



KAIKŌURA
DISTRICT COUNCIL



MARLBOROUGH
DISTRICT COUNCIL

10 August 2026

Record No: 26161772
File Ref: D050-007-01

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform
Chris.Bishop@parliament.govt.nz

Hon Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government
S.Watts@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Ministers

Marlborough District Council and Kaikōura District Council Head Start Outline Proposal

On behalf of Marlborough District Council and Kaikōura District Council, we submit this joint Head Start Outline Proposal and seek approval to proceed to the detailed design phase of the Government's Simplifying Local Government programme.

We believe that this proposal meets the objectives of Simplifying local Government, and will provide a practical, locally led pathway to a simpler and more effective system of local government for both Marlborough and Kaikōura. Building on the strong social, economic, environmental, and governance links between Marlborough and Kaikōura, it would establish a single extended unitary authority for the north-eastern South Island from 2028.

This proposal supports the objectives of the Head Start pathway through a single planning authority, integrated regional and territorial functions, and a coherent spatial planning framework. By extending an established unitary authority model, it simplifies governance, reduces institutional complexity, and strengthens accountability and decision-making.

Successful reform must improve efficiency without weakening community identity or representation. Maintaining local voice has been a guiding principle throughout the development of this proposal. The governance arrangements provide dedicated representation for Kaikōura that ensures the community of Kaikōura retains a strong local voice within a larger and more capable organisation.

Both of our communities and elected members have supported progressing further work on the merger provided their concerns about representation, financial arrangements, and local identity are addressed. Where we can, we have looked to address these issues in our proposal, but some matters will require further analysis during the detailed design phase, such as the transfer and funding of regional functions, the treatment of existing liabilities, and the implications of recent storm recovery costs in Kaikōura.

The proposal offers a credible and achievable pathway for implementation. Rather than creating an entirely new governance structure, it builds on Marlborough's established unitary authority capability, systems, and experience. This approach reduces implementation risk and provides confidence that the new arrangements can be in place for the 2028 local elections.

The proposal identifies where Government support is needed to progress the develop of the detailed proposal, help to manage the risk of the transition or avoid incurring costs for activities that will be superseded by this proposal. These include:

- Enabling both councils to begin work on spatial planning arrangements based on the boundaries of the proposed unitary authority
- Deferring or exempting the requirement for Marlborough District Council (MDC) undertake a representation review of MDC current governance arrangements
- Support to address the potential affordability impacts of transferring those regional costs from Canterbury to Marlborough
- Funding support for reasonable transition costs and the funding of technical assistance to ensure ratepayers continue to see the benefit of the proposed reform.

Overall, the proposal supports the Government's objectives of simplifying local government, strengthening planning and infrastructure delivery, and improving long-term organisational capability and resilience. We therefore recommend that Cabinet approves our proposal so that Marlborough District Council and Kaikōura District Council may proceed to the next stage of detailed design and community engagement.

We welcome the opportunity provided through the Head Start pathway and look forward to working with Ministers and officials as this work progresses.

Yours sincerely,



NADINE TAYLOR
MAYOR,
MARLBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL



CRAIG MACKLE
MAYOR,
KAIKŌURA DISTRICT COUNCIL