



Our reference
F19/13/03-D21/26182

21 May 2026

Notice of Meeting

Notice is hereby given that, in accordance with Standing Order 8.5, an **Extraordinary** Meeting of Council has been called for **2.00pm** on **Tuesday, 26 May 2026**, to consider the Heads of Agreement as part of the Government's Head Start Process. This meeting will be held in the **Council Chambers, Stratford District Council, 63 Miranda Street, Stratford**.

Additionally, the **Policy and Services** Meeting of Council will be held in the **Council Chambers, Stratford District Council, 63 Miranda Street, Stratford**, on **Tuesday 26 May 2026**, beginning at **3.00pm**.

The timetable is as follows:

11.30am	Workshop Long Term Plan – Early Conversations
12.30pm	Lunch break for Councillors
2.00pm	Extraordinary Meeting of Council Heads of Agreement as part of the Government's Head Start Process.
3.00pm	Policy and Services Committee

Yours faithfully

Sven Hanne
Chief Executive

2026 - Agenda - Extraordinary - May (Heads Start Process)



26 May 2026 02:00 PM

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AGENDA

Extraordinary



F25/96/05 – D26/19117

Date: Tuesday 26 May 2026

Venue: Council Chambers, 63 Miranda Street, Stratford

1. Welcome

- 1.1 **Opening Karakia**
D21/40748 Page 4
- 1.2 **Health and Safety Message**
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2. Apologies

3. Declarations of members interest

Elected members to declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest relating to items on this agenda.

4. Decision Report - Heads of Agreement - the Government's Head Start Process. D26/18987 Page 6

Recommendations

- 1. THAT the report be received.
- 2. THAT the Council approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference, or

THAT the Council approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference with amendments, or

THAT the Council does not approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference.

Recommended Reason

The matter for consideration by the Council is the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships (FLGP) Programme, Heads of Agreement and the associated FLGP Oversight (Joint) Committee Terms of Reference.

Not agreeing to participate in the Head Start pathway would result in the Council being subject to the backstop approach, whereby the Government would determine the future structure and arrangements for the Council.

/
Moved/Seconded

5. Closing Karakia D21/40748 Page 35



TE KAUNIHERA Ā ROHE O
WHAKAAHURANGI
STRATFORD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Our reference
F19/13/03-D21/40748

Karakia

Kia uruuru mai
Ā hauora
Ā haukaha
Ā haumāia
Ki runga, Ki raro
Ki roto, Ki waho
Rire rire hau Paimārire

I draw in (to my being)
The reviving essence
The strengthening essence
The essence of courage
Above, Below
Within, Around
Let there be peace.



TE KAUNIHERA Ā ROHE O
WHAKAAHURANGI
STRATFORD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Our reference
F19/13/03-D22/17082

Health and Safety Message

In the event of an emergency, unless guided to an alternative route by staff, please exit through the main entrance. Once outside the building please move towards the War Memorial Centre congregating on the lawn area outside the front of the council building.

If there is an earthquake, please drop, cover and hold where possible. Remain indoors until the shaking stops and you are sure it is safe to exit or remain where you are until further instruction is given.

DECISION REPORT



F25/96/004 – D26/18987

To: Council
From: The Chief Executive
Date: 26 May 2026
Subject: Heads of Agreement - the Government's Head Start Process.

Recommendations

1. THAT the report be received.
2. THAT the Council approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference, or
THAT the Council approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference with amendments, or
THAT the Council does not approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference.

Recommended Reason

The matter for consideration by the Council is the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships (FLGP) Programme, Heads of Agreement and the associated FLGP Oversight (Joint) Committee Terms of Reference.
 Not agreeing to participate in the Head Start pathway would result in the Council being subject to the backstop approach, whereby the Government would determine the future structure and arrangements for the Council.

/
 Moved/Seconded

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 On 5 May, the Government announced the Head Start pathway, giving councils a three-month window to put forward proposals to simplify and strengthen local government in their region. The message from the Government is: "lead your own reform, or we will do it for you. Either way, change is coming".
- 1.2 Council is asked to approve participation in the Head Start reform pathway and the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships (FLGP) programme, including the associated Heads of Agreement and Oversight Committee Terms of Reference.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Head Start pathway gives councils three months from 5 May 2026 to respond to the Government's call to simplify local government. Head Start is voluntary. Councils that do not opt in will face mandatory changes under the backstop approach, which will be implemented by the Government.
- 2.2 Two or more territorial and/or unitary authorities may submit a proposal to establish a new unitary authority covering part or all of the region. Regional councils cannot submit proposals. Proposals must be submitted by 9 August 2026. The Government's Head Start pathway document is attached as an appendix to this report for Elected Members, as it provides further guidance on the proposal to which the Council must respond. Note that Council approval will be sought for any Head Start application that might be lodged on its behalf by 7 August 2026.

- 2.3 Taranaki Councils have been working together to respond to the Government's local government reform and responding to the Head Start pathway. The programme will establish joint governance and a shared work programme across the four Taranaki councils.
- 2.4 Council is asked to approve participation in the Head Start reform pathway and the FLGP programme, including the associated Heads of Agreement and Oversight Committee Terms of Reference. The New Plymouth District Council, South Taranaki District and Taranaki Regional Councils are also considering this matter on 26 May 2026.

3. Local Government Act 2002 - Section 10

Under section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002, the Council's purpose is to "enable democratic local decision making by and on behalf of communities; as well as promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities now and into the future"			
Does the recommended option meet the purpose of the Local Government 4 well-beings? And which:			Yes
Social	Economic	Environmental	Cultural
✓	✓	✓	✓

This matter is considered important and will affect all four well-beings once the Council's response to the Government's call on the Head Start pathway has been agreed.

4. Background

Local Government Reform

- 4.1 In November 2025, the Government released a legislative reform proposal titled "Simplifying Local Government". The proposal outlines a two-step national approach:
- Replace elected regional councillors with a board of district mayors – a Combined Territories Board (CTB) which would be responsible for governance of the regional council.
 - Regional reorganisation plans – the CTB would develop a Regional Reorganisation Plan over two years, identifying opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, potentially including shared services, restructuring, or amalgamation.
- 4.2 In December 2025, the Government also introduced the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill as part of a wide-ranging reform programme intended to repeal and replace the Resource Management Act 1991. These bills:
- Form a new system designed to streamline planning processes, increase national consistency, enable economic development and land supply, and strengthen environmental protection and public health outcomes; and
 - Require regions to have one Regional Spatial Plan containing a Natural Environment Plan (generally covering Regional Council functions) and Land Use Plans (to replace District Plans).

Head Start Reform Pathway

- 4.3 On 5 May 2026, the Government announced the Head Start reform pathway option for regions to consider participating in. The Government “noted that a number of councils and mayors have signalled that they wish to reorganise faster, and that the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform and the Minister of Local Government (joint Ministers) intend to support councils to do this”.
- 4.4 In an associated press release, Minister Bishop stated “Our message to councils is simple: lead your own reform, or we will do it for you. Either way, change is coming”. To be eligible, a proposal must be submitted by two or more territorial authorities (city or district councils). Regional councils cannot submit proposals, but existing unitary authorities (except Auckland Council) may be included. The Government’s Head Start pathway document is attached as an appendix.
- 4.5 The Government has also confirmed that the regional council governance arm will stay in place until the October 2028 local elections.

Backstop reform pathway

- 4.6 Regions and councils not progressing through the Head Start pathway will be subject to a compulsory “backstop” process. During the transition, regional council governance would be exercised by an interim body, such as with a board of mayors, Crown Commissioners, or a combination of both with the precise model to be confirmed in 2027. The Backstop reform pathway models will be informed by the Head Start, feedback from consultation on the Simplifying Local Government proposals, and further advice from officials.
- 4.7 If a valid Head Start pathway proposal is not able to be submitted by the Council or if Council chooses not to be involved or withdraws from the pathway in the future, the Backstop would be applied to Council.

Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships

- 4.8 To deliver this programme, a Joint Committee is proposed (FLGP Oversight Committee), and a Heads of Agreement has been developed for consideration and approval by all Taranaki councils that choose to be involved.
- 4.9 The Heads of Agreement, is between New Plymouth District Council, South Taranaki District Council, Stratford District Council, and Taranaki Regional Council to form the governance structures including the FLGP Oversight Committee and a FLGP Steering Group, with defined principles, dispute resolution, and a no surprises approach.
- 4.10 The FLGP will deliver a phased approach from programme initiation to the development of a detailed Implementation Plan for a new local government model in Taranaki. This will focus on confirming the evidence base, future state definition and preferred configuration to meet the Head Start deadlines of an outline proposal to Cabinet in August 2026 and a detailed proposal in March 2027.

Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Governance

- 4.11 The draft Heads of Agreement is an agreement between all four councils to progress work on Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships and outlines the principles, way of working together and a commitment to undertaking the work to respond to the proposal to the Government.
- 4.12 As part of these arrangements, the Heads of Agreement proposes the establishment of a Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Oversight Committee. The proposed Oversight Committee provides a statutory joint committee with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and delegations to ensure appropriate decision-making, accountability, and risk management.
- 4.13 While the proposed Oversight Committee has a similar membership composition, it is a new joint committee established by the participating councils and is not meant to be the Taranaki Mayoral Forum acting in a different capacity.

- 4.14 Each council must now consider the Head Start reform pathway, FLGP programme and Heads of Agreement and decide if they wish to be party to the agreement and the associated governance, approach and cost sharing arrangements. If so, they should approve the Heads of Agreement and Joint Committee Terms of Reference.

Future Local Government Partnerships Steering Group

- 4.15 The draft Heads of Agreement also includes a Terms of Reference for a Future Local Government Partnerships Steering Group. The membership of the Steering Group includes two members from each participating council including the Chief Executive or their alternate and will be chaired by the TRC Chief Executive.

5. Consultative Process

5.1 Public Consultation - Section 82

Community engagement and/or consultation will occur as future work.

5.2 Māori Consultation - Section 81

Iwi engagement and/or consultation will occur as future work.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1 There is significant risk associated with responding to the Government's proposal. The timeframe is tight, and work must align with the Government's reform direction and deadlines. Responding to the Government's call will require substantial resources and effort. It is also essential that the community's voice is heard, as there may be concerns about "amalgamation by stealth" or a reduced local voice.

7. Sustainability Consideration

Not applicable for this decision but would need to be considered as part of future work.

8. Decision Making Process - Section 79

8.1 Direction

	Explain
Is there a strong link to Council's strategic direction, Long Term Plan/District Plan?	This decision will impact the way the Council delivers its services and manages district planning in the future.
What relationship does it have to the communities current and future needs for infrastructure, regulatory functions, or local public services?	As noted above, this will significantly affect the way the Council delivers services to the community.

8.2 Data

Not applicable to this decision.

8.3 Significance

	Yes/No	Explain
Is the proposal significant according to the Significance and Engagement Policy in the Long Term Plan?	Yes	Consultation and discussion with the public will occur at a later date.
Is it: • considered a strategic asset; or	Yes	This will affect our strategic assets.

• above the financial thresholds in the Significance and Engagement Policy; or	Yes	Will be considered as part of future decisions.
• impacting on a CCO stakeholding; or	Yes	Will be considered as part of future decisions.
• a change in level of service; or	Yes	Will be considered as part of future decisions.
• creating a high level of controversy; or	Yes	The community will want to have their voice heard in any future decisions.
• possible that it could have a high impact on the community?	Yes	It will alter the way services are delivered.

In terms of the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, is this proposal of high, medium, or low significance?		
High	Medium	Low
✓		

8.4 Options

- Option 1:** Approve participation in the FLGP Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference.
- Option 2:** Approve participation in the FLGP Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference with amendments.
- Option 3:** Do not approve participation in the FLGP Programme. Heads of Agreement at this stage.

8.5 Financial

The financial and resourcing implications are not yet clear, however, multiple staff across the region will be required to progress the work including to meet the Head Start pathway timelines.

8.6 Prioritisation & Trade-off

At this stage the decision does not change services; it enables development and engagement on potential future options in line with the Head Start pathway.

8.7 Legal Issues

None at this stage, but they are likely to emerge for future decisions.

8.8 Policy Issues - Section 80

Council's decision-making must be consistent with the Local Government Act 2002 (including governance arrangements, collaboration, and consultation/engagement requirements where applicable). Establishing the Joint Committee and FLGP programme aligns with Council's meeting procedures and delegations. The decision does not, of itself, change service levels or statutory functions; it establishes a framework to investigate options.



Kate Whareaitu
Acting Chief Executive

Date 22 May 2026

HEADS OF AGREEMENT

Between

TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL

And

NEW PLYMOUTH DISTRICT COUNCIL

And

SOUTH TARANAKI DISTRICT COUNCIL

And

STRATFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

For

**THE TARANAKI FUTURE LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME**

Version 1.0

ADOPTED [INSERT DATE]

PARTIES

Name	Taranaki Regional Council (TRC)
	New Plymouth District Council (NPDC)
	South Taranaki District Council (STDC)
	Stratford District Council (SDC)

Collectively parties are referred to as **THE PARTIES**.

PURPOSE

- A. The *Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships* programme (**the FLGP**) is a programme of work with the purpose of driving the Parties' ambitions for a new transformative local government model to improve the effective delivery of council functions and services, while maintaining effective expression of local democracy, and to progress this work at pace in alignment with the Head Start reform pathway signalled by Central Government in May 2026.

BACKGROUND

- B. The Parties share an ambition for thriving, resilient Taranaki communities. The FLGP provides a practical framework to combine strengths, test new approaches and design governance and service delivery arrangements that are more sustainable and aligned to community needs, within increasingly constrained financial and economic conditions. This includes a focus on delivering services and regulatory functions that maximise public value through greater effectiveness and efficiency.
- C. The Parties also recognise the need to prepare proactively for long-term pressures, including climate change, demographic shifts, infrastructure demands and productivity constraints. In responding to these challenges, any future service approach must support long-term resilience and prosperity, while maintaining strong local democracy, protecting community representation, and enabling meaningful participation by communities of interest and iwi partners.
- D. Continuity of critical services is a non-negotiable requirement through any change process, including retaining the capability and local knowledge needed for effective delivery. The Parties further acknowledge the Government's local government reform programme, and the need for the FLGP to remain aligned with evolving legislative requirements, including the Head Start pathway.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- E. The Parties agree that the objectives of the FLGP are to drive the development of a locally led model of local government that better:

- a. Supports the development of thriving and resilient Taranaki communities.
 - b. Enables the region to prepare for the long-term challenges it faces including climate change, demographic change and sustainable economic development.
 - c. Provides for an inclusive model of local democracy and community representation that maintains the trust, and builds on the strengths, of local Taranaki communities.
 - d. Recognises and respects the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi in a manner consistent with section 4 of the Local Government Act 2002 and complies with any obligations imposed on the Parties by settlement legislation¹ and/or government reform.
 - e. Allows for the cost-effective and efficient delivery of services and infrastructure designed to meet the changing needs of Taranaki communities, including ensuring the continuity of critical services delivered by the Parties.
 - f. Enables financially sustainable local government operations and reflects the need for a fair and equitable allocation of scarce public resources.
- F. A secondary objective, beyond the Parties' own ambitions for a better local government model for Taranaki, is to develop options and recommendations that are achievable within accelerated Central Government timeframes, including readiness for Cabinet decision or legislative processes.

PRINCIPLES

- G. In initiating and progressing the FLGP, the Parties acknowledge that there will be difficult issues and options to navigate and discuss. In addressing these, the Parties are committed to using evidence-based insights to make informed decisions, even when tough decisions are required. To this end the Parties, will act in a manner based on the following principles:
- a. Good Faith: The Parties will act in the spirit of partnership, courtesy, timeliness and mutual respect.
 - b. Open Mind: The Parties will not pre-determine a preferred future state, while recognising the need to respond pragmatically to Government direction and accelerated reform pathways.
 - c. Independence: The Parties respect the statutory responsibilities and democratic mandate of all Parties. All Parties retain the right to reach its own decisions.
 - d. Community Focus: The Parties will ensure there is meaningful and inclusive public engagement.

¹ Specifically, the Ngāruahine Claims Settlement Act 2016, the Taranaki Iwi Claims Settlement Act 2016, the Te Atiawa Claims Settlement Act 2016, and any future settlement legislation that applies in the Taranaki Region.

- e. Iwi Partnership: The Parties will respect and provide for their legal obligations to Māori, including as set out in settlement legislation, and will work collaboratively with iwi partners.
- f. Staff Welfare: The Parties commit to progressing the FLGP in a manner that is empathetic, transparent, and attentive to staff well-being.
- g. Evidence-based: Advice and recommendations will be evidence-based, with key assumptions and information sources clearly identified and recorded.
- h. Public Value: The work of the FLGP will deliver the best possible results, from a public value perspective (i.e. the best available result for the money spent), given the financial constraints that all Parties are operating within.
- i. Open Communication: The Parties commit to open and honest communication and to protect the confidentiality of information provided where required, in accordance with all relevant legal requirements.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

- H. The Parties will appoint a joint committee under Schedule 7, cl 30(1)(b) and 30A of the Local Government Act 2002 to provide governance and direction to the FLGP (**the FLGP Oversight Committee**). The proposed Terms of Reference for the FLGP Oversight Committee are set out in Appendix One.
- I. The Parties will also establish a Future Local Government Partnerships Steering Group (**the FLGP Steering Group**) which will report to the FLGP Oversight Committee and provide operational oversight of the FLGP work programme, while supporting coordinated delivery across the Parties. The roles and functions of the FLGP Steering Group are set out in the Terms of Reference in Appendix Two.

APPROACH

- J. The Parties agree that the FLGP will deliver a phased approach from programme initiation to the development of a detailed Implementation Plan.
- K. The FLGP will accommodate Central Government's Head Start pathway and will allow for outline and detailed proposals to Cabinet in August 2026 and March 2027 respectively (or any other timeframes that may in future be advised by, or agreed with, Central Government). This may require phases to be undertaken in parallel or iteratively to meet accelerated programme timelines.
- L. The FLGP will include defined decision gateways aligned, where appropriate, to Cabinet processes. These will focus on confirming the evidence base, future state definition and preferred configuration.
- M. The Parties will share any costs of the FLGP in proportions to be agreed between them from time to time.

NO SURPRISES

- N. The Parties will keep each other informed early, particularly where emerging risks or issues may affect scope, timing, cost or public confidence in the FLGP.
- O. The Parties, with all Parties utilising a specified person of their choosing for this function, will jointly approve external communications (including media statements) relating to the FLGP, and they will use reasonable endeavours to provide each other an opportunity to review communications prior to release.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

- P. The Parties agree and acknowledge that for the FLGP to be effective, the resolution of issues between them must be addressed in a constructive, co-operative and timely manner that is consistent with the principles set out in clause [G](#).
- Q. The formal dispute resolution process is as follows:
 - a. if the Parties cannot reach agreement or if one Party considers that there has been a breach of this agreement, then that Party may give notice to the other Parties that they are in dispute.
 - b. as soon as practicable upon receipt of the notice, a meeting of suitably senior officers from the Parties will meet in good faith to resolve the dispute.
 - c. if the dispute has not been resolved within 10 working days after receipt of the notice, the TRC Chair and the NPDC, SDC, STDC Mayors and will meet to work in good faith to resolve the issue; and
 - d. if the dispute has not been resolved within a further 10 working days, or at any other point as agreed during the dispute resolution process, the Parties may refer the matter to binding or non-binding mediation or arbitration.

REVIEW

- R. The Parties will undertake a review of this agreement and the FLGP in September 2026 and on an as-needed basis. Any variation must be in writing and approved by all the Parties.

BINDING AGREEMENT AND NO PRIVACY

- S. The Parties intend the agreement to be binding as to participation, process and governance arrangements only, and it does not bind any Party as to the adoption of any future model, policy or decision.
- T. Notwithstanding clause [S](#), nothing in this agreement limits or affects any Party's performance or exercise of its functions, duties, or powers under any enactment.
- U. Other than as expressly provided for in this agreement, this agreement is not intended to confer a benefit on any person or class of persons who is not a Party to it.

COMMENCEMENT, TERM, TERMINATION AND WITHDRAWAL

- V. This agreement commences on the date on which it has been signed by, and approved or ratified by resolution of, at least two Parties, after which it will commence in relation to each additional Party on the date on which that Party signs and approves or ratifies it by resolution, and will continue until the earlier of:
- a. successful completion of the FLGP, being the finalisation of the Implementation Plan referred to in clause [J](#);
 - b. three Parties withdraw from the agreement utilising the process specified in clause [W](#); or
 - c. all Parties agree in writing to terminate the FLGP.
- W. Any party may withdraw from this agreement at any time by providing written notice to the other parties. The effective date of withdrawal will be as specified in the notice, but may not be before the date written notice is provided.
- X. Any Party who withdraws from the agreement is liable to their share of the costs incurred by the FLGP up to the operative date of their withdrawal. When a Party withdraws from this agreement, the remaining Parties will agree a new cost sharing ratio between them.
- Y. Any Party who withdraws from the agreement may join it again from the date on which that Party signs and approves or ratifies it by resolution. Upon rejoining, the Parties will recalculate the cost sharing arrangements to reflect the period during which the Party was not participating, including allocating to that Party an agreed share of costs incurred over that period

SIGNATURES

SIGNED for and on behalf of Taranaki Regional Council by

SIGNED for and on behalf of New Plymouth District Council by

SIGNED for and on behalf of South Taranaki District Council by

SIGNED for and on behalf of Stratford District Council by

APPENDIX ONE: TARANAKI FUTURE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS FLGP OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference for Future Local Government Partnerships Oversight Committee

Purpose

1. The purpose of the Future Local Government Partnerships Oversight Committee (**the FLGP Oversight Committee**) is to provide governance direction, and oversee the effective and efficient delivery of, the Future Local Government Partnerships programme (**the FLGP**), as described in the FLGP Heads of Agreement.

Membership

2. The FLGP Oversight Committee is a joint committee of the Taranaki Regional Council, the New Plymouth District Council, the South Taranaki District Council and the Stratford District Council (together **the Councils**). Its members comprise:
 - Chair of the Taranaki Regional Council
 - Mayor of New Plymouth District
 - Mayor of South Taranaki District
 - Mayor of Stratford District
3. The FLGP Oversight Committee has authority to appoint additional non-voting advisory members to the Committee.
4. The Chair of the FLGP Oversight Committee shall be the Chair of the Taranaki Mayoral Forum. The Deputy Chair will be appointed at the first meeting of the FLGP Oversight Committee.

Role and Functions

5. The intention is that the FLGP Oversight Committee has the following responsibilities:
 - overseeing implementation of the FLGP, including the approval of FLGP phases, deliverables and programme budget, including the share to be funded by each party
 - upholding the principles set out in the FLGP Heads of Agreement.
 - overseeing the development of the FLGP deliverables, including accepting them as complete.
 - overseeing public engagement and/or consultation related to the FLGP.
 - providing recommendations to each Council on the preferred future state configuration, and any proposal under the Head Start pathway
 - reviewing the FLGP in accordance with the FLGP Heads of Agreement.

- supporting, and providing input into, the development of the Councils' long-term plans and annual plans as far as they relate to the FLGP if required; and
 - undertaking engagement and advocacy activities with central government, other local authorities and other relevant agencies in relation to local government reform and the FLGP programme, including the development and lodgement of relevant submissions.
6. The FLGP Oversight Committee may not delegate any of its responsibilities, duties or powers.

Power to Recommend to the Councils

7. The intention is that the FLGP Oversight Committee may recommend to the Councils:
- a. a preferred future state configuration for local government in Taranaki.
 - b. Any proposals under the Head Start pathway.
 - c. any changes to the FLGP Heads of Agreement or this Terms of Reference; and
 - d. the termination of the FLGP Heads of Agreement.

Delegated Authority – Power to Act

8. The intention is that the FLGP Oversight Committee will:
- a. Have all of the powers necessary for it to discharge its responsibilities under clause 5 of these Terms of Reference, but will not have any power referred to in clause 32(1)(a) to (h) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002, i.e. to:
 - i. make a rate
 - ii. make a bylaw
 - iii. borrow money, or purchase or dispose of assets, other than in accordance with the long-term plan
 - iv. adopt a long-term plan, or annual plan or annual report
 - v. appoint a Chief Executive
 - vi. adopt policies required to be adopted and consulted on under the Local Government Act 2002 in association with a long-term plan or developed for the purpose of a local governance statement
 - vii. adopt a remuneration and employment policy.
 - b. Have the ability to appoint subcommittees, working parties or advisory groups to deal with any of its responsibilities under these Terms of Reference

Chairperson

9. The Chairperson is responsible for:
- a. the efficient functioning of the FLGP Oversight Committee.
 - b. setting the agenda for FLGP Oversight Committee meetings; and
 - c. ensuring that all members of the FLGP Oversight Committee receive sufficient timely information to enable them to be effective Committee members.

10. The Chairperson will be the link between the FLGP Oversight Committee, the FLGP Steering Group, and Council staff working on the FLGP as may be required.

Terms of Membership

11. Members of the FLGP Oversight Committee are expected to regularly report back to their Councils on matters discussed at Committee meetings.

Quorum

12. The quorum at any meeting of the FLGP Oversight Committee shall be half of the members.

Frequency

13. The FLGP Oversight Committee will meet at least six-weekly. Additional meetings may also be held over and above the regular meetings as and when required as determined by the Chair.

Meeting Agenda items

14. Requests for items to be included on the agenda for each FLGP Oversight Committee meeting should be made to the Chief Executive of the Taranaki Regional Council at least three weeks before the scheduled meeting date.
15. Matters of general business can be considered for decision.

Term

16. The FLGP Oversight Committee will cease to operate upon the termination of the FLGP Heads of Agreement.

External communications

17. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are the authorised spokespersons for the FLGP Oversight Committee in all matters where the Committee has authority or a particular interest.
18. All FLGP Oversight Committee members are bound by the no-surprises provisions set out in clauses [N](#) and [O](#) of the FLGP Heads of Agreement.
19. Formal communications from the FLGP Oversight Committee in the exercise of its business will be undertaken by the Chair of the FLGP Oversight Committee, or the Chief Executive of the Taranaki Regional Council or their delegate.

Conduct of Affairs

20. The FLGP Oversight Committee is a joint committee constituted under clauses 30(1)(b) and 30A of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002 and shall conduct its affairs in accordance with the Local Government Act 2002, the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968, Taranaki Regional Council's Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct.

Public Access and Reporting

21. The committee is subject to usual LGOIMA processes requirements and safeguards
22. The FLGP Oversight Committee shall ensure that minutes are recorded of all its proceedings.

Committee Member Accountabilities

23. FLGP Oversight Committee members are accountable for:
- a. providing information, guidance and advice as appropriate for a governance role, while refraining from being involved in management or operational level decisions and matters.
 - b. contributing to the decision-making processes of the FLGP Oversight Committee as provided for in these terms of reference and relevant legislation.
 - c. participating in the business of the FLGP Oversight Committee in accordance with the Principles set out in the FLGP Heads of Agreement and respecting the confidentiality of any information provided or shared.
 - d. preparing for and attending scheduled FLGP Oversight Committee meetings as a priority; and
 - e. raising any questions or concerns about the operation of the FLGP Oversight Committee with the Chair.

APPENDIX TWO: TARANAKI FUTURE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS STEERING GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference for Future Local Government Partnerships Steering Group

Purpose

1. The purpose of the Future Local Government Partnerships Steering Group (**the FLGP Steering Group**) is to provide internal oversight over, and operational direction to, the functioning and delivery of the Future Local Government Partnerships programme (**the FLGP**).

Membership

2. The FLGP Steering Group comprises (the Members):
 - Chief Executive of the Taranaki Regional Council or their alternate
 - Chief Executive of the New Plymouth District Council or their alternate
 - Chief Executive of the South Taranaki District Council or their alternate
 - Chief Executive of the Stratford District Council or their alternate
 - One additional member per council as appointed by the council's respective chief executive
3. The Chair of the FLGP Steering Group shall be the Chief Executive of the Taranaki Regional Council.
4. Council officers and relevant technical experts will attend meetings of the FLGP Steering Group on an as needed and advisory basis.

Responsibilities

5. The FLGP Steering Group has the following responsibilities:
 - oversee the planning, execution and monitoring of the FLGP work programme and budget.
 - inform policy, implementation and resourcing decisions.
 - ensure programme alignment with the strategic objectives set out in clause [E](#) of the Heads of Agreement.
 - oversee the management of FLGP risks and issues.
 - provide other guidance and input as needed to support the FLGP.
 - prepare for and attend scheduled FLGP Steering Group meetings as a priority; and
 - raise any questions or concerns about the operation of the FLGP Steering Group with the Chair.

Term

6. The FLGP Steering Group will cease to operate upon the termination of the FLGP Heads of Agreement.

Operational Provisions

7. FLGP Steering Group meetings will be at least monthly, unless otherwise agreed by the Members.

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8. A quorum will consist of half the members if the number of members (including vacancies) is even or a majority if the number (including vacancies) is odd.
9. Recommendations will be made by consensus wherever possible. Where consensus cannot be reached, a simple majority is required with the Chair (or Deputy Chair in the Chair's absence) being the decider in the event of a tie.
10. The Members agree to work in good faith and in an open, honest and transparent manner to achieve the Group's purpose. Members will operate under their respective organisational codes of conduct. The confidentiality of any information provided or shared will be fully respected by all Members.
11. All agendas and papers will be provided to the Members at least five working days ahead of any meeting.
12. The FLGP Steering Group will undertake a self-review process each year, as necessary, and as part of any review of the FLGP itself, to consider opportunities to improve its effectiveness and contribution to the work of the FLGP.

DRAFT

Head Start pathway

Simplifying Local Government



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Ministerial foreword

Local government plays a central role in shaping how New Zealand grows and develops. Councils understand their communities and regions, and they are key partners with central government in delivering housing, infrastructure, and environmental management.

The Government knows councils are managing significant change, with multiple reforms happening at once. Alongside implementing a new planning system, councils told us through submissions on the [Simplifying Local Government proposal](#) that they wanted greater flexibility, including the ability to shape future governance arrangements themselves and, where they are ready, to move more quickly.

The Head Start pathway is a direct response to that feedback. It provides a voluntary, streamlined option for councils that want to lead the transition early, while continuing to deliver the new planning system. Head Start enables locally led solutions, so councils can set their own direction and pace rather than waiting for wider reform settings to apply.

The Government has been clear that regional governance needs to be simpler and more effective over time. Head Start is voluntary. Councils that do not opt in will not face mandatory change until after the 2028 local elections, giving them space to focus on delivering the first generation of plans under the new planning system.

Together, the Head Start pathway and the backstop approach provide certainty and confidence, supporting councils to lead where they are ready, while setting the system up to work better for the long term and delivering the new planning system.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Bishop'.

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Watts'.

Hon Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government

The Simplifying Local Government proposal

In November we consulted on a draft proposal to establish regional boards of mayors, replacing regional councillors, to lead the development of reorganisation plans for a region. The proposal can be found at dia.govt.nz/Simplifying-Local-Government#Proposal.

What we heard

Consultation on this proposal resulted in more than 1,150 submissions, including around 70 from councils and local government sector bodies, and around 60 from iwi/Māori organisations. Submitters generally agreed with the need for reform but raised issues with the specific proposal.

There was more support for regional reorganisation plans than combined territories boards (CTBs). Many submitters had concerns about council capacity to progress these reforms at the same time as other government initiatives. Some suggested changes to the timing, membership, or remit of CTBs.

Many submitters supported keeping regional councillors in place until the 2028 local elections – as a practical measure to support mayors and maintain democratic legitimacy.

Submissions highlighted the important relationships regional councils have with iwi Māori, and the Treaty settlement redress arrangements that relate to regional council functions.

Other issues raised in submissions included:

- preserving and supporting local democracy, including balancing urban and rural interests, with some support for Crown observers
- retention of regional service delivery, particularly environmental management and river catchment management
- mayoral workloads and adopting a regional perspective; and
- funding and process concerns.

Councils told us they wanted greater flexibility to take locally led approaches to reform. Some councils and mayors have been clear that they are ready to move faster, building on existing regional arrangements such as mayoral forums rather than establishing a board of the region's mayors.

The Head Start pathway responds directly to that feedback, giving councils that are ready the opportunity to take the lead, shape their own regional solutions, and progress at pace.

What we are doing

We have listened to feedback and refined our approach.

We will introduce a streamlined Head Start pathway for councils that are ready to develop and progress reorganisation proposals, with the aim of creating unitary authorities within a region through bespoke legislation.

We will legislate for councils not progressing through Head Start to enter a compulsory backstop process after the 2028 local elections.

We will replace regional councillors at the 2028 local elections with an interim body (for example, a board of mayors, Crown commissioners, or a combination of both). The precise model will be confirmed later. Retaining regional councillors until the 2028 local elections will provide capacity during a period of substantial change.

How this fits with the new planning system

We know councils are navigating significant change, with multiple reforms happening at once.

The Head Start pathway gives councils that are ready to move early the confidence to get on with delivering the new planning system now, while they shape the governance arrangements ahead of the 2028 local elections.

By progressively aligning governance with how the new planning system is designed to work, Head Start enables councils to lead the transition on their own terms, rather than waiting for wider reform to commence.

Delivering the new planning system remains core business for all councils and continues in parallel, whichever pathway councils choose.

Head Start pathway

From 5 May 2026, two or more territorial and/or unitary authorities can submit an outline proposal to establish a new unitary authority covering part or all of a region. Proposals will need to be submitted by 9 August 2026.

A unitary authority combines the functions of a regional council and a city or district council into a single organisation. This can simplify governance, reduce duplication, and improve regional coordination.

Councils participating in the Head Start pathway will continue implementing the new planning system alongside any reorganisation activity.

Who can submit an outline proposal?

Any two or more territorial and/or unitary authorities (except for Auckland) including cross-boundary groupings, may submit if they represent a majority of either the:

- directly affected territorial authorities, or
- population across directly affected areas.

Proposals cannot be submitted by minority groupings, individual territorial authorities or unitary authorities, regional councils, individuals or other organisations.

Eligibility criteria

Proposals must be submitted by two or more territorial authorities that together represent a majority of either directly affected territorial authorities or a majority of the population across directly affected districts. The following examples illustrate how this may work.

What types of reorganisation can be proposed?

Outline proposals must provide for the establishment of new unitary authorities. The most straightforward approach is for all councils in a region to combine to form a single unitary authority.

We will also consider outline proposals for subregional unitary authorities and potential cross-boundary proposals, where:

- existing territorial authorities are combined and regional council functions are transferred
- the proposed arrangements would result in fewer local authorities overall
- the proposed arrangements would deliver clearer accountability and effective delivery of key functions, including regional planning, transport, and catchment management.

More than one unitary authority in a region is only likely to be approved if:

- the region is large and has more complex issues
- the proposal clearly meets the criteria and doesn't lead to the fragmentation of key regional functions where collaboration is required, such as catchment management.

Working with iwi/Māori

Treaty settlement arrangements will continue to be provided for. We will work with applicants and iwi/Māori affected by the Head Start pathway to support the continuation of effective relationships and uphold settlement redress.

Councils will be expected to engage with relevant post-settlement governance entities (PSGEs) to demonstrate how existing Treaty settlement arrangements could be transferred to new unitary authorities with equivalent effect. The Government will also work with PSGEs directly on proposed arrangements. Councils will have an opportunity to further engage with Māori as they continue to develop outline proposals ahead of final decisions in 2027.

Example 1: Majority of directly affected councils

A region contains three territorial authorities: Council A, Council B and Council C. Council A and Council B jointly submit a proposal that affects Council C.

✓ This proposal would be eligible for consideration because Councils A and B form a majority of the directly affected territorial authorities, regardless of population size.

Example 2: Majority of population

A region contains four territorial authorities: Councils A to D. Councils A and B jointly submit a proposal that also impacts Councils C and D. Councils A and B together represent more than 50% of the population of the directly affected area, even though Council C and Council D are larger in land area.

✓ This proposal would be eligible for consideration because the proposing councils represent a majority of the population, even if they do not represent all councils.

Example 3: Minority of directly affected councils

A region contains five territorial authorities: Councils A to E. Council A and Council B jointly submit a proposal that also affects Councils C, D and E. Councils A and B together do not represent more than 50% of the population or the majority of affected councils of the directly affected area.

✗ This proposal would not be eligible for consideration because, while it involves two councils, it does not represent a majority of councils or population.

Example 4: Subregional unitary authorities

A region contains five territorial authorities: Councils A to E. Council A, Council B, Council C and Council D jointly submit a proposal for two unitaries for the region affecting Council E.

✓ This proposal would be eligible for consideration because the proposing councils are a majority of the directly affected territorial authorities, regardless of population of the directly affected areas.

Example 5: Subregional proposal - part of region

A region contains seven territorial authorities: Councils A to F. Council A, Council B and Council C jointly submit a proposal for a unitary for the three councils within their part of the region. The other four councils are unaffected.

✓ This proposal would be eligible for consideration because there are more than two territorial authorities proposing amalgamation and the majority of territorial authorities and population affected by the proposal are in favour of the proposal. Reorganisation plans for the remainder of the region (Councils D to F) will be required after the 2028 local body elections.

Note: eligibility is not acceptance, and eligible proposals will still need to pass the assessment.

How will outline proposals be assessed?

Five criteria will be used to assess the proposals:



Deliverability: Proposals are realistic and demonstrate how new arrangements can be implemented in a timely manner.



Supports the new planning system: Shows clear support for implementing the new planning system – including progress on spatial and natural environment plan development – and avoids or minimises disruption to that work.



Simplifies local governance: Proposes more efficient regional governance arrangements, consolidating decision-making and improving alignment between a region's councils.



Economies of scale: Supports regional strategic planning and effective delivery of key regional functions (such as transport and catchment management), and demonstrates responsible and affordable asset management, infrastructure investment, and service delivery.



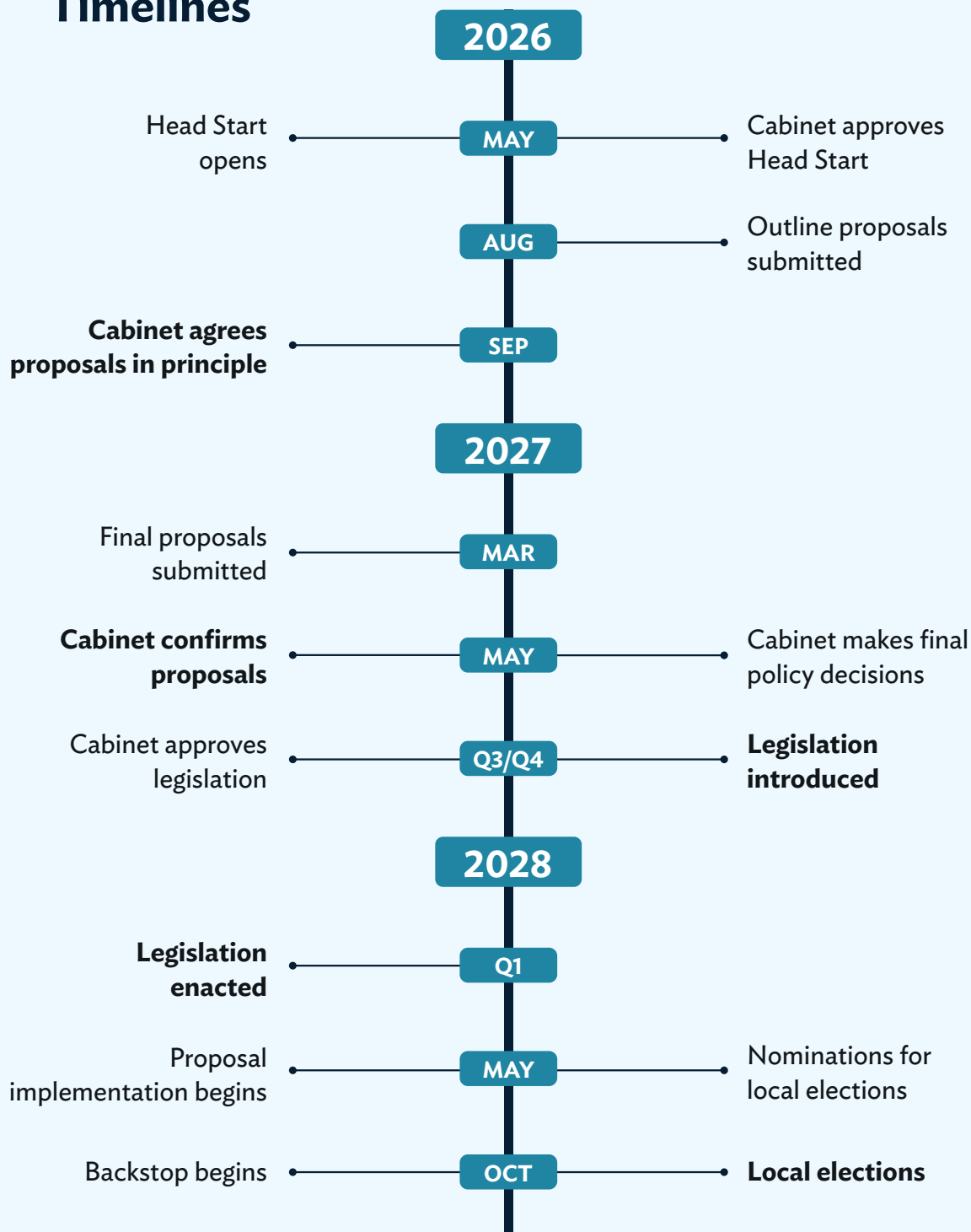
Maintains local voice: Demonstrates fair and effective representation for communities of interest and how decisions will be made at the local level, balancing urban and rural interests.

Next steps for Head Start

Once outline proposals have been assessed, Cabinet will decide which proposals are accepted into the detailed design phase of the Head Start pathway.

Once agreed in principle, any support required to develop detailed reorganisation proposals will be determined with submitters and agreed by Cabinet.

Timelines



Status of regional councillors

We previously proposed replacing regional councillors with boards of mayors.

Submitters suggested that retaining regional councillors until the end of their current elected periods would:

- support the transition to the new planning regime, including the first generation of spatial and natural environment plans
- retain institutional knowledge needed to make the transition
- provide additional governance capacity and capability during a period of substantial change.

It is our intention that regional councillors will not be elected at the 2028 local elections. They will be replaced by an interim body, for example a board of mayors, Crown commissioners, or a hybrid model. We will confirm the exact model in 2027, when successful Head Start proposals are approved.

Current regional councillors will stay on through to the end of the 2028 term to lead regional councils in their roles in the new planning system, particularly regional spatial plans.

Backstop legislation

Progress through the Head Start pathway will help inform the design of backstop arrangements for other regions.

Councils that do not progress through Head Start will continue to focus on delivering the new planning system, including development of the first generation of plans. Reform for those councils will not occur until after the 2028 local elections, through the compulsory backstop process.

This approach gives councils more time to concentrate on planning system implementation before any mandatory governance changes take effect, while still providing a strong indication of when and where future reform will occur.

Regions and councils not progressing through the Head Start pathway will be subject to a backstop process. During the transition, regional council governance would be exercised by an interim body, with the precise model to be confirmed in 2027. Legislation for the backstop will be enacted before nominations open for the 2028 local elections. This will ensure candidates understand any new roles and responsibilities, and electors can vote with clarity.

The final models of governance will be informed by lessons from the Head Start, feedback from consultation on the Simplifying Local Government proposal, and further advice from officials.

Rapid review update

A rapid review of regional council functions was completed to help guide councils during reorganisation planning. It was intended to identify functions that could potentially be centralised or ceased.

The review found that the key opportunities for centralisation are already being considered through existing government work programmes. For example, a national regulator for compliance and enforcement is being considered as part of the new planning system.

The RMA Expert Advisory Group recommended that, in the new planning system, compliance and enforcement functions should be transferred to a national regulator with regional compliance hubs. Policy work on this proposal is expected to be progressed after the Planning and Natural Environment Bills pass. The Government then expects to engage with local authorities and others to discuss the merits of different approaches.

The review concluded that other functions are still best delivered at a regional or local scale. In general, centralisation would involve high transition costs, be disproportionate to the problem identified, and is unlikely to materially improve regional or system outcomes. In some cases, the status quo is functioning effectively or could benefit from targeted modification rather than substantial change.

Transport is one key regional function that requires further consideration as a part of Head Start proposals. Transport responsibilities are currently split across central (NZ Transport Agency) and local government, with territorial authorities responsible for local roading while regional councils are responsible for network planning and public transport.

Outline proposals do not need to resolve all issues relating to any transfer of regional functions. However, proposals should:

- address the need to consolidate regional transport functions (such as in a regional unitary authority, regional joint committee or regional council controlled organisation)
- propose interim arrangements with respect to the new planning system compliance and enforcement functions, until Government decisions have been made
- explain how effective river catchment management can be maintained.

Resources

For further information, including guidance and how to engage with officials and access support, see dia.govt.nz/Simplifying-Local-Government

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Karakia

Kia uruuru mai
Ā hauora
Ā haukaha
Ā haumāia
Ki runga, Ki raro
Ki roto, Ki waho
Rire rire hau Paimārire

I draw in (to my being)
The reviving essence
The strengthening essence
The essence of courage
Above, Below
Within, Around
Let there be peace.