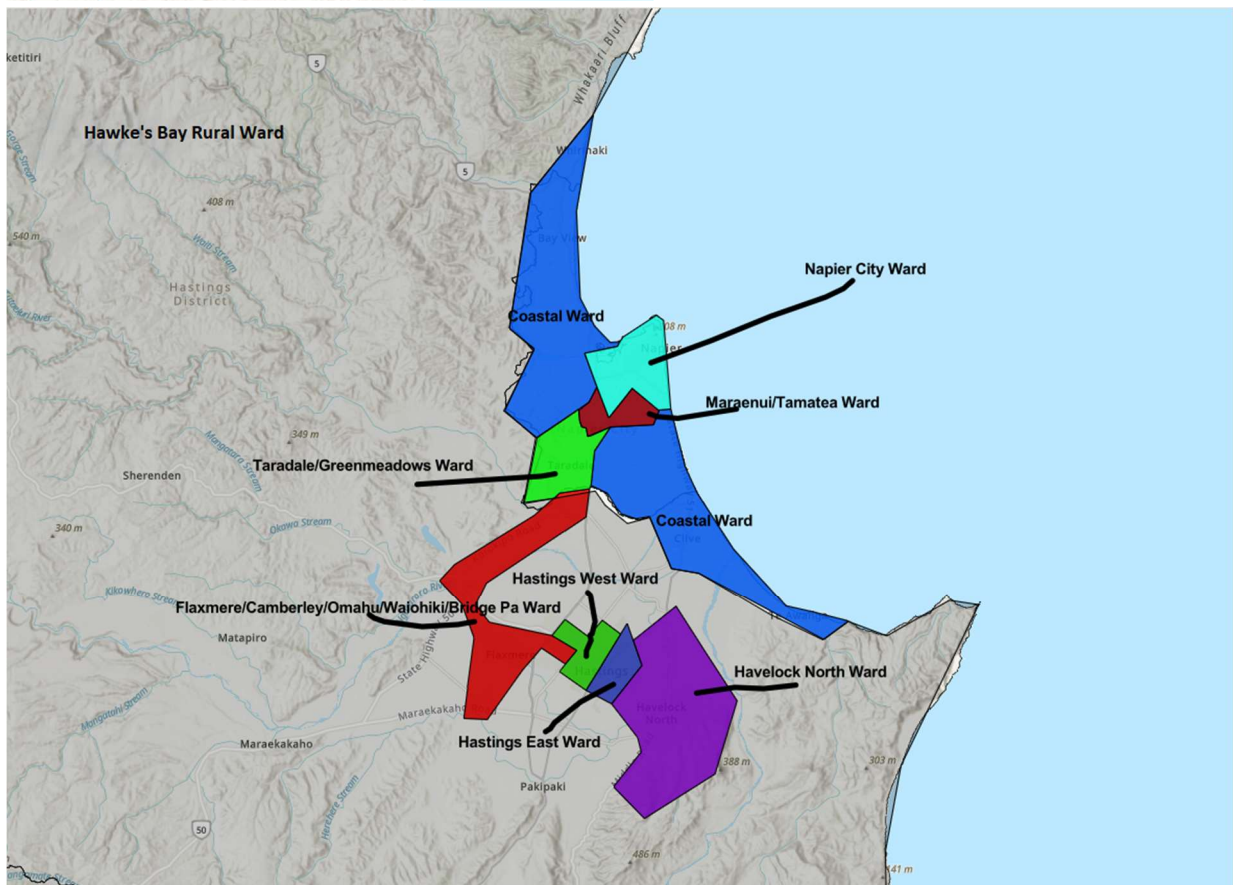
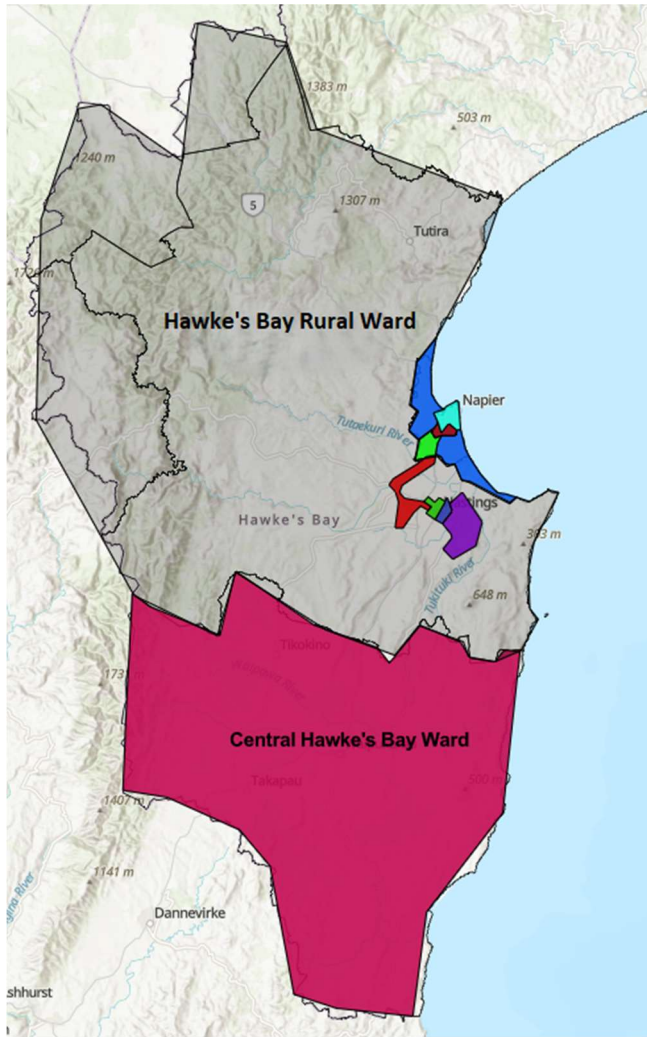
---

<sup>19</sup> Please see appendix. This is calculated via the salary bands in the Annual reports. It is difficult to separate out the senior leadership teams and so high-paid salary bands are used as proxy.

<sup>20</sup> <https://mnacommunity.com/insights/cost-synergies-ma/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://baybuzz.co.nz/staffing-costs-at-hb-councils/>

# Possible Ward System & Council Map



## Overview

- Wairoa as a separate council
- Central Hawke's Bay, Hastings, Napier and Hawke's Bay Regional Council amalgamated
- 10 councillors and one mayor
- Single councillor wards
- Single Transferable Vote election system for mayor
- A new, discontinuous coastal ward with one councillor from Clifton to Whirinaki
- Community Boards in Central Hawke's Bay, Hastings Rural and Coastal Wards

## Explanation of the new system:

### 1. *Hastings & Napier*

The amalgamation that makes most sense from both a coordination and fiscal perspective is Napier City Council and Hastings District Council. The majority of their population and economy is on the Heretaunga Plains, they share a job market with a huge number of commuters, and they share large river catchments that need to be managed to ensure the safety of their populations. In short, they share most of the same challenges and are very close to each other. Together they represent over 80% of Hawke's Bay's population, and clearly the majority of the benefit to any form of Hawke's Bay amalgamation would come from these two councils merging.

### *Central Hawke's Bay*

Central Hawke's Bay covers a large area and has a much smaller population than the two councils on the Heretaunga Plains. The population centres of Waipukurau, Waipawa and Otane are located less than an hour from the Heretaunga Plains. This means that the job market is very closely tied to that of the Heretaunga Plains with many commuters. In addition, CHB shares a river catchment with the Hastings District (Tukituki River), the same Post-Settlement-Governance-Group (PSGE)<sup>22</sup>, and many of the same challenges and opportunities as large parts of Hastings District.

The cultural similarities, job market links, shared catchment and shared challenges and opportunities mean that amalgamation with the councils of the Heretaunga Plains makes sense for Central Hawkes Bay. Hastings District Council already has a strong shared services agreement with Central Hawkes Bay Council including information technology<sup>23</sup>. An improvement in economies of scale should help CHB with costs and efficiency. Additionally, the population of CHB is about 15,500, which guarantees one councillor in a council of 10 councillors. CHB's population means that the area would suffer underrepresentation in every other council size up to almost 20 councillors<sup>24</sup>.

---

<sup>22</sup> A PSGE is an entity that administers assets from a Waitangi Settlement  
<https://mccawlewis.co.nz/publications/post-settlement-governance-entity/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://baybuzz.co.nz/shared-it-to-save-councils-6m/>

<sup>24</sup> See appendix for a table, but in short CHB is 10% over-represented in a 10-person council which means it has more councillors than the population deserves. In a 16-person council, CHB would be 50% under-represented.

## *Wairoa*

Wairoa is in a different position. While the Wairoa district is traditionally located within the Hawke's Bay region, it is distant from the population centres of the Heretaunga Plains (1.5hrs to Napier), does not share a job market with the rest of Hawke's Bay, shares very little catchment area, has its own PSGE<sup>25</sup> and may be more aligned with Gisborne District in the challenges it faces such as forestry and Civil Defence. The small population of 8800, makes it difficult to provide proportional representation within the wider district. Only at a council size of around 20 councillors would Wairoa be entitled to one councillor for their population.

The challenges of Hawke's Bay Regional Council managing the Wairoa bar has highlighted the feeling of many residents in Wairoa, reinforcing that a 'distant' council based in Napier is not adequate to ensure local decision making<sup>26</sup>. The distance may also undermine the economies of scale benefit that a large, amalgamated council would usually provide, as many functions would still need to be in Wairoa.

## *Flood protection & river management*

Overlaid through the amalgamation decisions outlined above is the issue of river management and flood protection. The devastation of Cyclone Gabrielle showed the vulnerability of the Heretaunga Plains population to flooding from the big river systems of the Tukituki, Ngaruroro and Tutaekuri<sup>27</sup>. Wairoa has been flooded by the Wairoa River and the Nuhaka River<sup>28</sup>.

Management of rivers needs to be holistic, with upper-catchment management as necessary as flood protection in the lower reaches. It makes sense for a single council to do the necessary planning and work to integrate catchment management from headwaters to ocean.

This makes the case clearer for Napier, Hastings and Central Hawke's Bay to amalgamate, ensuring that the three catchments that impact the Heretaunga Plains most are managed appropriately. Wairoa has its own catchments of Nuhaka and Wairoa Rivers to manage, and these do not intersect with other districts' catchments. The Mohaka River does cross from Hastings District into Wairoa District, but this river is less important in flood protection terms than the other catchments and can continue to be managed in a shared way.

Places like Invercargill share concerns around catchment management between unitary councils. The mayor of Invercargill has recently said that his council cannot accept a two-council model because it would separate the Oreti catchment from the city<sup>29</sup>. This is a reason why Napier and Hastings should amalgamate. Any amalgamation proposal that separates the two cities will inevitably separate the management of the Tutaekuri catchment, while the Ngaruroro would be managed by Hastings but shares a mouth with the Tutaekuri and may impact on Napier's flood protection.

---

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ttotw.iwi.nz/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/527976/wairoa-mayor-iwi-leaders-reject-regional-council-reviews-into-town-flooding>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.hbrc.govt.nz/our-council/cyclone-gabrielle-response/cyclone-gabrielle-flooding/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/video-twice-in-one-year-is-unbelievable-as-homes-flooded-in-northern-hawkes-bay/FLGQM3GNEBHCBQZFK5LK6RPY/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://whatsoninvers.nz/mayors-clash-over-oreti-river-management/>

## Mayor:

### *Why one mayor*

One of the benefits of an amalgamated Hawke's Bay is the region speaking with one voice and with one agenda on important issues and in negotiations with Central Government. A single, region-wide elected mayor is the most valuable way to ensure this benefit is achieved. It is clear that a publicly elected mayor has a mandate and the authority to ensure a council and region work together in a particular direction, while also being more accountable to the electorate.

A council elected chairperson (as in Hawkes Bay Regional Council) is not recommended. A mayor elected by popular vote has a greater direct mandate from the public than a chairperson. Accountability for direct-elected mayors is to the public, while for chairpersons the accountability is first to their councillors, and then the public.

### *Why STV/proportional voting*

The purpose of the mayor is to speak and lead for the whole region. It would be expected therefore that mayoral candidates should campaign in the whole region. However, there is a risk that with a First-Past-the-Post election system, that a candidate could win by focusing on one particular city or large urban area. A mayor who won by focusing on one urban area could then also be incentivised to govern for that one area. A mayoral candidate could win by getting a large majority of votes in Napier/Taradale, while a number of candidates split the vote in the rest of the region.

To ensure that candidates are incentivised to campaign for every vote in all parts of the region, a Single-Transferable-Vote system should be used. This is a system where the voters rank their preferred candidates, and when their first preference candidate is eliminated, their vote flows on to their next preference. The District Health Board Elections in Hawke's Bay ran this system. This system is used in 15 council elections across the country<sup>30</sup> and is broadly used in Australia for national elections. It ensures that every vote counts, and no candidate can win by only appealing to a small plurality of voters<sup>31</sup>.

### *Office of the mayor*

Governance, including the mayor, exist almost entirely within an information environment determined and provided by council staff. Mayor and councillors rely on council staff for advice, communication and recommendations for decision making.

An issue with the current system of local government is therefore the power imbalance between governance and staff. This has led to very poor outcomes in councils such as Wellington City<sup>32</sup>.

Auckland Council gives a solution to this problem by establishing an Office of the Mayor. Funding is made available for the mayor/governance to employ advisers, experts and communications people to give advice independent of the council bureaucracy. This budget is set at a minimum of 0.2% of council operating expenditure<sup>33</sup>. A more independent governance

---

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.1news.co.nz/2022/06/07/15-councils-using-voting-system-which-ranks-candidates/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.stv.govt.nz/how.shtml>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-addresses-wellington-water-concerns> & <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-listener/new-zealand/out-of-control-how-to-absolutely-positively-kill-a-well-resourced-capital-city/premium/PTPU5TVNFBEC3PHCVOGIP4UEPU/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://governance.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/4-roles-responsibilities-and-relationships/the-mayor-of-auckland/office-of-the-mayor>

has the benefit of allowing politicians to better advocate for their constituents, such as the Mayor of Auckland confronting Auckland Transport<sup>34</sup> with clear independent advice and ensures that decisions are shaped by broader information than solely on what council staff can be expected to provide.

## Councillors:

### *Why reduction of councillors*

Currently there are 56 elected councillors and mayors across Hawke's Bay, serving a population of 180,000. They are paid a total of \$4,231,434.00 and are nearly all part time<sup>35</sup>. It has been said Hawkes Bay is over governed, costing money and potentially exacerbating the power imbalance between full-time staff and part-time councillors. Further, the comparatively low wage councillors earn means that most candidates reduce their incomes significantly in order to be a councillor and many have to work a second job to makes ends meet. A potential candidate who requires a fulltime salary simply cannot afford to stand for election in Hawke's Bay. This significantly reduces the number of highly competent candidates that can put themselves forward for election.

A reduction in councillor numbers down to 10 for an amalgamated Napier, Hastings and Central Hawke's Bay gives a sensible and logical ward structure, effective representation with one councillor per 16,600 people and a well-paid, full-time governance team that can challenge staff and appropriately represent their constituents. In addition, there is a significant savings.

### *What are the savings from governance*

Currently, Hastings, Napier, Hawke's Bay Regional Council and Central Hawke's Bay spend about \$3.5m on governance (excluding Wairoa). If the 49 councillors and mayors across this group was reduced to 10 full-time councillors and a mayor, the councillors could receive \$120,000 and the mayor \$220,000. These are generous, full-time salaries, and would still save the region \$2m/year<sup>36</sup>.

These salaries are to govern an entity with assets worth \$6.960 billion<sup>37</sup>, and income of over \$300m in rates per year. Our region deserves skilled, experienced quality councillors to manage the business of council.

---

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/572183/auckland-transport-to-be-stripped-of-most-powers>

<sup>35</sup> See appendix

<sup>36</sup> Discussed in appendix

<sup>37</sup> <https://figure.nz/chart/mRwW0f0oXZkMorNI-711OkClfNI08crqi> & <https://figure.nz/chart/mRwW0f0oXZkMorNI-CbX48YWdIA2QBOla> & <https://figure.nz/chart/mRwW0f0oXZkMorNI-EJnKKcdEiQ4kylid>

## Wards:

### *Why single wards*

Single councillor wards improve accountability and responsiveness of elected members to their constituents<sup>38</sup>. Christchurch is an example of single-councillor wards in practice, with 16 wards for 16 councillors<sup>39</sup>. In multi-councillor wards, such as the 7-seat Hastings-Havelock Ward, there is a lack of clear responsibility for problems, as councillors can assume that someone else is dealing with an issue. Constituents also do not know who to approach, and when they approach several councillors, there are issues with staff having to answer the same question numerous times. In a single councillor ward, constituents know exactly who to talk to about a problem, and who to hold accountable if that problem is not fixed. This has worked extremely effectively in single councillor wards across Hastings District

When multi-councillor wards cover areas that of different voter participation, you can also get the situation where one particular area elects most of the councillors for the ward. A good example is the Hastings-Havelock Ward, where currently at least 4 of the 7 councillors are living in Havelock, almost 60%, despite Havelock only representing about 23% of the ward's population<sup>40</sup>.

At election time as well, it is difficult for voters to distinguish between the huge number of candidates in contested election years like 2025, when 19 people ran for 7 seats in the Hastings-Havelock Ward<sup>41</sup>.

Overall, multi-councillor wards reduce can responsibility for problems and decrease accountability to the public at election time.

One final benefit for single councillor wards is it would increase the incentives for different ward councillors to work together across the cities, rather than creating teams via multi-councillor wards that represent the old council boundary lines.

### *Why CHB ward*

Central Hawke's Bay, while similar to Hastings and Napier, does have unique challenges and constituencies. The towns of Waipukurau, Waipawa and Otane are much smaller and less urban than Hastings and Napier. The rural area shares many of the same challenges as the rural area of Hastings, but the rural population is quite small.

Continuing with a Central Hawke's Bay Ward is a way of ensuring the unique challenges of the area are catered to and represented. Making this ward match the current boundaries of the CHB Council also makes implementing a separate rating area and community board seamless.

Clearly, such a large area would be very difficult for a single councillor to travel around for constituents, and so a community board is necessary.

### *Why Hawkes Bay rural ward*

A Hawkes Bay Rural Ward is needed to ensure that the distinct rural community of the Region has a voice in governance. The rural community has a very different set of interests to the urban

---

<sup>38</sup> <https://seanoreilly.com.au/2024/10/02/single-member-vs-multi-member-councillor-wards/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://ccc.govt.nz/the-council/how-the-council-works/elected-members/representation>

<sup>40</sup> See appendix for table of over-representation

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/hawkes-bay-local-government-elections-2025-114-candidates-and-fierce-competition-ahead/IFCMAFX5CNATFBIXHJW5BA6E5I/>

area, and this would easily be lost if merged with urban areas. This ward could continue to have a separate rating area and community board like CHB, to ensure small, distant communities are still heard.

#### *Why coastal ward*

This is a new ward spanning the unique coastal areas of Whirinaki, Bay View, Westshore, Awatoto, Clive, Haumoana and Te Awanga. This ward represents communities that face uniquely similar challenges especially coastal erosion. Other areas of Hawke's Bay do not have this issue. These communities require separate representation as they have very different issues and opportunities, to urban and other rural communities. This is clearly shown through the Coastal Hazard Strategy<sup>42</sup> and the establishment of Cape Coast Community Group<sup>43</sup>. A community board would be helpful to bring these geographically split communities together to focus on their shared problems.

#### *Why a 'Flaxmere to Waiohiki' ward & why a 'Maraenui and Tamatea' ward*

The expanded Ward of Flaxmere, Omahu, Waiohiki, Bridge Pa and Camberly brings together a constituency that is likely to be underrepresented if not split out from other wards. These communities share many links, problems and demographics that other urban areas do not face. It is similar to the ward centred on Maraenui & Tamatea. To win election in these wards, candidates would have to cater to Māori interests and would ensure Māori representation. This is important since the region voted to disband Māori Wards.

The actual name of this ward is a decision to come from those that live within the area, but the geographic spread has led to the "Flaxmere to Waiohiki" working title. The same is applied to the "Maraenui to Tamatea" proposed ward.

The recent referenda on Māori Wards must be respected, see appendix.

### **Community Boards:**

Community Boards can improve representation for smaller, distinct communities that would otherwise not see much of their councillor. The current Hastings District rural councillor wards are so large that it can take 2.5hrs to drive from one end of the ward to the other. This creates a challenge for a councillor to visit different areas in the ward consistently and be present for community events. Having community board members elected in these distant areas gives smaller communities a voice and gives the councillor a team with which to better represent their ward's interests.

Further, a community board can govern a separate rating area and have significant input into rates, roading and costs. These community board members live within and know their community.

Clearly, these concerns apply most directly to the Hastings Rural Ward and the Central Hawke's Bay Ward. Both these wards cover huge areas with scattered, small populations. The other ward that is similar is the Coastal Ward, which has geographically spread and distinct communities. There is also the possibility of a separate rating area for this ward to address some of the concerns of that community around coastal erosion etc.

---

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.hbrc.govt.nz/environment/coast/coastal-hazards/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.capecoastcommunity.nz/>

Urban wards do not have the issue of tyranny of distance. In these wards the population is very close together and shares most issues. A single councillor should be able to deal with the concerns of their wards without help from community board members.

### Separate Rating Areas:

One of the concerns that turned public opinion against amalgamation during the referendum in 2016 was the issue of different levels of debt and rates between areas<sup>44</sup>. This can be solved through different Rating Areas.

Hastings District has two rating areas (RA), RA1 covers urban Hastings, Havelock and Flaxmere, while RA2 covers rural areas<sup>45</sup>. Each rating area pays for its own services, capital and maintenance, with very limited cross-subsidisation (Cyclone Gabrielle rebuild is the exception). Essentially, it means that rural ratepayers do not pay for urban services for example, rubbish collection, and vice versa. This structure could be applied to Hastings, Napier and Central Hawke's Bay to smooth the transition to a new council structure and ensure that debt is not cross subsidised by ratepayers of different areas. It can also be used as a tool to manage costs where significant investment is needed only in one area or only one local area receives the benefits of investment

The rating area innovation emerged from amalgamations of Hawke's Bay councils in 1989 and has worked very successfully in Hastings over the last decades.

---

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/big-no-in-amalgamation-referendum/VNC4GBPEJHXCVLK6BQAPBIAKDM/>

<sup>45</sup> [www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Differential-Rating-Area.pdf](http://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Differential-Rating-Area.pdf)

## Appendix:

### Table of local governance numbers

	<b>Central Hawke's Bay<sup>46</sup></b>	<b>Hastings<sup>47</sup></b>	<b>Napier<sup>48</sup></b>	<b>Wairoa<sup>49</sup></b>	<b>HBRC<sup>50</sup></b>
<b>Councillor/mayor count</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Community board members</b>		<b>4<sup>51</sup></b>			

### Māori Wards

The community voted against Māori wards in 2025. The will of the electorate is clear, and amalgamation should not be seen as an opportunity to re-litigate this issue. The establishment of single-councillor wards for 'Flaxmere to Waiohiki' and 'Maraenui to Tamatea' creates two areas where taking Māori issues seriously will provide electoral benefit and possibly lead to Māori leaders being elected to council. This has worked extremely well in Hastings over the lifetime of the Flaxmere Ward and led to Hastings having Māori representation in line with, or exceeding, the demographic size of Māori in the district over the last 20 years.

### Elected Member Remuneration<sup>52</sup>

Elected member pay is determined by legislation and set by the Remuneration Authority. Their formula is not public, so it is difficult to see how this can be applied to a 10 councillor Hawke's Bay unitary council. One close example is the Christchurch City Council, which has 16 councillors for 420,000 people, or 26,500 people per councillor. They are not a unitary council and have a much smaller geographic area. Their baseline councillor salary is \$127,000, and the mayor's salary is \$220,000<sup>53</sup>. It therefore seems reasonable to see 10 unitary Hawke's Bay councillors paid \$120,000 and the mayor \$220,000.

	<b>Hastings</b>	<b>Napier</b>	<b>CHB</b>	<b>Wairoa</b>	<b>HBRC</b>
<b>Mayor</b>	181,032	171,317	135,405	135,360	156,423
<b>Councillor Pool</b>	1,023,150	921,322	389,207	385,943	732,275
Total	1,204,182	1,092,639	524,612	521,303	888,698
<b>Hawke's Bay total</b>	4,231,434				

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.chbdc.govt.nz/our-council/mayor-and-councillors/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/our-council/mayor-and-councillors/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.napier.govt.nz/our-council/mayor-and-councillors/>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.wairoadc.govt.nz/our-council/mayor-and-councillors/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.hbrc.govt.nz/our-council/hbrc-councillors/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/our-council/rural-community-board/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2025/0140/latest/LMS1451080.html>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/secondary-legislation/pco-drafted/2024/124/en/latest/#LMS968596>

## Proposed ward population table (2023):

Each councillor must represent the same number of eligible voters (give or take 10%) This is set in law. Any deviation from this requires a special ruling from the Local Government commission. Hence the table below highlights that the proposed ward structure fits within the rules.

Ward Name	Population (2023)
Flaxmere to Waiohiki	16,015
Havelock North	16,263
CHB	15,480
Hastings West	17,541
Hastings East	15,993
Hawke's Bay Rural	14,838
Hawke's Bay Coast	16,004
Napier City	17,805
Maraenui to Tamatea	16,707
Taradale-Greenmeadows	18,513

## Under/over representation by current council boundaries at different councillor numbers:

Council Area	Population (2023)	10 Councillors	12	14	16
CHB	15,480	0.93	1.12	1.31	1.5
HDC	85,965	5.2	6.2	7.3	8.3
NCC	64,695	3.9	4.7	5.5	6.3

## Current and historic over/under-representation in the Hastings-Havelock Ward:

Havelock North has a population of 15,000<sup>54</sup>, while Hastings has a population of 49,000<sup>55</sup>. This means that Havelock North should elect one or two of the total Hastings-Havelock Ward councillors to be representative to its population. In the below calculations, Havelock should elect 23% of councillors in the ward.

Term Years	Hastings councillors	Havelock	Proportion Havelock	Havelock over-represented by:
2025-2028	3	4	57%	34%
2022-2025	4	3	43%	20%

<sup>54</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havelock\\_North](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havelock_North)

<sup>55</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hastings,\\_New\\_Zealand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hastings,_New_Zealand)

Table of payments for senior positions in Hawke's Bay local government<sup>56</sup>:

<b>Staff pay</b>	Numbers	Total min (000s)	Total max (000s)	Average (000s)
<u>Hastings</u>				
200-260k	9	1800	2340	2070
260-440k	6	1560	2640	2100
<u>Total</u>		3360	4980	4170
<u>Napier</u>				
200-280k	6	1200	1680	1440
280-390k	3	840	1170	1005
<u>Total</u>		2040	2850	2445
<u>CHB</u>				
160-240k	4	640	960	800
240-290k	4	960	1160	1060
<u>Total</u>		1600	2120	1860
<u>Wairoa</u>				
120-260k	10	1200	2600	1900
<u>Total</u>		1200	2600	1900
<u>HBRC</u>				
160-220k	20	3200	4400	3800
220-360k	5	1100	1800	1450
<u>Total</u>		4300	6200	5250
<b>Overall Total</b>	67	20,700,000	31,300,000	26,000,000

<sup>56</sup> All information sourced from salary bands reported in Annual Reports prepared by councils

## Rates increases & Hawke's Bay debt tables<sup>57</sup>

<b>Council</b>	<b>2022-25 cumulative rates increase</b>
CHBDC	42.9
HDC	48.76
NCC	43.3
WDC	39.04
HBRC	35.13
<b>Average:</b>	<b>41.826</b>

<b>Council</b>	<b>Debt in Q3 2025 (\$millions)<sup>58</sup></b>
CHBDC	47
HDC	454
NCC	110
WDC	10
HBRC	117
<b>Total:</b>	<b>730</b>

It is important to note that Hawkes Bay suffered an extreme event with Cyclone Gabrielle affecting the region. Sadly, lives were lost, homes destroyed and much infrastructure damaged.

These costs are calculated to be close to \$2b overall to councils and is reflected in the increases in debt and rates<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/rates\\_dashboard\\_2025](https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/rates_dashboard_2025)

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/one-hawkes-bay-councils-debt-has-nearly-tripled-in-a-year-how-much-debt-does-each-council-have/premium/V4I73VJM2BG4XJICNNC1JM5XG4/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/hawkes-bay/131944154/cyclonehit-hawkes-bay-councils-facing-recovery-costs-nearing-2-billion>

# Bibliography

<https://www.stv.govt.nz/index.shtml>

<https://governance.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/4-roles-responsibilities-and-relationships/the-mayor-of-auckland/office-of-the-mayor>

<https://www.dia.govt.nz/Future-for-Local-Government-Review>

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/521409/government-rejects-future-for-local-government-review-recommendations>

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/local-government/123605113/tauranga-city-council-to-be-replaced-by-commissioner> & <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/567021/scandal-division-and-rumours-gore-district-council-s-tumultuous-term>

[https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/rates\\_dashboard\\_2025](https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/rates_dashboard_2025)

<https://www.hbwater.nz/what-is-local-water-done-well/>

<https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2020/11/2-billion-value-of-savings-over-10-years/>

<https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/auckland-council-2026/> & [https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/hastings-district-council-2026/?profile\\_year=2026&profile\\_tab=demographics-rates](https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/hastings-district-council-2026/?profile_year=2026&profile_tab=demographics-rates)

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/housing-strategy-for-napier-and-hastings-finalised-after-more-than-two-years/7K5AX6235VBZXBBGXPVV33SRAY/> & [www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Document-Library/Strategies/Hastings-and-Napier-Future-Development-Strategy/Future-Development-Strategy.pdf](http://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Document-Library/Strategies/Hastings-and-Napier-Future-Development-Strategy/Future-Development-Strategy.pdf)

<https://www.hbrc.govt.nz/hawkes-bay/economic-development/matariki-hbreds/>

<https://baybuzz.co.nz/who-really-runs-hawkes-bay/>

<https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/10/06/hastings-bars-forced-to-close-an-hour-earlier-than-napier/>

<https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/12/09/govt-reveals-big-consenting-reforms-once-in-a-generation-shift/>

<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-system-make-planning-easier-everyone>

<https://mnacommunity.com/insights/cost-synergies-ma/>

<https://www.rfberlin.com/research-insights/who-loses-when-firms-are-bought/>

[https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/hawkes-bay-regional-council-2026/?profile\\_year=2026&profile\\_tab=demographics-rates](https://ratepayersreport.nz/2026/hawkes-bay-regional-council-2026/?profile_year=2026&profile_tab=demographics-rates)

<https://mccawlewis.co.nz/publications/post-settlement-governance-entity/>

<https://www.ttotw.iwi.nz/>

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/527976/wairoa-mayor-iwi-leaders-reject-regional-council-reviews-into-town-flooding>

<https://www.1news.co.nz/2022/06/07/15-councils-using-voting-system-which-ranks-candidates/>

<https://www.stv.govt.nz/how.shtml>

<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-addresses-wellington-water-concerns> &  
<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-listener/new-zealand/out-of-control-how-to-absolutely-positively-kill-a-well-resourced-capital-city/premium/PTPU5TVNFBEC3PHCVOGIP4UEPU/>

<https://governance.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/4-roles-responsibilities-and-relationships/the-mayor-of-auckland/office-of-the-mayor>

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/572183/auckland-transport-to-be-stripped-of-most-powers>

<https://seanoreilly.com.au/2024/10/02/single-member-vs-multi-member-councillor-wards/>

<https://ccc.govt.nz/the-council/how-the-council-works/elected-members/representation>

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/hawkes-bay-local-government-elections-2025-114-candidates-and-fierce-competition-ahead/IFCMAFX5CNATFBIXHJW5BA6E5/>

<https://www.hbrc.govt.nz/environment/coast/coastal-hazards/>

<https://www.capecoastcommunity.nz/>

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/big-no-in-amalgamation-referendum/VNC4GBPEJHXCVLK6BQAPBIAKDM/>

[www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Differential-Rating-Area.pdf](http://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Differential-Rating-Area.pdf)

<https://www.chbdc.govt.nz/our-council/mayor-and-councillors/>

<https://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/our-council/mayor-and-councillors/>

<https://www.napier.govt.nz/our-council/mayor-and-councillors/>

<https://www.wairoadc.govt.nz/our-council/mayor-and-councillors/>

<https://www.hbrc.govt.nz/our-council/hbrc-councillors/>

<https://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/our-council/rural-community-board/>

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2025/0140/latest/LMS1451080.html>

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/secondary-legislation/pco-drafted/2024/124/en/latest/#LMS968596>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havelock\\_North](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havelock_North)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hastings,\\_New\\_Zealand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hastings,_New_Zealand)

[https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/rates\\_dashboard\\_2025](https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/rates_dashboard_2025)

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/one-hawkes-bay-councils-debt-has-nearly-tripled-in-a-year-how-much-debt-does-each-council-have/premium/V4I73VJM2BG4XJICNNCIJM5XG4/>