

9 August 2026

Dear Ministers Hon Watts and Bishop cc Hon Upston and To Whom it May Concern,

Re: Head Start Local Government Reform - *Waikato Together*

I am writing in my capacity as an elected member of Taupō District Council to submit the attached *Waikato Together - A Subsidiarity Model for Regional Government* for your consideration as part of the current local government reform process.

I acknowledge at the outset that *Waikato Together* is not presented as a formal Head Start proposal endorsed by the councils that would potentially comprise it. It is instead a conceptual governance model which I have developed to contribute another perspective to the discussion about what regional government in the Waikato could look like.

Much of the present debate has understandably concentrated on boundaries: which councils should amalgamate, which communities may gain or lose, and where a new authority should sit. My concern is that comparatively little attention has been given to an equally important question: **how should authority actually be distributed within a larger unitary authority?**

Waikato Together attempts to answer that question through the principle of subsidiarity - decisions should be made at the lowest practical level, and transferred upward only where coordination or scale genuinely produces better outcomes.

The model therefore proposes regional governance for genuinely regional matters, three Local Areas, elected Local Boards broadly reflecting existing district communities, and Community Committees with meaningful delegated responsibilities and budgets. It also recognises that Treaty settlements and statutory obligations must be appropriately carried forward through structural reform, that established relationships between iwi, hapū and their communities should be respected, and that future arrangements should be developed with the relevant iwi and hapū rather than predetermined by this proposal.

I also wish to provide some context regarding the position being communicated by Taupō District Council: Council did undertake community engagement during the Head Start process. However, in my view the resulting feedback should not be interpreted as an informed comparison between the present arrangements and detailed alternative governance models. The information available to our community about the respective options was very limited, with perhaps the major factor being the compressed timeframe which councils have been required to respond - but not entirely. For example, in the community survey undertaken in early June no information was provided around potential governance and representative structures, or even any description of the four options which were later considered. In summary, the Taupō community has not been properly informed.

Consequently, I do not believe it can safely be concluded that the Taupō community has rejected the concept of being part of a larger Waikato authority. What I believe our community has very clearly expressed is concern about losing local voice, local assets, financial autonomy and control over decisions affecting their communities. I share those

concerns, but where I differ is in believing that they need not necessarily be arguments against regional reform. They are instead arguments for designing regional government differently. *Waikato Together* is my attempt to demonstrate one way that could be achieved.

I recognise that many details in the attached model - including representation, delegations, financial arrangements, transition mechanisms and boundaries - would require considerable further analysis, consultation and ultimately legislative determination. I do not present those details as settled. What I do hope Government will consider is the underlying architecture: **strong regional capacity where scale matters, combined with constitutionally durable local decision-making where it does not.**

I believe there is an opportunity through this reform process to create something considerably better than simply amalgamating existing councils into larger versions of themselves.

I respectfully ask that *Waikato Together* be received as a constructive contribution to that discussion, and considered alongside the formal proposals and submissions Government receives through the Head Start process.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Duncan Campbell', with a stylized, cursive script.

Councillor Duncan Campbell
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