

Media Release

Communities 4 Local Democracy

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Predictably disappointing feedback from hamstrung working group

Feedback from the Government's three waters working group was "predictably disappointing" according to the group representing 1.5 million New Zealanders and almost half of New Zealand's territorial local authorities.

Communities 4 Local Democracy He hapori mō te Manapori is the local government action group campaigning for better reform for three waters.

"The Government well and truly stymied the working group members with the terms of reference making any chance of real change impossible," said group Chair Mayor Helen Worboys.

"This was an opportunity for genuine engagement with local councils and mana whenua, but the Government deliberately limited the scope of the group so it posed no threat to its bottom lines on three waters.

"There was widespread hope that working party feedback might result in real change to the policy, and our group even commissioned and presented alternative models that we believed meet Government and community objectives.

"Even the small movement on the ownership side falls short of what is needed," she said.

"Mayor Goff in his minority view makes the point well when he says, 'with ownership comes rights, responsibilities, and obligations'.

"Ownership needs to be reflected in democratic accountability and this proposal would lead to the loss of direct accountability and control the people of Auckland have over water service entities through their elected representatives.

"Quite apart from bizarrely separating ownership from the value of the assets, the Working Group has recommended that the sole right that goes with ownership is the right to vote on some future speculative privatisation.

"All other ownership rights are stripped from councils and the communities that they democratically represent.

“Whichever way you cut it this proposal remains, at its heart, simply a confiscation of community assets without compensation, everything else is window-dressing. This is simply not acceptable,” said Mayor Worboys.

“Sadly, as we’ve maintained all along, the working group was hamstrung by the terms of reference. It’s a triumph of process over substance.”

The working group’s feedback has been publicly released and is now with Local Government Minister, Nanaia Mahuta.

“From the pre-determination based on flawed analysis, the ignored consultation, the broken promises, the silencing of LGNZ and now the limiting of this working group, this has been a flawed and undemocratic process from the very outset which will lead to poor outcomes for New Zealanders unless the pause button is pushed.”

Communities 4 Local Democracy has presented two alternative three waters models - council owned with stronger regulation, and a new council owned enterprise (COE) model.

The action group believes both of these models meet all of the Government’s bottom line objectives – ranging from meaningful partnerships with mana whenua to appropriate balance sheet separation.

“It’s now widely accepted that the Government’s ‘one size fits none’ model won’t deliver the lasting, long term change needed in the three waters sector, it is only guaranteed to last as long until the next change in government. This is not a recipe for delivering a stable investment climate,” said Worboys.

“Our models are common-sense and community oriented ways to cost effectively meet all the requirements for the Government, have broad cross party support and could be used by local communities to develop services that work for their unique needs.

“Our members have been voted in by our local communities to look after their infrastructure and provide quality services and we need to represent their views to the Government,” said Mayor Worboys.

For more information about Communities 4 Local Democracy He hapori mō te Manapori and its models for better water services, visit www.communities4localdemocracy.co.nz