

Cabinet Calls for Even Greater Changes to Auckland Governance

There has been widespread debate and discussion since the release of the Report of the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance just over a week ago. But one of the key issues, signalled at the outset by both Minister of Local Government, Rodney Hide and Prime Minister, John Key, has been the manner in which “local democracy” was to be protected.

As expected Cabinet has endorsed the so-called super city proposal for the Auckland Council, but has given further consideration to what happens at the next level.

The Royal Commission recommended four urban and two rural “local councils”, but in its Report detailed its consideration of two alternative models featuring 20 or 21 “community councils” or “neighbourhood boards”, or 11 “local councils”. The latter proposal was not favoured because of “significant start-up costs, complex transitional arrangements, and potential disruption to staff and the public”.

The proposal for 20 or more 2nd tier entities, favoured by the Auckland Regional Council and Auckland City Council, was discarded even sooner by the Commission “as it concluded early on that the creation of 20 entirely new entities with new territories would, for uncertain gains, impose high transitional costs on the ratepayers of Auckland and cause major disruption to existing staff and services.” The Commission was also concerned that the scale of operation would limit what functions could be delegated to them, and that the costs of interaction between these entities and the Auckland Council and of overseeing their activities would be very high.

Since the release of the Report the existing territorial authorities have largely focused on the scope of the functions and responsibilities to be exercised at the proposed “local council” level, and most would have preferred that the role of local councils be strengthened rather than further divided.

But Cabinet has decided that the needs of local democracy will best be met by 20 - 30 “local boards” instead of the 6 larger local councils recommended by the Royal Commission.

Cabinet also rejected the recommendation for three Maori councillors on the Auckland Council, saying instead that it could establish these for itself if there is community support for the idea. There has also been some tweaking of the representation model, and it is now proposed that only eight of the 20 councillors be elected at large, with the remaining twelve to be elected on a ward basis. The re-introduction of at large elections for councillors has drawn criticism from some quarters.

All staff and assets of the existing regional council and territorial authorities in Auckland will be taken over by the Auckland Council. The first election will be held in October 2010.

To download the Government’s announcement today go to www.auckland.govt.nz.



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