6 August 2026

The Hon Simon Watts, Minister of Local Government
Simon.Watts@parliament.govt.nz;
S.Watts@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister Watts,

On behalf of the Mayors and Chief Executives of three Hawke's Bay councils, we are pleased to submit our Head Start proposal for simplifying local government in Hawke's Bay.

This proposal represents the collective work of our councils over recent weeks and reflects an unprecedented level of collaboration on the potential for amalgamation within the region. While we have brought different perspectives and priorities to the table, we have remained united by a shared commitment to identifying the governance arrangements that will best serve Napier, Hastings and Central Hawke's Bay people and communities for generations to come.

The proposal has been developed through discussion, robust debate and careful consideration of the opportunities and challenges facing our region. Throughout this process, we have sought to focus on outcomes rather than institutions, recognising that effective local government must be capable of delivering for our communities, supporting economic growth, responding to future challenges and providing strong democratic representation.

As we submit this proposal, we also wish to acknowledge the passing of Nigel Bickle, Chief Executive of Hastings District Council, who died unexpectedly last week. Nigel was an important contributor to these discussions and a respected colleague across our region. His loss has been deeply felt by all of us. We dedicate this submission, in part, to his commitment to Hawke's Bay and acknowledge the professionalism and resolve shown by everyone involved in ensuring this work was completed during such difficult circumstances.

Our proposal reflects what we believe is a practical, ambitious and achievable pathway for our areas. It builds on the strengths of our region while recognising the need to modernise the way local government operates so that we are better positioned to deliver infrastructure, support economic development, strengthen community resilience and provide sustainable services into the future.

Importantly, this proposal is founded on a commitment to preserving the identity of our communities while creating a governance model that is capable of making decisions at the scale required for a growing and increasingly connected region. We believe the package we have developed strikes an appropriate balance between regional leadership and strong local representation.

We appreciate the opportunity provided through the Head Start process to develop a locally led solution. The process has challenged us to think differently, work collaboratively and focus on what is best for Hastings, Napier and Central Hawke's Bay. We commend the Government's willingness to support councils prepared to lead their own future.

We look forward to continuing to work constructively with you and your officials as the proposal is considered. We are confident that our councils are ready to take this next step and believe this submission provides a strong foundation for a more effective and resilient model of local government.

Yours sincerely,

Will Foley
Mayor, Central Hawke's Bay District Council

Wendy Schollum
Mayor, Hastings District Council

Richard McGrath
Mayor, Napier City Council