

6/7/2026

Open Letter to Hawke's Bay Mayors

Dear Mayors Foley, Little, McGrath & Schollum,

Local Government Reform - don't divide us

On behalf of Heretaunga Sustainable Water Incorporated, representing water users in the Heretaunga primary and industrial sectors, we the undersigned wish to register our concerns about an aspect of the proposed local government reform currently being consulted on.

Firstly, we commend the Mayors (and Chair of HBRC) on their collective efforts to develop and publicly consult on a range of options for the future structure of local government in Hawke's Bay, at pace. In an ideal world, the region would have been given a lot longer than 3 months to consider such a consequential issue. However, we also acknowledge that the region already has a deep well of local government amalgamation and restructuring experience to draw on.

Secondly, we wish to acknowledge that there are a range of community views (including within our membership) on both localism and the rates burden, and tradeoffs between the two that are inherent in amalgamation. So it is only fitting that all Hawke's Bay residents and ratepayers are consulted & have a say on future representation structures and we do not wish to interfere with that process but do feel compelled to be a part of it.

That said, we have grave concerns about one option currently being consulted on, namely the proposition that Hawke's Bay could somehow sensibly or safely be divided in two administratively, bisecting the Heretaunga Plains, at or about the Tūtaekurī River (or elsewhere, for that matter).

Such a proposal flies in the face of the reality that many agribusiness and commercial enterprises operate at multiple locations across the Heretaunga Plains and need a consistent regulatory regime throughout, particularly when it comes to environmental compliance. And that the integrity of Heretaunga Plains flood protection relies on a single coordinated planning regime.

Like it or not, Central Government's directive to transfer responsibility for HBRC's regional environment regulatory regime to HB Mayors, is a game-changer for amalgamation on the Heretaunga Plains.

The proposed resource management legislation requires each new unitary authority to prepare both a Regional Spatial Plan and a Regional Combined Plan. The combined

plans will include, inter alia, controls and consenting arrangement for use of our natural resources such as land, water & air.

Currently this is HBRC's core function and we firmly believe it to be essential for a safe and efficiently functioning regional economy & society that we adopt local government structures that both complement our natural environment, and ease the region's transition to a new resource management regime.

The idea that we could somehow safely, efficiently and effectively operate in future under local government structures that artificially divide the Heretaunga Plains is an anathema. It fails to recognise that we all live and work in the same local environment and need to create and effectively operate under a single coherent, safe set of operating rules and administrative systems in order to thrive.

Of course it is not lost on us that we already have local government division within the Heretaunga Plains, as Napier City resides in a large part there. But for all its size, Napier City only comprises a tiny fraction of the Heretaunga Plains and environment planning rules are already consistent across the entire region, thanks to HBRC's Regional Plans.

Environment planning is quintessentially about managing water in the landscape – both its shortages and its excesses. This truism dictates that the most logical, efficient and effective way to regulate the natural terrestrial environment is via planning units based on freshwater watersheds (catchments).

The thought that somehow it would be sensible, let alone safe, to divide administration of the watershed of one of our major regional rivers, cutting through a floodplain and flood management assets protecting over 150,000 people, is frankly frightening.

Dividing the Heretaunga Plains and its catchments into separate administrative regions would put flood management and the lives of Heretaunga Plains residents at unnecessary and unacceptable risk.

The scale and breadth of issues challenging our regional society and economy will only intensify in a climate-warming world, which has already severely challenged our local institutions through successive weather events. With all parts of society playing their part, we can continue to thrive but not without efficient and logically-constituted regional government.

Hawke's Bay already has rational options before it in terms of amalgamation, in particular whether & how to accommodate our northern- & southern-most Councils into amalgamated structures. Beyond that, there are a plethora of options for incorporating localism into amalgamated structures and we recommend that in the limited time available, deliberation on localism choices ought to be prioritised.

Pursuing ideas about artificially dividing the Heretaunga Plains in this context, is neither sensible nor safe.

Heretaunga haaro o te kahu – Heretaunga, whose beauty can only be truly appreciated by the hawk. The hawk sees the Plains in its entirety; we need to heed that lesson and do the same!

The undersigned, Heretaunga Sustainable Water Inc. Steering Group members:

Greig Taylor, Chair

Xan Harding

Carl O'Brien

Jonathan Brookes

John Bostock

Bruce Mackay

Peter MacIntyre

Tony Cunningham

Richard Pentreath

Ivan Knauf

Emma Taylor

Cc:

Sophie Siers, HBRC Chair

Hawke's Bay Today

Baybuzz