



The Northern Action Group Incorporated

Christmas Newsletter: December 2019

Dear Member/Supporter,

High Court Appeal decision

Since my last newsletter in October (and at the time of writing this) we are still waiting for a decision from the High Court on our appeal hearing but the wheels of justice do not turn quickly. It's over two months since the hearing and hopefully we will get a decision before Xmas. Still, if it's the right one for us we can wait!

Legislation change

In the meantime this Labour lead government, who claim to be champions of democracy, have amended the Local government Act yet again. Despite talking about community engagement they have removed the reorganisation purpose that required the Commission to work with communities on better governance, and have raised the bar for communities to initiate and take part in considering reorganisation proposals. This impacts particularly negatively on de-amalgamation proposals. These provisions were only made in 2012 and created the only path open for us to challenge our enforced inclusion in Auckland.

That's gone now and replaced with a requirement for such community lead proposals to be supported by a petition of at least 10% of voters in the 'affected area'. Although the definition of 'affected area' has also been altered it is not at all clear just how that would apply in our situation (more High Court appeals might be necessary to determine that!), the worse case (and most likely) scenario would be that the whole of the Auckland would still have to be the catchment for the 10% criteria to be calculated.

Therefore, in our case, this would mean raising a petition with over 140,000 signatures – a very tall order if not an impossibility for us with only 17000 voters in total. Even if we managed to get all of us to sign such a petition we'd still have to find a further 123,000 signatures from the rest of the region who by and large don't even know we exist let alone have any interest in our plight.

So thank you (NOT) Labour, NZ First and Greens for your anti-democratic approach to giving your constituents any say in their future.

Of course if we win our appeal and the judge overturns the Local Government Commission decision and sends them back to the 'drawing board' to reconsider our



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proposal it will almost certainly have to follow the new law with its changed criteria so there is more uncertainty how that would work out..

No rosy prospects ahead there for us I'm afraid.

Localism: Response to the LGNZ discussion paper

Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) has published a discussion paper called "Reinvigorating local democracy: The case for localising power and decision-making to councils and communities". Their website is <https://localism.nz>

LGNZ supports "Localism" and the discussion paper has 15 questions for comment and calls for comments and feedback by **15 December**. (Some of you may wish to add your comments)

NAG has made a submission and you can view our [submission to LGNZ](#) on our website.

With our long history of ever decreasing representation and forced amalgamations, unsupported by North Rodney communities, and without any opportunity to vote on the decisions, localism for NR means a lot more to us than just the devolution of authority (power) and responsibility from central to local government.

Perhaps a telling point is that communities might well be prepared to pay more for the right to local self-governance. It is not just all about lower costs and rates (and many councils have failed on that anyway). At no point in its consideration of our application for de-amalgamation did the Local Government Commission ever ask if North Rodney people would be prepared to pay more to have a NR Unitary Authority - notwithstanding the Queensland de-amalgamation experience which shows that communities might well do so and should be given a choice and chance to decide.

In summary our submission says:

- the Electoral Act and the Local Electoral Act need review to address the need for fair representation by and for communities, and the Local Government Act needs updating and reform to recognise:
 - more relevant funding options;
 - appropriate governance structures for large Councils (Auckland is unique, but regional unitary authorities might be more relevant if they were properly structured and managed to reflect the needs and roles of communities in local governance);
 - recall provisions (to remove bad electoral choices); and
 - greater flexibility in reorganisations to respond and adapt to changing communities.



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Electorate boundary changes.

However there is some light for us in the recently announced proposed changes to electorate boundaries. These are well covered in the last issue of Mahurangi Matters and North Rodney will now be in one electorate, more consistent with the Ward areas, even if it is proposed (for some inexplicable reason) to be called 'Helensville'.

NAG has submitted to the Electoral Commission supporting the move of the old Rodney boundary north to the top of the region but opposed the inclusion of urban areas around Te Atatu and Henderson and the loss of Dairy Flat and Coatesville to what will be the Whangaparaoa electorate.

We will get new blood representing us as Mark Mitchell will stay with the newly created Whangaparaoa electorate.

I have always felt that this area's biggest disadvantage politically is being a 'safe seat' for National who can (and have) cruised to power each election in this area so they don't have to try very hard to give their constituents what they want and are content to just 'follow the party line'!

NAG has also objected to the proposed name for the new electorate and argued that we should keep the name 'Rodney' as being the more appropriate title. We will of course speak to our submission at the hearing in February to drive our arguments home.

That's all there is to report right now so I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all the best for the festive season and thank you for your ongoing support. Let's hope next year brings us some positive changes for the better governance of North Rodney we all want.

This is NAG's 10th year of campaigning to get North Rodney a better deal. Who'd have thought we'd still be needed after such a long time? However, clawing back the loss of representation, respect, and voice in our local governance from the centralists' power and control was never going to be easy.

Yours sincerely

Bill Townson

Chairman

Northern Action Group Inc.

14 December 2019