

# Submissions made on reform

“AMALGAMATION is the last step . . . not the first.”

That was message from Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna in a submission to a Parliamentary Select Committee in Hamilton on August 30.

The local government and environment select committee was in the Waikato to hear submissions to the Local Government Act 2002 Amendment Bill.

Mr Hanna says he was pushing the point that “a lot of the reforms were around arriving at the solution before identifying what the problem was.

“And for small councils like ourselves it’s really important that we have strategic alignment.

“What I mean by that is, when you go back to about 2000 when there was an attempt to amalgamate Waitomo and Otorohanga, they were doing nothing in common. There were no shared services – there was no strategic alignment.

“It was doomed to fail,” he says.

“The key for small local governments is to work through the regional alignment we can get around planning, roading and those sorts of things.

“Amalgamation is the last step, not the first.”

He says small councils like Waitomo and Otorohanga don’t want solutions forced on them.

“We want our communities to be better

off under reform, not worse off, in terms of representation and decision-making.”

Otorohanga District Council did not make a submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee but mayor Dale Williams did make one on behalf of the Mayors’ Taskforce for Jobs.

## STRONG GOVERNANCE

Waikato Regional Council also sent the committee a clear message.

Chairman Peter Buckley and deputy chief executive Clare Crickett presented the submission to the select committee, reiterating the council’s support for the Government’s push to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local government.

Good local government in the Waikato demands strong governance at local and regional levels.

Mr Buckley told the committee: “The regional council is keen to work with others and play a constructive role in helping to build a more competitive and export-driven economy, balanced against the need to protect the environment.”

He said to achieve the objectives of the Better Local Government reforms; the regional council believed several changes would be helpful to the draft legislation around the purpose of local government and re-organisation of local authorities.

Ms Crickett said the council believed the purpose of local government should

continue to include the promotion of the “four wellbeings – environmental, economic, social and cultural”.

“This purpose has been in use for the past 10 years and is now clearly understood.

“It allows communities the ability to seek what they need from their local government.

“Local authorities are under the ultimate control of their communities through the democratic process. This is a better check than that proposed in the bill.”

## PLANNING VITAL

There was also concern that insufficient weight was provided in the bill for strategic planning that is vital for regional economic success and environmental sustainability.

“Strategic planning has the potential to develop the regional economy and make better use of regional and national resources,” said Ms Crickett.

“The value of spatial planning is recognised for Auckland, and it seems sensible that spatial planning should be within the purpose of all local authorities.”

The regional council’s submission urged caution in relation to provisions that suggested local reform proposals could only go ahead if more than half of voters polled agreed.

Ms Crickett said regional councils have



**BRIAN HANNA**

a distinct role that should be reflected in legislation.

“The Local Government Act would better support good local governance, if it recognised that territorial authorities and regional councils have distinct roles to play.

“If these different roles were made more explicit in the Local Government Act, there would be less confusion and conflict between territorial authorities and regional councils, and a better public understanding of their respective roles,” she said.

The select committee was presented with information about the role of the regional council in the Waikato including its ability to take an integrated regional overview; extensive flood management network and other hazard management; environmental resource management; pest control; provision of public transport; and implementation of Waikato River co-management legislation.



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