



AUCKLAND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FEEDBACK ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION PROPOSALS FOR WARDS, LOCAL BOARDS AND BOUNDARIES FOR AUCKLAND

1. INTRODUCTION

The Auckland Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Local Government Commission (LGC) proposals for wards, local boards and boundaries for Auckland.

The Auckland Chamber has a corporate membership of more than 6000 engaged in business activities in the Auckland region.

It is dedicated to the development of international, national and regional trade through:-

- Freedom of enterprise for those who by their individual and corporate talents contribute real economic, social and cultural wealth to the community.
- The development of a market economy in which there is minimal interference from central and local government.
- The strengthening of Auckland's place as New Zealand's pre-eminent commercial, industrial and communications centre.
- Assisting the development of the region in creating a desirable commercial and industrial environment for its citizens.

The Chamber's mission is to inspire and influence business vitality. We do this by positively influencing the environment in which businesses operate and by providing "opportunities, products and services" that will improve the success and vitality of business.

The Chamber has a strong commitment to the growth of Auckland as a successful, progressive city in the Asia Pacific region and is recognized as such. It gives practical expression to this commitment through a conventional range of services provided by Chambers of Commerce and innovative initiatives such as the New Kiwis recruitment service which plays an invaluable role in matching new migrants, especially from the Asia Pacific region, to employment opportunities and administering business-to-business trade documentation and relationships arising from the New Zealand's free trade agreements (China, ASEAN, CER with Australia, etc) and in numerous other ways.

The Chamber takes a close interest and participation in advocating for effective governance arrangements for the Auckland region, and in particular more efficient and productive Auckland infrastructure. We are proactive in seeking to assist government to

develop initiatives to improve Auckland's – and therefore New Zealand's – economic development.

We concur with the Commission's view that Auckland's new governance structure needs to:

- Be coherent, understandable, enduring and legally compliant;
- Promote good governance and support effective engagement between people, communities, local boards and the Auckland Council; and,
- Provide effective representation for Auckland's diverse communities.¹

The balance of the Chamber's feedback assesses the Commission's proposals against how these objectives have been achieved.

2. OVERVIEW

Overall, the Auckland Chamber congratulates the Commission for its proposals on the boundaries and representation arrangements for the new Auckland Council.

The Commission's determinations go most of the way to satisfying the Chamber's submission seeking:

- Abandonment of the proposal to elect up to eight councillors at large and the balance from wards and instead recommended:
- The establishment of 20 wards made up of 'communities of interest' of around 60,000 people each (for a total population of 1.2 million) with one councillor elected from each; or, alternatively 10 wards from which two councillors are elected.
- Alignment between ward and local board boundaries to reduce potential confusion and impression of a three-tiered system; and
- A tier of 20-30 local boards which retains Franklin and Rodney representation in the Auckland Council and also provides for a fair representation of distinctive rural communities.

The Commission's main determinations provide for:

- 12 wards comprising 8 two member wards and 4 single (mainly rural) member wards (two of which are a requirement of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009), based on a representation of one councillor per 70,000 people (for a total population of 1.4 million);
- 19 local boards each of which fits within a single ward; and,
- Strong representation provision for Auckland's distinctive rural communities.

The Chamber acknowledges the complexities that faced the Commission in making its determination including to satisfy a range of factors such as to:

¹ Volume 1 - Auckland Government Arrangements: Proposals for Wards, Local Boards and Boundaries for Auckland, Objectives, p3.

- Comply with the requirements of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 to include two single-member wards – one based on the rural area of Rodney District and the other based on the area of Franklin District remaining within Auckland’s boundary; and to
- Comply with the Act’s ‘fair representation’ definition in terms of the ratio of population to councillor for each ward being within +/-10% of the average of the district as a whole;
- Recognise communities of interest in Auckland by providing them with ‘effective’ representation; and, while at the same time ensuring
- Effective overall governance of Auckland.

As a result of these requirements the single-member wards based on the rural area of Rodney and Franklin representation became exceptions to the ‘+/-10% fair representation rule’. In other words, the more over-representation in these two single-member wards – i.e.53,590 people in Rodney for one councillor and 63,650 in Franklin compared to the benchmark of 70,809 for each ward councillor in Auckland as a whole – the more under-representation there would have to be in the rest of Auckland.

The Chamber notes that after determining the boundaries for the single-member Rodney and Franklin wards, the Commission distributed the remaining 18 councillors left from the fixed total of 20 councillors set under the Act.²

We concur that given the requirements of the Act for effective representation of communities of interest and fair representation for electors, the Commission has generally achieved a fair result and agree that in a number of cases where the level of ward representation is less than what may be seen as ideal, local board arrangements has the potential to assist community representation.

Consistent with the Chamber’s alternative recommendation of 10 two member wards, we particularly note that taking into account the constraints the Commission was obliged to work within noted above, the Commission has nonetheless recommended 8 two members wards. We agree with the commission view that two-member wards provide:

- Greater opportunities than single-member wards to combine like communities of interest and in other cases to avoid splitting communities of interest; and,
- Potential for more diverse representation of communities at the council table; and will provide
- A choice for residents on who to approach with local concerns.

3. MATTERS OF DETAIL

However, there are a number of specific matters of detail that the Chamber requests the Commission re-consider, as follows:

Local Board size and representation

² See Volume 1 page 6.

We note that with the exception of Papakura Local Board area of 44,000 people, the 18 other local boards will represent areas in excess of 53,000 people, with three having significantly larger populations – Waitakere (166,150), Hibiscus-Albany-East Coast Bays (120,400) and Howick-Pakuranga-Botany (121,700).

This outcome means that the size of local board areas are larger, in some cases significantly, than electorates of Members of Parliament representing central government, all of which represent in the order of 45,000 Aucklanders.

Reflecting the large variation in the size of local boards, there is a wide variance in the number of members on local boards. Six boards have 5 members, three have 6 members, six have 7 members, and four have 9 members.

Putting aside geographic size differences of local board areas, there is a clear imbalance in representation between some boards. Waitakere has 9 board members to represent 166,150 residents while Franklin also has 9 board members representing 63,650 people. In contrast, Maungawhau in central Auckland has a 5 member board for a population of 78,860 while nearby Maungakiekie-Tamaki has a 6 member board for a lower population of 74,200.

The Chamber requests that the relative size of boards be re-considered with a view to addressing some of these imbalances. The question of what is an ideal number for a local board needs to be addressed. Given that the majority of 19 local board areas are larger than Auckland's 23 electorates - thus diluting the outcome to achieve a greater level of 'local' representation in local governance than is provided for in the general electorate arrangements – the Chamber suggests consideration be given to increasing the number of boards to create a more evenly balanced representation outcome.

A tidy option could be to increase the number of boards to 22 and limit board sizes to seven members maximum. With the Waiheke and Great Barrier local boards required by statute, the other 20 board areas could be structured to align better and more fairly with the ward areas of the 20 councillors?

Mt Eden township split between two boards

The Chamber notes that in most local board areas an identifiably town centre or suburban mainstreet 'community of interest' has been retained intact. However, there appears to be one glaring exception in that the boundary between the Maungawhau and Mt Albert local boards splits Mt Eden township in half. The shopping centre north of the major Mt Eden Road – Essex Road – Owens Rd traffic lights is in Maungawhau and the balance of the township centre is in the Balmoral-Epsom subdivision of the Mt Albert local board.³

³ Volume 2 – Auckland Governance Arrangements: Maps Relating to Proposals for Wards, Local Boards and Boundaries for Auckland, LB4b and LB4d.

The Chamber requests a relook to ensure appropriate coherence and recognition of the Mt Eden township community of interest.

4. CONCLUDING COMMENT

Our feedback and suggestions for improving the Local Government Commission proposals for wards, local boards and boundaries for Auckland are put forward in the positive spirit of achieving measurable improvement to Auckland's governance. We look forward to their inclusion in the finalised legislation.

Michael Barnett
Chief Executive

9 December 2009