

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) (<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 Act 2002 made significant changes to the framework governing local authorities. It replaced the 1974 Local Government Act which had become largely obsolete.

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 Māori. 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.