

LGNZ RURAL & PROVINCIAL MEETING

WELLINGTON

6TH/7TH AUG 2026

LGNZ opened the meeting with the normal around the regions updates from Mayors.

Not surprisingly 'Simplifying Local Government/Amalgamation' was the focus from all Mayors and given the fact that 'Head Start' proposals are required by 9 August 2026 this topic dominated this first session – Where have you landed?. In my quick count Government will receive 6 different Head Start proposals made up of 20-22 separate councils Note: I am not sure of the exact number here or the mix/make up but other RDC members attending may be able to correct me?

All other councils are supportive of the need for change, as signalled by the number willing to sign varying MOU type letters to Government Ministers in support of the direction. The principle areas of concern remain the same, being 'What does/will local voice look like' and the bigger questions around funding and financing of amalgamated councils? All councils want to be a part of the solution.

The question of funding is of real concern to me, as the costs cannot continue to fall on rate payers to fund infrastructure, community needs/wants and expectations - amalgamation doesn't automatically fix or address the on-going costs.

Without having real and meaningful conversations with central Government on the issue of how do we fund, we are setting up 'amalgamation' to fail – not only for us but future generations! Sadly this issue seems to fall on the deaf ears of Ministers as they continue to blame all rates increases on what they say is the poor performance of Councils without recognising the cost impacts of Central Government actions. I thank LGNZ for continued lobbying to Central Government on funding and financing matters, to seek relief for our ratepayers.

Session 2: was a panel discussion with Labour, NZ First, ACT, OPT Party & Greens

All agree that some form of amalgamation is required, but that the process has been poor. Most agree that a restructure of the 'funding' model needs to be a part of 'Simplifying Local Government/ Amalgamation'. Apart from these statements, all a bit as expected - they want to work with us/LGNZ - very much election year comments.

Session 3: LGNZ has developed a broad manifesto to go to all parties and will continue to engage with Central Government on reforms, in support of Local Government.

Session 4: M.C.E.R.T. CE Jeremy Lightfoot & Hemi Smiler GM, LG Reforms

MCERT is the newly combined Ministry that will be responsible to implement Head Start proposals and the overall 'Simplifying Local Government/Amalgamation' process. They will now focus on any Head Starts received, while all other Councils will be in a holding pattern pending future Government direction around the Back Stop process, which is yet to be announced – my hope here is that Government will take into account the MOUs received

from a large number of Councils that indicate a willingness to engage and be a part of the solution, not to be simply dismissed! If Government believe that they can build a better future for our communities, without the involvement of local communities, again amalgamation will be doomed to fail and will require constant reviews over many years, all at a cost to ratepayers. I don't envy the job of MCERT but having listened to these to speakers I believe that they genuinely want to be engaged with Local Government, noting the constraints that may be imposed on them by Government.

I was un-able to attend the Day 2 morning sessions as I was scheduled to attend a Central Districts Water meeting, with the Share Holders Committee in Levin. I look forward to catching up with my fellow Councillors that attended Rural & Provincial to hear what Day 2 covered.

Deputy Mayor
Dave Wilson