Home (home/) » About Local Government Commission (/about-local-government-commission/)

# (Local Government Commission, n.d.)

# History

- Early years: the post-war era (/about-local-government-commission/history/#early)
- Steady as she goes: 1950s to 1980s (/about-local-government-commission/history/#steady)
- The era of reform: the 1980s onwards (/about-local-government-commission/history/#reform)
- The Commission in the 21st century (/about-local-government-commission/history/#lgc)
- Mana Kāwanatanga ā Rohe (/about-local-government-commission/history/#mana)
- Changes to the reorganisation process (/about-local-government-commission/history/#changes)

#### Early years: the post-war era

The Local Government Commission was established on 16 April 1947 following the assent of Governor-General Sir Bernard Freyberg. Its first chairperson was Judge Israel 'Izzy' Goldstine.

The Commission's functions were outlined in section 12 of the Local Government Commission Act 1946. It was established "to review from time to time the functions and districts of local authorities and to inquire into proposals and prepare schemes for the reorganisation thereof and generally to review and to report to the Minister upon such matters relating to local government as may be determined by the Commission or referred to it by the Minister."

The establishment of the Commission followed an inquiry by Parliamentary select committee. In 1945 the committee reported (http://atojs.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/atojs? a=d&cl=search&d=AJHR1945-l.2.2.6.12&srpos=70&e=-----10--61--bySH---0-AJHR 1945 | EZz-l-) that:

"First ime to time over the past fifty years there have been criticisms of the number of local authorities in the Dominion. People of all shades of opinion have stated the are are too many local bodies, and particularly too many types of ad hoc bodies, and 'New Zealand is overgoverned' is a common phrase. The result has been overlapping of functions and a situation approaching a chaos of jurisdictions. It has been felt that the administrative expenses involved have been unnecessarily great to provide for the effective development of local areas. It was against such a background of official and private comment that we were asked to undertake our investigation."

In the immediate post-war era there were more than 700 local authorities of some description, including 260 county councils and borough councils. There were also special-purpose authorities, such as road boards, river boards, harbour boards, fire boards, hospital boards, electric power boards, milk authorities, nasella tussock boards and more than 100 rabbit control boards.

(New Zealand Official Year Book, 1947-1949, chapter 26)

Despite the intentions of the original parliamentary inquiry, the first Commission was unable to carry out wholesale reorganisation. However it did make some modest changes. It successfully negotiated the amalgamation of six Northland Hospital Boards by 1954. It was able to significantly improve the procedures for boundary changes between authorities and create a body of standard practice. In particular, it aimed to prevent endless tinkering with boundaries by ensuring that any change was sufficient to meet community needs at least 15 years into the future. It also educated local authorities on the need to apply proper town and country planning principles to boundary changes instead of making them at whim, as had been the case.

The first commission was severely affected by the loss of valued staff. On 18 March 1949 the former Secretary to the Commission Frank Stephens and the Acting Secretary Douglas Jeune were killed in an <u>air crash in the Tararua foothills (http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/disasters-and-mishaps-air-losses/page-2)</u> near Waikanae. All 15 people on the NAC Lockheed plane 'Kereru' died when it crashed while coming in to land at Paraparaumu. They were returning to Wellington from a hearing in Auckland.

The Department of Internal Affairs <u>annual report for 1949 (http://atojs.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/atojs?a=d&d=A]HR1949-I.2.3.2.27&cl=search&srpos=27&e=-----10--21---bySH---0-A]HR 1949 I H-) paid tribute: "It is with deep regret that the untimely passing of these two valued officers is recorded, and it is desired to place on record a tribute to the splendid and unselfish work performed by both of them in the sphere of public administration and local government."</u>

A function of labour and skills shortages it was difficult to find replacement staff. Until the end of its term in 1953 the first commission struggled to find resources.

## Steady as she goes: 1950s to 1980s

The number of ad hoc bodies continued to grow. Hospital boards and rabbit boards were outside the authority of the Local Government Commission. By 1960, half a dozen counties had amalgamated with others, and the long obsolete river, road and town boards continued to dwindle, but there was little other change.

After 1960 a trend emerged for certain kinds of ad hoc bodies, such as harbour boards and fire boards, to merge with their territorial local authorities. <u>Harbour boards (http://www.poal.co.nz/about\_us/history\_auckland.htm)</u> were under increasing pressure from the decline of the coastal shipping trade and the onset of containerisation. The functions of the old-style rabbit boards were taken over by county councils.

The most important new development was the establishment of the <u>Auckland Regional Authority (http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpub.dll?</u>

<u>AC=SEE ALSO&QF0=Subjects&Q10==%22Auckland+Regional+Authority%22&XC=/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpub.dll&BU=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.aucklandcity.govt.nz%2Fdbtw-wpd%2FHeritagelmages%2Findex.htm&TN=heritagelmages&SN=AUTO16380&SE=987&RN=0&MR=5&TR=0&TX=1000&ES=0&CS=1&XP=&RF=HlORecordSearch&EF=&DF=&859-1&OEH=ISO-8859-1)</u> in 1963. The opening of the Auckland Harbour Bridge in 1959 gave huge impetus to the development of the North Shore and helped launch the city's population growth. Governance was already fragmented among many small local boroughs such as One Tree Hill, Onehunga, and Newmarket. The spread of settlement southwards engulfed previously rural areas and villages like Pukekohe and Manukau.

The establishment of the Auckland Regional Authority was an Auckland initiative, spearheaded by the mayor, Sir Dove-Myer Robinson. A wide range of functions was defined as regional: bulk water supply, main sewerage, main public transport arrangements, the airport, milk distribution, regional roads and reserves and civil defence The Auckland Regional Authority was directly elected by the electorate, not indirectly by the territorial authorities.

A directly elected Wellington Regional Council was formed in 1980 with more limited functions than those of in Auckland. It had responsibility for regional planning, civi defence, regional parks and reserves (http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22811644?

search%5Ri%5D%5Bcentury%5D=1900&search%5Bi%5D%5Bdecade%5D=1980&search%5Bi%5D%5Bis\_catalog\_record%5D=false&search%5Bpath%5D=items&search%5Buth%5D=items&search%5Bi%5D%5Bis\_catalog\_record%5D=false&search%5Bpath%5D=items&search%5Buth%5D=items&search%5Bi%5D%5Bis\_catalog\_record%5D=false&search%5Bpath%5D=items&search%5Buth%5D=items&search%5Bi%5D%5Bis\_catalog\_record%5D=false&search%5Bpath%5D=items&search%5Bi%5D%5Bis\_catalog\_record%5D=false&search%5Bpath%5D=items&search%5Bi%5D%5Bis\_catalog\_record%5D=false&search%5Bpath%5D=items&search%5Bi%5D%5Bis\_catalog\_record%5D=false&search%5Bpath%5D=items&search%5Bi%5D%5Bis\_catalog\_record%5D=false&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Bixcord%5D=items&search%5Dixcord%5D=items&search%5D=items

5th

es began to affect the traditionally limited and somewhat passive functions of local government during the 1970s and 1980s.

There was a considerable increase in the range of services provided by territorial local authorities. The increasing political activism of women changed the makeup of elected members and staff of local bodies and new concepts of management began to circulate. Important as these are as background factors, however, they are not part of the history of the Local Government Commission itself.

#### The era of reform: the 1980s onwards

The election of the fourth Labour Government in 1984 ushered in a period of extremely rapid, wholesale reform of the machinery of government. A foreign exchange crisis at the time of the election contributed to a drive to save costs across all branches of government.

The new administration sought to increase efficiency by rationalisation and reorganisation, including the corporatisation and privatisation of some functions traditionally performed by government. In December 1987 the Minister of Internal Affairs announced (http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/local-and-regional-government/page-5) a reorganisation of local authorities throughout all of New Zealand (except the Chatham Islands) by October 1989.

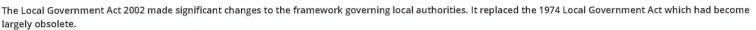
The Commission under Sir Brian Elwood spearheaded this enormous task. This was the most active period in the Local Government Commission's history, The commission was temporarily enlarged to six members.

The distinction between Regional and United Councils was abolished and the whole of New Zealand was divided into 14 regions with directly-elected regional councils. Around 850 local bodies were consolidated into 86 multi-purpose local authorities.

Boundaries of regions largely conformed to water catchment areas to ensure integrated management of water supply, rivers and related matters. Counties and boroughs were abolished. Auckland and Wellington were greatly shaken up, with many small suburban bodies abolished. For local reasons Gisborne was a partial exception. Because of the city's isolation and large erosion-prone hinterland its district council exercises the powers of a regional council.

The Local Government Commission also acquired an important new function as both an appeal authority and an arbitrator. It was required to make a triennial review of wards and membership of local authorities and to hear appeals. It could also hear appeals on draft reorganisation schemes, proposals for the constitution of new authorities, and proposals for the reorganisation or abolition of communities.

### The Commission in the 21st century



The Local Government Commission was defined as a body corporate with full powers and perpetual succession. It maintained the powers of a Commission of Inquiry, including the ability to summon witnesses, request certain information and to receive evidence.

It consisted of three members appointed by the Minister of Local Government, one of whom was to be conversant with tikanga Maori. This reflected the much greater concern of government with issues of partnership under the Treaty of Waitangi.

The commission's powers were significantly redefined. It was to:

- report on and make recommendations to the Minister of Local Government on matters relating to a local authority. This can be on the Commission's own initiative or at the request of the Minister.
- consider proposals to reorganise local authorities. This could include the creation or abolition of a district council, city council or regional council, the unification of several local authorities, or the establishment of a unitary authority.
- consider appeals and counter-objections to a local authority's proposals for boundary changes to a ward or constituency. It can also consider appeals on the number of members of a ward or constituency following a representation review.
- · consider appeals against a territorial authority decision to decline a request from a group of electors for the constitution of a community.
- determine an application from a territorial authority that wishes to be called a city council or a district council
- hear and determine objections to proposals to transfer the ownership and administration of local authority land drainage and water race schemes
- inquire into any question concerning the union, reconstitution, or alteration of the boundaries of any district or constituency of a district health board.
- provide information about local government
- promote good practice in the local government field.

#### Mana Kāwanatanga ā Rohe

In October 2007 the Commission, under Chair Sue Piper, adopted its Māori name, Mana Kāwanatanga ā Rohe.

A literal translation is "the authority for governance of districts".

The name was chosen because both its literal and conceptual meanings appropriately convey the Commission's functions and responsibilities

#### Changes to the reorganisation process

The Local Government Act 2002 was further amended in December 2012. It significantly changed the process for reorganisation of local authorities. The purpose of reorganisation was defined as improving the effectiveness and efficiency of local government by:

(a) providing communities with the opportunity to initiate, and participate in considering, alternative local government arrangements for their area and

(b) requiring the Commission, in consultation with communities, to identify, develop, and implement in a timely manner the option that best promotes good local government."

The 2012 changes allowed anyone to lodge a reorganisation application. During the first full year of the new process there were four applications, three of them from local authorities. They related to local government in Northland, Hawke's Bay, Wellington and the Wairarapa.

