



Taupō District

HEAD START RESPONSE



GREAT LAKE TAUPŌ
Taupō District Council

Taupō District Head Start response

Following the announcements in May, our council has worked hard to respond to Government direction and to bring our community on the change journey. This response sets out our key messages to inform Cabinet decision-making, confirmation of the councils we prefer to work with and the time we think we need to do that.

We can see that there is a case for amalgamations in local government and we want to work constructively with Government and other councils towards good outcomes for communities. These are big structural changes with long-run implications, and we are determined to get them right even if that means taking a little more time.

Our key messages for Cabinet



WHEN CABINET MAKES DECISIONS IN SEPTEMBER, WE WANT THEM TO BE AWARE THAT:

- Taupō District Council is willing to work with the other Central North Island councils to create robust and financially sustainable local government.
- We need more time and a flexible process to effectively do that given the complexities of the large Waikato region and the fact the Taupō district spans four regions.
- We respect the right of Waitomo and Ōtorohanga district councils to propose their own unitary authority. If Cabinet decides that they do not have the required scale to progress, then we would like

to discuss the potential to join that proposal, adding our scale and financial strength.

- We acknowledge that parts of the Ruapehu district have strong connections with the Taupō district through communities of interest, iwi rohe, and the environment. Furthermore, the Taupō catchment starts in the Ruapehu District. With more time we would like to explore with them whether amalgamating with Taupō, with or without boundary adjustments would make sense.
- Our request is for eight weeks post Cabinet's decisions to be able to work with neighbouring councils and present a coordinated plan to support reform.

To be clear, if we need to amalgamate our preference is a Central North Island unitary authority with Taupō District Council, Ruapehu District Council, Waitomo District Council, and Ōtorohanga District Council. We note that Waitomo and Ōtorohanga are pursuing another option currently and Taupō District Council wishes to respect that decision.

We are willing to work with Central North Island councils

We have approached the Head Start process by respecting the need for other councils to make decisions in the best interests of their communities.



We are committed to keep working with our direct neighbouring councils and particularly the Central North Island grouping. We have had good discussions so far, we can see areas of similarity, and we have identified some areas where more work is needed to resolve differences. What we need is a reasonable period of time with neighbouring councils to come up with a sustainable long term unitary authority option.

The reality is that Taupō District spans the regions of Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Manawatu-Whanganui and Hawkes Bay. We have been grappling with how to manage the balancing of communities of interest, catchment management and implementation of the new planning system across existing regional boundaries.

We appreciate that Head Start is provided for other parts of the country which are much simpler to reorganise. That is not our situation but with time we could come up with a robust solution.

WE HAVE CONSIDERED A RANGE OF OPTIONS TO RESPOND TO HEAD START

Over three months we have done our best to understand what opportunities might be presented and how they could impact the Taupō community now and in the future. Our focus has been on the long-term not just the here and now.

We have assessed several options from a single unitary authority for the Waikato region through to a range of smaller subregional options. Our analysis has looked at the Government's criteria along with the matters that our community and iwi have identified as important. The financial and non-financial assessments we have undertaken are included as attachments.

Our analysis shows the Taupō community would be better off in a smaller subregional unitary authority focused on the southern part of the Waikato region. Being amalgamated with the high growth and urban focused councils in the northern part of the Waikato would result in worse outcomes for our community, both financial and non-financial.



Not One-Size-Fits-All

THERE ARE COMPLEXITIES WITH THE DELIVERY OF REGIONAL SERVICES

Much of our time has been focused on the opportunities and challenges of potential amalgamation with neighbouring territorial authorities. We have not had the necessary time to understand all the potential implications of taking on regional council functions and services.

While we understand what those functions and services are, we don't have a detailed understanding of matters like the financial and legal liabilities, the state of the asset base, and how the delivery of services and associated rating might need to change in a unitary arrangement. This is further complicated because we sit in four regions. It would be irresponsible for us to jump into an amalgamation arrangement without better understanding these aspects.

The large geographic scale of the Waikato region and the complexity that comes with 10 territorial authorities pose significant challenges to deliverability. There may be several subregional proposals across the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions where we are an interested party. We want to understand how the governance and delivery of regional functions and services will continue to be delivered across the regions both during transition and in the long-term. There has not been the time to have those important discussions yet.

THE TIME THAT WE NEED

We request eight weeks following Cabinet decisions on the Head Start proposals. This will allow us to confirm if Ōtorohanga and Waitomo have a proposal that is acceptable to Cabinet. The outcome of their proposal will impact how we approach our preferred Central North Island option. With that information we expect to be able to come back to Government with a plan for how we could proceed down the reform path.

CONCLUSION

The Taupō District is in a strong financial position compared to many of the councils in the Waikato region. Any amalgamation option is likely to place Taupō ratepayers in a worse position than they would otherwise face from both a financial and non-financial perspective. However, if we need to amalgamate our preferred partners are the Central North Island councils of Waitomo, Ōtorohanga, and Ruapehu. We respect their decision-making to this point and believe that over an eight-week period we could work with them to be able to present a plan to keep up reform momentum.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Council's agenda report and supporting information - 28 July 2026
2. Council's agenda report and supporting information - 6 August 2026



