



Representation Review 2024

Have your say | **Kōrero Mai**

SUMMARY REPORT

Overview of answers to the March 2024 Preliminary Representation Review survey



Introduction

At its 31 October 2023 meeting, our Council unanimously voted to establish one or more Māori Wards for the 2025 Local Elections.

This is what has triggered the representation review process, to make sure our communities are fairly and effectively represented at Council. The review does not revisit the decision to establish Māori Wards.

This survey was run to help us understand how our communities feel about key aspects of our current representation structure. The feedback will help to inform our proposal, which will go out for formal consultation later this year. The survey was open from 1-31 of March 2024. Hardcopies were available at our Council offices and District Libraries. The survey received 502 completed responses.

The survey asked nine key questions for public feedback

- Do you think the name of our Council (Thames-Coromandel District Council) accurately reflects the district?
- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I feel I’m well-represented with the current representation arrangements (e.g. wards, number of councillors, etc)”?
- Do you think we should have more, less, or the same number of elected members, to ensure fair and effective representation?
- How do you think our Councillors should be elected?
- Do the current ward boundaries and names make sense to you?
- Do you have any suggested names for our Māori Ward(s)?
- Do the current community board areas, boundaries, and names make sense to you?

- Are there any other ‘communities of interest’ that Council should be considering?
- Do you have any other comments or feedback that you would like considered as part of the review?

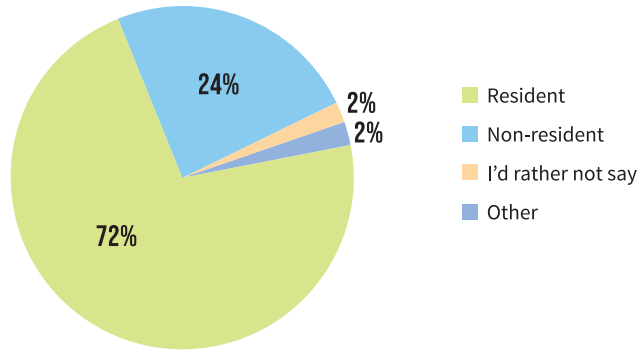
This report presents a demographic analysis of survey respondents and an overview of responses to the above questions.

Demographics

The majority (72 percent) of survey respondents were residents of the Thames-Coromandel District, while 24 percent were non-resident ratepayers. Two percent chose ‘Other’, describing their situation as working in Thames, being part of a Residents & Ratepayers Association, spending time in both Thames-Coromandel and elsewhere, and previously being a resident.

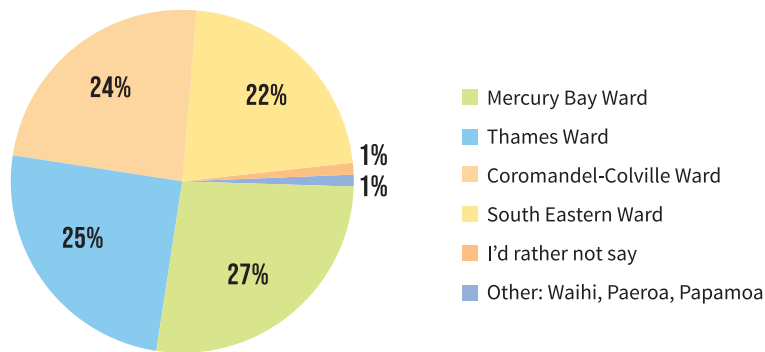
Are you a resident, or a non-resident ratepayer?

The majority of respondents were local residents (72 percent) with around a quarter being non-resident ratepayers.



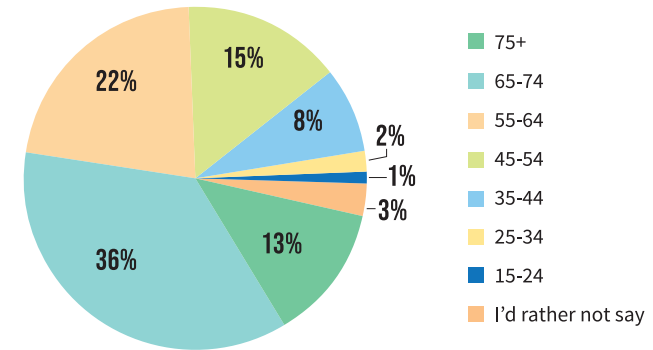
Which ward do you live or own a property in?

Respondents were spread relatively evenly across our district's four wards. Mercury Bay and Thames had the highest number of respondents, with 27 percent and 25 percent respectively.

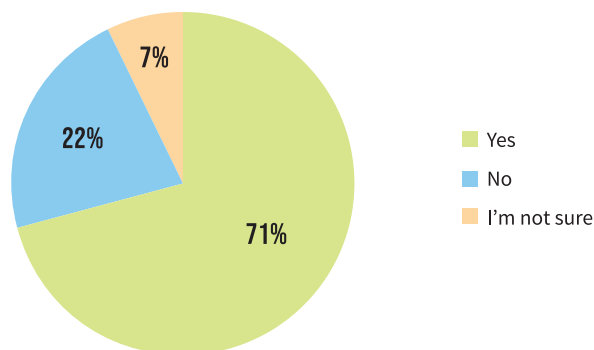


Which age group are you in?

Respondents were predominantly from the 65-74 and 55-64 age categories, making up 57 percent of respondents. In the second phase of engagement, further effort will be made to engage with a more representative range of age groups.



Do you think the name of our Council (Thames-Coromandel District Council) accurately reflects the district?



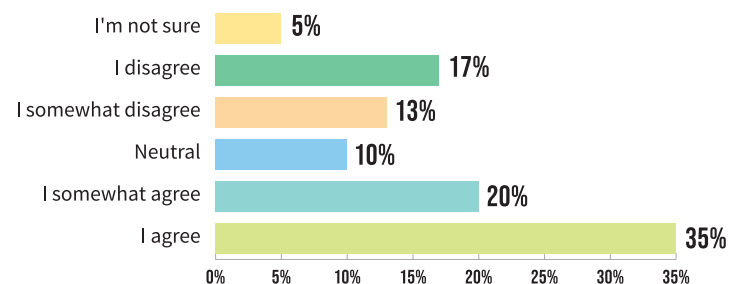
The vast majority, seventy-one per cent, of respondents felt the name accurately reflected the district. The main reasons given for this included geographical accuracy and simplicity. Among respondents who answered 'yes', some felt that changing the name would result in a loss of name recognition and would be an unnecessary expense.

Almost a quarter of respondents, 22 per cent, did not feel the name accurately reflected the district. The most prevalent reasons given for this included:

- Feeling the name has an overemphasis on 'Thames', with people noting that it was just one town within the region.
- Similarly, it was felt there was a focus on the Eastern side of the Coromandel Peninsula, over other areas.
- Respondents (within both categories) felt there was an opportunity to incorporate Te Reo Māori into the name, with some noting this would need to happen at an appropriate time and in consultation with local iwi.

- Some respondents noted the connection between the name 'Coromandel' and the ship it is named after, which was seen to represent the region's colonial history, including the disease that was carried on board.
- Others suggested that 'Coromandel Peninsula' would be more accurate. Others also thought the name could incorporate more of a connection to Hauraki and/or the broader Waikato region the district is part of.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I feel I'm well-represented with the current representation arrangements." (E.g. wards, number of councillors, etc?)



The majority of respondents (55 per cent) either agreed or somewhat agreed that they were well-represented within the current arrangements. Thirty percent either disagreed or somewhat disagreed they were well-represented, with 10 percent of respondents feeling neutral towards the statement. Five percent of people weren't sure how well they were represented.

The key reasons for people feeling well-represented were:

- Feeling the sizes of the wards accurately reflected their respective populations
- Believing their councillors and/or community boards were accessible and engaged in local issues.

- Many respondents described the current arrangements as ‘fair’ or ‘balanced’ and understood that they could contact their representatives as needed.

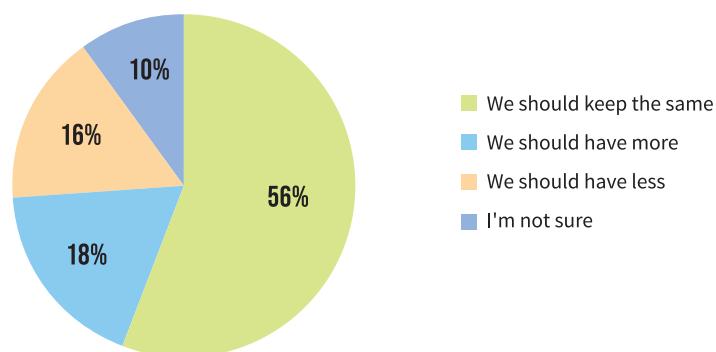
People who had some level of disagreement with this statement gave more complex and in-depth reasons, often dependent on their location within the district. For example, respondents said they selected this answer because:

- Some respondents believed their respective area and its unique issues was not adequately accounted for. Tairua, Hikuai, Pāuanui, Northern Coromandel, Matarangi and Whangamatā were cited as examples. Some appreciated having their local Community Boards, but felt this representation did not extend to Council.
- Another key reason was feeling there was an adequate number of representatives, but that community views and feedback were not effectively listened to within Council. They felt a sense of disconnect towards the decisions being made by representatives.
- Some people had a sense that there were ‘too many people’ at decision-making tables and were unsure whether this resulted in efficient planning and action.
- Some selected this answer as they felt there was not fair or equitable representation for Māori within Council, suggesting ways this could be better incorporated, including supporting the introduction of a Māori ward and Iwi involvement in decisions.
- Some noted there could be more diverse and representative demographics within Council, for example a wider age range and a more even gender balance. They felt this would help to represent the range of needs within the district’s communities.
- Some respondents explained they selected this answer to show their disagreement with the Council vote to introduce Māori wards.

- Several respondents wanted to see changes in how non-resident ratepayers were accounted for when assessing the size of each ward.
- Several people were also interested to know more about the background of their representatives, for example, their previous experience within their careers and businesses.
- Some noted dissatisfaction with particular elements of Council’s service delivery, for example rubbish collection or local roads.

Of those who selected ‘I’m not sure’, some said they did not have enough information to be able to say and did not feel connected to their local representatives nor arrangements. Some expressed a desire to find out more or become more actively engaged with Council.

Do you think we should have more, less, or the same amount of elected members, to ensure fair and effective representation?



Just over half of respondents (56 percent) believed we should keep the number of elected members the same. Thirty-five percent thought there should be a change, with slightly more (18 per cent) believing there should be more and 16 per cent that there should be less.

People who felt we should keep it the same said they chose this answer because:

- They felt the current number of elected members was generally working well in terms of balancing fair representation of local voices and overall efficiency.
- Some felt that adding more elected members could be ‘confusing’ or ‘cumbersome’.
- Several respondents were not convinced there was a sufficient pool for more elected members to be drawn from.
- There was a belief that increasing the number of elected members would result

in increased costs and could make it harder to arrive at final decisions in a timely manner.

- Some felt that increasing the level of engagement with local elections would affect the fairness of representation, as opposed to increasing the number of Councillors.

Those who believed we should have less, said they chose this answer because:

- Having less would ‘keep costs down’ and result in more efficient decision-making.
- They associated more elected members with ‘increased bureaucracy’ which was seen as antithetical to efficient decisions.
- Some respondents believed the current number was not relative to the ‘small’ size of the district’s population.
- This view was generally associated with a belief that Council should ‘trim’ operations in a general sense and focus on the provision of ‘core tasks’.
- Several respondents linked this question/answer to the introduction of Māori wards, with some believing the ward should be removed, and others stating that the Māori ward could replace a current position.

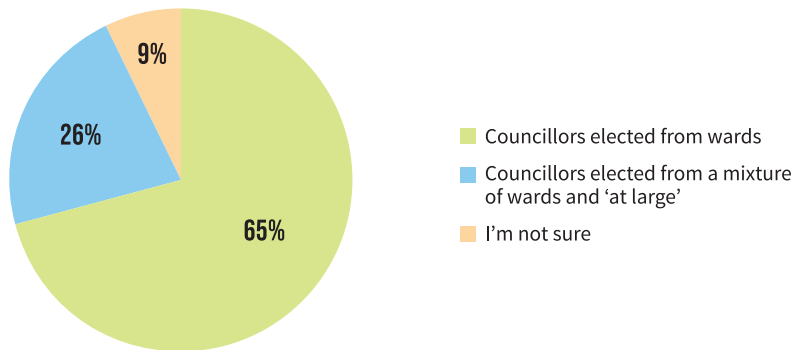
Respondents who felt we should increase the number of Councillors said this was because:

- It was seen as a way to increase the diversity of representation, either by location, demographic and/or community needs. It was felt this would help bring a wider range of issues and solutions to Council discussions.
- In particular, some respondents felt it could help Māori to have fairer and more proportional representation.

- Some noted that an area having just one representative was a lot for one person to carry and the load could be spread more evenly. They also felt it could help to balance the discussion where particular representatives held ‘strong views’ on an issue and introduce a broader range of subject matter expertise.
- Several respondents felt it would result in a more even spread of elected members per ward.

Many of those who ‘weren’t sure’ in terms of numbers, still held views on the arrangements, such as ensuring there was a sense of diversity, that Māori were well-represented, and/or that those elected had strong qualifications and ethical intentions. Some were not sure about the current arrangement or did not feel connected to their representatives.

How do you think our Councillors should be elected?



Well over half of respondents thought that Councillors should be elected from wards (65 percent), while just over a quarter felt they should be elected from a mixture of wards and ‘at large’. Nine percent were not sure.

Throughout the open field responses, it was clear many people felt particularly strongly about this question. Those who selected ‘from wards’ said they chose this answer because:

- It would result in fairer and more effective local representation, as the elected members would be more familiar with the issues of their particular area. It was acknowledged the district’s wards each have their own distinct social and geographic characteristics that would be better accounted for when electing by ward.
- Some thought that in particular, this helped to ensure representation for smaller areas and meant that the possibility of all councillors being from one area was eliminated. It was believed that councillors were likely to be more available to engage directly with smaller or more remote communities if elected from wards.
- It was felt that voters would be more connected to their current or potential representatives and in turn and therefore feel more confidence in their decisions. Some were uncertain about how often Councillors from one area were likely to travel to certain parts of the district.
- Some noted it would allow Councillors particular areas of focus, rather than being ‘spread thinly’ across the wider district and provide an increased sense of accountability.
- One example given was that a respondent said they felt more confident in being represented by someone who was respected within a local community, rather than known widely within the larger district, which they believed could at times be an unfair advantage.

The most prevalent themes for those who selected ‘a mixture of wards and ‘at large’ were:

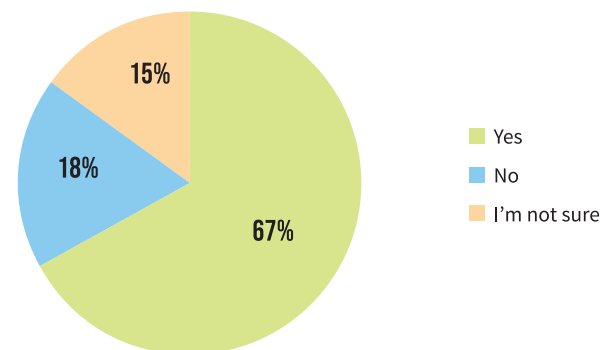
- Believing it could result in councillors making decisions that had more far-

reaching benefits, as they would be considering the district as a whole, rather than a particular area. Some respondents felt this may result in more balanced and/or strategic decision-making.

- Many stated that local representation was very important aligning with the key comments given in the responses above.
- Some felt it could result in people being elected based more directly on their broad skills and qualifications, rather than being well-known in a community.
- Similarly, some people felt it might result in a broader choice of candidates during local elections and were more interested in general skills and expertise they can bring to discussions, rather than knowledge 'limited' to a particular ward.
- Several people wanted to be able to vote for other areas, aside from where they lived, as they had an interest and connection to the wider district.

Do the current ward boundaries and names make sense to you?

The majority (67 per cent) of respondents said the current ward boundaries and names made sense as they are. Eighteen percent felt they did not make sense, while almost as many (15 per cent) were unsure.



The key reasons for people believing they make sense as they are, were relatively straightforward with many people giving short responses as to why:

- People did not see an urgent need for change as each area was fairly represented in terms of geography. As one respondent stated, there was a sense that there's 'no need to fix something that's not broken'.
- Some saw changes to either aspect as being too costly and/or not being essential enough to achieve value for money.
- As with those who wanted to keep the current Council name, some felt it would be confusing or reduce current levels of understanding.

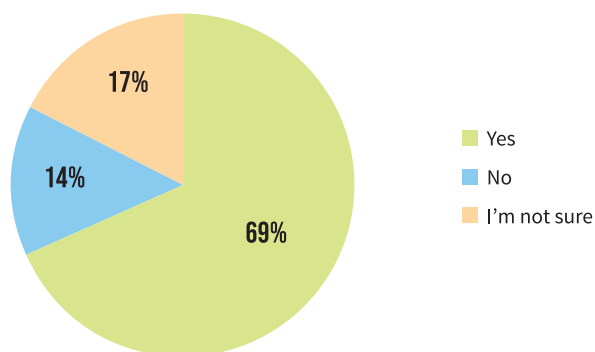
Reasons given by those who felt the current names and boundaries did not 'make sense' included:

- Wanting to see wider use and acknowledgement of pre-colonial history and Te Reo Māori names and geographic boundaries/signifiers.
- Some felt their geographic interests fell outside of the wider ward, for example Thames Coast/Te Mata within Thames, or their boundary put them at an unfair disadvantage in terms of funding, e.g. Coromandel-Colville.
- Further incorporation of future population projections and areas of growth was mentioned by some respondents.
- Several people said they did not associate the name of the ‘South Eastern’ ward with its geographic area, feeling it was too general of a name.
- Some did not understand the ‘North’ and ‘South’ distinction within the Mercury Bay ward.
- Some respondents expressed confusion or uncertainty about the areas included in the South-Eastern ward, feeling it was too broad to represent each town’s interests.
- It was noted some boundaries were not representative of/aligned to the iwi or hapu of each area.
- It was noted that more could be done to educate people on the current wards and have this information more publicly accessible.

• *Do you have any suggested names for our Māori Ward(s)?*

- It should be decided by local Iwi, hapu and mana whenua
- Te Tara-o-te-Ika-a-Māui
- Kauaeranga/Te Kauaeranga
- Coromandel Ki Moehau
- Pare Hauraki
- Whitianga-nui-a-Kupe
- Ngā Kaitiaki
- Katiaki roopu
- Moehau te Maunga
- Hauraki
- Matā Ward
- Māori ward
- Moehau ward
- Moehau ward
- Kapanga (for Coromandel)
- Tai Hauauru Takiwa
- Tai Rawhiti Takiwa
- Te Whanganui-o-Hei (for Mercury Bay)

Do the current community board areas, boundaries and names make sense to you?



Almost three quarters (69 per cent) of respondents felt the current community board boundaries and names made sense, while 14 percent said they did not. Seventeen per cent were unsure – the largest level of uncertainty from all survey questions.

Those who said the current arrangements made sense said that they chose this answer because:

- The names and boundaries fairly and accurately reflected each area and there was no need to spend time and resources making changes.
- Some felt community boards worked effectively as a local link to Council and the representatives were knowledgeable about local issues.
- Several people mentioned they were glad that Tairua-Pauanui had its own board.
- Several people who answered yes went on to question the role of community boards, stating they would be interested to know more about the role of

community boards and their effectiveness and/or input into Council processes, such as the LTP.

The most prevalent themes for those who said the current arrangements did not make sense were:

- A sense that community boards had limited scope to make meaningful decisions. This led to questions around the amount of resources required to run them, relative to their effectiveness.
- There were several suggestions from this group of respondents that Community Boards could be reduced or replaced with alternative options for representing Io. For example, one respondent stated that an alternative, more efficient option would be electing Councillors with strong links to local communities. Another suggested 'Community Councils' with increased resource/decision-making capacity and key representatives that formed a 'district parliament' of local Community Councils.
- In terms of names, the main feedback from this group was around incorporating Te Reo Maori names in consultation with local Iwi.
- Several respondents felt that Northern Coromandel was not adequately represented within the current arrangements.

Those who were unsure also had questions around the role of community boards, with some saying they would be interested in learning more about their local representatives and the processes/projects they were involved in. For example: "I'm not sure how they are determined, or what impact they have."

Are there any other 'communities of interest' that Council should be considering?

Many respondents opted not to give an answer for this question, or gave general answers such as 'ratepayers' or the 'district as a whole'. Below is a selection of the most prevalent answers and a selection of direct quotes that encompass a range of views:

- Disabled community
- Business community
- Local iwi/hapu
- Pare Hauraki
- Nature, the environment and biodiversity
- People who live rurally
- "We need to continue to consider the cultural values for all people, all community groups, in our district."
- "The next generations, our tamariki and mokopuna – our children and children's children."
- "The rural north, and I imagine other places, have 'communities' that operate under a different cultural agenda. These should have the right to do so within the broad bounds of council rules for health and safety. i.e. the number of houses on a block of communal land should be increased as there is a lot of community-owned land and a big shortage of housing. The same applies to Māori land – people should be able to house themselves on their own land."
- "Youth. They will be affected by the decisions we make today but don't have a choice at council or in consultations."
- "At-risk and vulnerable communities that are poorly serviced by support

- services and government departments due to our remote and rural locations."
- "There is still very little acknowledgement by TCDC of conservation and very little support."
- "I often think Thames is being forgotten in many ways to the east coast newer towns, we need an uplift."
- "I think that the number of non-resident ratepayers could be recognised – their interests are not always the same as the residents."
- Those impacted by extreme weather events, and potentially, climate change."
- "Yes, there should be seats that can represent specific areas such as conservation/ environment, sustainability, affordable housing."
- "It would be nice if council could invite representatives of different communities at times to give their view on things."
- "The increasing number of people experiencing homelessness in the Thames-Coromandel DC area."
- "The Silverstream Falls development and Paul Road north of Tairua. It would be great for those living in these two areas to be consulted about whether they want to be represented by Whangamatā or Whitianga as Paul Road is with Whangamatā and Silverstream Falls is with Whitianga."
- "Aged people much going on for so many aged in our community also under 25's need more reasons to stay and live and work and learn in this area."
- "The people who live outside the main centres and get little or no voice at the table."
- "We need better representation of women."
- "If Māori wards are included, then that' the main community of interest not yet represented. I would also like to see Council create more dynamic engagement

with youth, say through the establishment of a youth council, to help young people better understand our democratic and government systems at a younger age.

- “Recognition of a high percentage of 65+ age group.”

Do you have any other comments or feedback that you would like considered as part of the review?

Around 200 respondents provided ‘other comments’, with many falling outside of the scope of the review (e.g. comments on particular services or requesting items such as bins and signage). Some shared their opinion on Maori Wards, with some expressing their dissatisfaction with Council’s vote to establish them or discussing the potential for a referendum.

A selection of quotes representing a range of views on topics related to representation are provided below:

- “More consultancy across media and meetings and drop in chats need to be in place when making long term decisions for our community.”
- “STV should be councils voting system as this yields more representative, democratic results.”
- “TCDC should find additional ways to include Māori and mana whenua representation in decision making. This may be done through co-opting iwi representatives into standing committees. TCDC should acknowledge the fact that Māori wards will not transform the political arena and will not provide sufficient power and authority to tangata whenua within the district, as envisioned in Te Tiriti. A Māori ward is improvement of Māori representation in the colonial system (kāwanatanga) and is a requirement under article 3 of Te Tiriti.”
- “Consider more than one Māori Ward. Te Ao Māori is a world view/lens that

can benefit and uplift the wellbeing of ALL people, generations and our living environment/world.”

- “That the system is ineffective, and rates are not proportionally distributed for each ward.”
- “We need a group of independent residents whose job it is to go around the district reporting on what they see happening, and what they hear people saying, reporting to the communities they visit and to our governing bodies.”
- “Tangata Tiriti and Tangata Whenua sitting at the decision table together can only bring forth harmony and prosperity for all. Kia kaha koutou.”
- “The decision to have Māori wards should not have been taken without public consultation.”
- “If the wards are changed to meet the current community board areas – I believe the community board numbers could decrease. There seems to often be conflict between the community boards and the councillors.”
- “I think that TCDC should be split into the west and east areas along the spine range.”
- “I thank you for this email and the invitation to be part of the conversation. I would like to see more readily available information about how to engage with the democratic process and I think all people who want that opportunity for engagement would benefit from that.”
- “Don’t do away with the Coromandel-Colville Ward. It is unique and vibrant region that needs and deserves its own identity and representation.”
- “I think the system we have is a sound system and that it is always looking to review and improve. A system only works if it addresses the needs of the people.”

- “I know that there are some very highly qualified and knowledgeable people in all areas of life living on the Peninsula. Seems to me that their knowledge and experience is wasted. Have you ever thought of setting up a think tank and sending them issue/problems to consider to add to your own research? It could be done online.”
- “Representation needs to reflect communities of interest to achieve balance between the developed eastern seaboard and more sparsely populated western and northern areas.”
- “Councillors should not be automatically elected to community boards.”

This feedback will be used to inform an initial proposal, which will go out for public feedback in June 2024, with submission information available on our website, in local service centres and libraries.

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