



Hon Simon Watts  
Minister of Local Government

Hon Chris Bishop  
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

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Dear Ministers,

I have now had a chance to read your proposal entitled, *Simplifying Local Government*.

As the document notes, the primary focus of regional councils is environmental management. As a result, changes to their governance and functions go to the heart of my mandate to maintain an oversight of the agencies and processes that constitute our environmental management system. I deal with regional councils almost every day and am acutely aware of both what is asked of them and their performance.

Your proposal is an opportunity to ask some fundamental questions about how we manage our physical environment, including the potential to take some responsibilities back to the centre. I have raised questions in a number of reports about the absence of central guidance in areas as disparate as catchment level water modelling and biosecurity implementation. There are also close links with the work I continue to undertake on environmental information, and the need to federate the vast amount of siloed information that is currently held by agencies, including regional and local councils.

I note that you are undertaking “a review of regional council roles and functions [which] will provide clarity on which responsibilities remain local and which may be either centralised or discontinued”. I welcome such a review and have a lot to offer it. The purpose of this letter is to ask you to encourage your officials to engage with me and my team. I can add more value before you take key decisions than afterwards.

Rt Hon Simon Upton

**Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment**  
**Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata**