



Local Government Commission

Mana Kāwanatanga ā Rohe

Determination

on a decision of the Thames-Coromandel District Council
to adopt representation arrangements for the local
authority elections to be held on 11 October 2025

Introduction

1. All territorial authorities are required under sections 19H and 19J of the Local Electoral Act 2001 (the Act) to review their representation arrangements at least every six years.
2. The matters for this determination by the Commission are limited to the decision of Thames-Coromandel District Council (the Council) to retain the Coromandel-Colville General Ward with its current boundaries and membership, and the South East General Ward with adjusted boundaries and its current membership, despite neither complying with section 19V(2) of the Act (the '+/-10% rule').

Commission's determination¹

3. Under section 19V(6) of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the Commission upholds the decision of the Thames-Coromandel District Council not to comply with section 19V(2) in respect of:
 - a. the Coromandel-Colville General Ward, as non-compliance is required for effective representation of the isolated settlements located within the Ward, including Coromandel, Colville and other small settlements located around the northernmost tip of the Coromandel Peninsula; and
 - b. the South East General Ward, as compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by uniting within the Mercury Bay General Ward the Pumpkin Hill and Sailors Grave communities with the Hot Water Beach and Whitianga communities with which they have few functional commonalities of interest.

¹ Plans referred to in this determination that are preceded by LGC are deposited with the Local Government Commission; plans preceded by SO are deposited with Land Information New Zealand.

4. Accordingly, for at least the triennial general election of the Thames-Coromandel District Council to be held on 11 October 2025, the following representation arrangements will apply:

a. Thames-Coromandel District, as delineated on Plan LG-011-2025-W-1 will be divided into wards and will be represented by a Council comprising the mayor and 10 councillors elected as follows:

Ward	Councillors	Plan delineating area
Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward	1	LG-011-2025-W-2
Coromandel-Colville General Ward	1	SO 57968
Mercury Bay General Ward	3	SO 424737
Thames General Ward	3	LG-011-2025-W-3
South East General Ward	2	LG-011-2025-W-4

b. There will be five communities with community boards as follows:

Community/ Community Board	Area	Members	Appointed members
Coromandel-Colville Community	Comprising the area of the Coromandel-Colville General Ward	4	1, representing either the Coromandel-Colville General Ward or the Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward
Mercury Bay Community	Comprising the area of the Mercury Bay General Ward	4	3, representing either the Mercury Bay General Ward or the Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward
Tairua-Pāuanui Community	As delineated on plan LG-011-2025-Com-1	4	2, representing either the South East General Ward or the Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward
Whangamatā Community	As delineated on plan SO 427009	4	2, representing either the South East General Ward or the Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward
Thames Community	Comprising the area of the Thames General Ward	4	3, representing either the Thames General Ward or the Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward

5. The ratio of population to elected members for each ward will be as follows:

Wards	Population *	Number of members	Population per member	Deviation from district average population per member	% deviation from district average population per member
Coromandel-Colville General Ward	2,840	1	2,840	-530	-15.73%
Mercury Bay General Ward	10,050	3	3,350	-20	-0.59%
Thames General Ward	9,980	3	3,326	-43	-1.29%
South East General Ward	7,460	2	3,730	360	+10.68%
Total general wards	30,330	9	3,370		
Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward	3,310	1	3,310	N/A	N/A
Total	33,340	10			

*Based on Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates

6. The community boards will not be subdivided for electoral purposes. The population they each represent will be as follows:

Community/community board	Population*	Number of members^	Population per member
Coromandel-Colville Community	3,590	4	898
Mercury Bay Community	10,650	4	2,663
Thames Community	11,300	4	2,825
Tairua-Pāuanui Community	3,090	4	773
Whangamatā Community	5,010	4	1,253

*Based on Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates

7. As required by section 19T(b) of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the boundaries of the above wards coincide with the boundaries of current statistical meshblock areas determined by Statistics New Zealand and used for Parliamentary electoral purposes.

Background

8. Under sections 19H and 19J of the Local Electoral Act 2001 (the Act) territorial authority representation reviews are to determine the number of councillors to be elected, the basis of election for councillors and, if this includes wards, the boundaries and names of those wards. Reviews also include whether there are to be community boards and, if so, arrangements for those boards. Representation arrangements are to be determined so as to provide fair and effective representation for individuals and communities.
9. The Council last reviewed its representation arrangements prior to the 2022 local authority elections. In October 2023 it resolved to establish Māori wards and therefore was required to undertake a review prior to the next elections in October 2025.
10. On 3 September 2024 the Council voted to affirm its decision to establish Māori wards in accordance with the Local Government (Electoral Legislation and Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Act 2024.

Current representation arrangements

11. The Commission last made a determination regarding the Council's representation arrangements in 2016, in relation to the non-compliance of the Coromandel-Colville Ward at -14.27%. At that time the Council was comprised of a mayor and eight elected members. The Commission upheld the non-compliance of the Coromandel-Colville Ward, on the basis that non-compliance was required for effective representation of communities of interest within isolated communities situated in the district.
12. In the Council's 2021 representation review, all ward boundaries and community boards were retained without change. However, one additional elected member was added to the Mercury Bay Ward, to bring the Council to a total of nine elected members plus the mayor. All four wards became compliant with the +/- 10% rule and, as no appeals were received, no determination was required by the Commission.
13. The Council's current representation arrangements are:
 - a. a council comprising:
 - nine members elected from four wards
 - the mayor elected at large
 - b. five community boards, being:
 - Coromandel-Colville Community Board (four elected members and one appointed member)
 - Mercury Bay Community Board (four elected members and three appointed members)

- Thames Community Board (four elected members and three appointed members)
- Tairua-Pāuanui Community Board (four elected members and two appointed members)
- Whangamatā Community Board (four elected members and two appointed members)

Current review

Preliminary consultation

14. The Council began its review by undertaking preliminary engagement with the community in March 2024 via a survey that attracted 502 responses. The survey responses indicated general satisfaction with the current ward and community board structure of the Council. The Council also engaged directly with iwi and hapū in the District regarding the name of the Council's Māori Ward.
15. Between February and May the Council held four workshops to consider potential options for the initial proposal, with similar workshops held with community board members in February and May 2024. The workshops considered a range of different representation options, including options with nine or 10 elected members, and ward configurations ranging from three to six different general wards. Consideration was also given to continuing the five current community boards, as well as various options for amalgamating the Tairua-Pāuanui and Whangamatā Community Boards.
16. Ultimately the Council settled on a ward structure largely based on the current ward boundaries, with adjustments to the boundaries of the Thames and South East General Wards to incorporate the Neavesville community within the Thames General Ward, rather than the South East General Ward. The boundaries of the Thames and Tairua-Pāuanui Community Boards were likewise adjusted.
17. The proposed boundary adjustment recognised that there was no road access from the South East General Ward to Neavesville, and that Neavesville was only accessible from the western side of the District, in the Thames General Ward. It was considered that residents in the Neavesville area had a stronger functional community of interest with the Thames General Ward and Thames Community Board, rather than the South East General Ward and the Tairua-Pāuanui Community Board.

The Council's initial proposal

18. On 13 June 2024 the Council resolved its initial representation proposal for a council comprising the mayor and 10 members elected from five wards. The proposal retained the five communities and community boards listed at paragraph 13 above.

19. The proposed representation arrangements were as set out in paragraphs 5-6 above, other than the name of the Māori ward which was identified as the 'Thames-Coromandel Māori Ward' in the Council's initial representation proposal.

Submissions

20. The Council notified its initial representation proposal on 21 June 2024 and received 81 submissions by the deadline date of 2 August 2024. Of these, 41 focused specifically either for or against the establishment of the Māori ward and were considered outside of the scope of the representation review.
21. Of the remaining 40 submissions, 22 supported the Council's initial proposal, and 18 submissions did not support the proposal.
22. Key themes in the submissions related to:
 - a. The number of elected members, with some submitters supporting the proposed increase to 10 elected members and others preferring that the number of elected members remained at nine;
 - b. The proposed ward structure, with submitters generally in support of a ward structure representing the different communities of the district, with several submitters requesting specific representation for Tairua-Pāuanui and Whangamatā;
 - c. The proposed boundary change to include the Neavesville community within the Thames General Ward, with submitters generally in support of this change; and
 - d. The name of the Māori Ward, with submissions on this point supportive of the name 'Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward'.
23. On 15 August 2024 the Council met to hear submissions. We note that the Council does not appear to have documented why submissions were rejected, as required by s19N(2)(b) of the Act, and we recommend that for all future reviews, the Council ensures it meets all statutory requirements with regards to public notices.

The Council's final proposal

24. At its meeting on 3 September 2024 the Council adopted its initial proposal as its final proposal, aside from the name of the Māori ward which was renamed Te Tara o Te Ika Māori Ward. The final proposal was publicly notified on 13 September 2024.
25. The details of the Council's final proposal are as set out in paragraphs 5-6 above.

26. No valid appeals or objections against the Council's final proposal were received. The Council was, however, required by section 19V(4) of the Act to refer its proposal to the Commission for determination as the Coromandel-Colville and South East General Wards did not comply with the fair representation requirement of section 19V(2) of the Act (the +/-10% rule).

Need for a hearing

27. Prior to making a determination, the Commission may make such enquiries as it considers appropriate and may hold meetings with interested parties. There is no obligation on the Commission to hold a hearing. Rather, the need for a hearing is determined by the information provided by the relevant parties and as a result of any further inquiries the Commission may wish to make.
28. The Council's final proposal included two general wards that do not comply with the +/-10% rule. In each case the Council documents recorded only brief justifications for non-compliance, relating to the geography of the Coromandel Peninsula.
29. On further enquiry the Council provided additional information to the Commission relating to the characteristics of the Coromandel-Colville and South East General Wards and the communities of interest within them. The additional information explained the reasons for non-compliance and was sufficient to allow the Commission to proceed to a determination. Accordingly, no hearing was required.

Matters for determination by the Commission

30. The matters for this determination by the Commission are limited to the Council's decision to retain the Coromandel-Colville General Ward with its current boundaries and membership, and the South East General Ward with adjusted boundaries and its current membership, despite neither complying with section 19V(2) of the Act (the '+/-10% rule').

Key considerations

31. Based on the legislative requirements, the Commission's *Guidelines for local authorities undertaking representation reviews* (the Guidelines) identify the following three key factors when considering representation proposals:
- a. communities of interest
 - b. effective representation of communities of interest
 - c. fair representation for electors.

Communities of interest

32. The Guidelines identify three dimensions for recognising communities of interest:

- a. *perceptual*: a sense of identity and belonging to a defined area or locality as a result of factors such as distinctive geographical features, local history, demographics, economic and social activities
 - b. *functional*: ability of the area to meet the needs of communities for services such as local schools, shopping areas, community and recreational facilities, employment, transport, and communication links
 - c. *political*: ability to represent the interests of local communities which includes non-council structures such as for local iwi and hapū, residents and ratepayer associations and the range of special interest groups
33. All three dimensions are important and often interlinked. We note however, that there is often a focus on the perceptual dimension. That is, what councils, communities or individuals intuitively feel are communities of interest. It is not enough to simply state that a community of interest exists because it is felt that it exists; councils must provide evidence of how a sense of identity is reinforced, or how a community is distinct from neighbouring communities. Such evidence may be found by considering, for example:
- how communities rely on different services and facilities to function as part of the wider district, city, or region
 - demographic characteristics of an area (for example age, ethnicity, or deprivation profiles) and how these differ from other areas
 - how particular communities organise themselves and interact with others as part of the wider district, city, or region
34. In the current review, the Council undertook a preliminary community survey, which indicated that residents felt that the Council's current ward structure generally reflected communities of interest.
35. As noted in paragraphs 16-17 above, the Council also identified that ward and community board boundary adjustments were required to more accurately reflect communities of interest around Neavesville.
36. We are satisfied that the Council has adequately identified communities of interest in the current review.

Effective representation for communities of interest

37. 'Effective representation' is not defined in the Act, but the Commission sees this as requiring consideration of factors including an appropriate number of elected members and an appropriate basis of election of members for the district concerned (at large, wards, or a mix of both).
38. The Guidelines note that what constitutes effective representation will be specific to each local authority but that the following factors should be considered to the extent possible:

- a. avoiding arrangements that may create barriers to participation, such as at elections by not recognising residents' familiarity and identity with an area
 - b. not splitting recognised communities of interest between electoral subdivisions
 - c. not grouping together two or more communities of interest that share few commonalities of interest
 - d. accessibility, size, and configuration of an area including access to elected members and vice versa.
39. The Council has increased the number of elected members by one, reflecting the addition of a Māori ward. We note that the Council considered several options with an overall total of nine members, but discounted these as decreasing the number of elected members in one or more of the general wards was considered to be detrimental to the effectiveness of representation for those wards. We are satisfied that the Council has adequately considered the number of elected members throughout its review process.
40. The Council has also resolved to retain a geographic ward structure that ensures specific representation for the various parts of the Coromandel Peninsula. We note that the communities of the Coromandel Peninsula are dispersed around the edge of the Peninsula, and there are few transport links crossing the Peninsula. The Council's preliminary survey demonstrates that residents feel a sense of attachment to their immediate communities and appreciate having local representation. We are satisfied that the Council's retention of a geographic ward system is likely to support effective representation of the district.

Fair representation for electors

41. Section 19V of the Act sets out the requirement for the Commission to ensure that electors receive fair representation. Section 19V(2) establishes fair representation as a population per member ratio per ward type (i.e. general or Māori) that does not differ by more than 10% across the district. This is also referred to as 'the +/- 10% rule'.
42. Section 19V(3) of the Act provides that, despite subsection (2), if a territorial authority or the Commission considers one or more of certain prescribed conditions apply, wards may be defined and membership distributed between them in a way that does not comply with subsection (2). The prescribed conditions are:
- a. non-compliance is required for effective representation of communities of interest within island or isolated communities situated within the district of the territorial authority
 - b. compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing a community of interest between wards

- c. compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by uniting within a ward two or more communities of interest with few commonalities of interest.
43. As noted in paragraph 28 above, the explanations provided in Council documents as to why the exemption should apply in relation to each non-compliant ward were limited to brief statements relating to the geography of the Coromandel Peninsula.
44. The Council is reminded that, if it wishes to rely on the factors set out in s19V(3) to justify non-compliance with the +/-10% rule, it bears the onus of clearly demonstrating why in each case the respective provisions apply.
45. Section 19V(6) provides that on receiving a reference under subsection (4), the Commission must determine whether to:
- a. uphold the decision of the council, or
 - b. alter that decision.
46. Accordingly, the matters for determination by the Commission are limited to the Council's decision to retain the Coromandel-Colville General Ward with its current boundaries and membership, and the South East General Ward with adjusted boundaries and its current membership, despite neither complying with section 19V(2) of the Act (the '+/-10% rule').

Proposed non-compliance of Coromandel-Colville General Ward

47. The Council has proposed over-representation of the Coromandel-Colville General Ward of -15.73%. In the Council's 2021 representation review the Coromandel-Colville Ward complied with the +/-10% rule, although in the 2016 representation review it was also over-represented at -14.27%.
48. The Coromandel-Colville General Ward is situated at the northernmost point of the Coromandel Peninsula. The Ward is separated from the Thames and Mercury Bay General Wards by a range of hills and the Waikawau River. Large parts of the interior of the Ward, along with its northernmost point, are forest park, largely undeveloped and sparsely populated. The main towns in the Ward are Coromandel and Colville, both located on the eastern coast. Road access is via a single road that winds around the coastline and is often closed during or following weather events.
49. The Coromandel-Colville General Ward has existed in its current form since the District was constituted in 1989, aside from a minor boundary adjustment in 2004. Its communities and boundaries are therefore familiar to residents in the area.

50. To become compliant the Coromandel-Colville General Ward would need to incorporate an additional 193 people. This could only be achieved by transferring parts of the Thames General Ward or the Mercury Bay General Ward into the Coromandel-Colville General Ward. We have considered the potential effects of either course of action.
51. With respect to the Thames Ward, the small communities of Waikawau and Te Mātā are located towards the northern boundary of the ward. The Council has advised that these communities have a stronger functional community of interest with other communities in the Thames Ward. The Waikawau River acts as a natural boundary, with residents north of the river generally travelling towards Coromandel for education, shopping, and other services, as Coromandel is closer and the roading in this area is generally better. Residents south of the Waikawau River instead generally turn south to Thames for such services.
52. Furthermore, the road between Thames and Coromandel is narrow, winding, and coastal, including being subject to tidal activity on occasion. There are frequent road closures due to weather events, with the road between Te Mātā and Keretā, particularly vulnerable to closure.
53. Taking the above factors into consideration, we do not consider that joining the northern parts of the Thames General Ward with the Coromandel-Colville General Ward would result in effective representation for communities of interest in either ward.
54. With regards to the Mercury Bay General Ward, there is no easy roading access from the northern parts of this ward into the Coromandel-Colville General Ward. As a result, we consider that there is unlikely to be strong functional or perceptual communities of interest between the small communities of the northern Mercury Bay General Ward and those of the eastern Coromandel-Colville General Ward.
55. Taking into account the geography of the northern Coromandel Peninsula, and the lack of resilient roading access and transport links between the communities of the Coromandel-Colville General Ward and the Thames and Mercury Bay General wards, we are satisfied that the proposed Coromandel-Colville General Ward can be considered an isolated community under section 19V(3) of the Act.
56. We therefore uphold the ward boundaries of the Coromandel-Colville General Ward, as proposed by the Council.

Proposed non-compliance of South East General Ward

57. The Council has proposed under-representation of the South East General Ward of +10.68%. The South East Ward has always previously complied with the +/- 10% rule since it was constituted in 2010.

58. The South East General Ward covers the south-eastern part of the Coromandel Peninsula to the boundary with Hauraki District in the south. The Thames General Ward forms the eastern boundary of the ward, with the Mercury Bay General Ward to the north. The main communities of the ward are centred around the towns of Tairua and Pāuanui in the northern part of the ward, and Whangamatā in the southern part of the ward.
59. To achieve compliance with the +/-10% rule would require transferring 23 people out of the South East General Ward. The Council has already transferred the Neavesville area from the South East General Ward to the Thames General Ward, as set out in paragraphs 16-17 above. This suggests that any transfer of population would need to be made into the Mercury Bay General Ward to the north.
60. The small communities of Pumpkin Hill and Sailors Grave are in the northernmost part of the South East General Ward. However, the Council has advised that these communities share a stronger functional community of interest with the Tairua and Pāuanui communities than they do with the Hot Water Beach and Whitianga communities.
61. Residents of these communities generally travel to Tairua for employment, education, shopping and to access other services. The travel time to Tairua from Pumpkin Hill and Sailors Grave is around 10 minutes, whereas it is approximately 40 minutes to Whitianga. There are no public transport links currently linking Pumpkin Hill and Whitianga.
62. We are satisfied that the proposed South East General Ward arrangements appropriately balance the requirements for fair and effective representation of the communities of the South East General Ward, and particularly the small communities at the northern boundary of the Ward. We therefore uphold the South East General Ward boundaries as proposed by the Council.

Communities and community boards

63. Section 19J of the Act requires every territorial authority, as part of its review of representation arrangements, to determine whether there should be community boards in the district and, if so, the nature of those communities and the structure of the community boards.
64. In the current review the Council has retained the five current community boards with their current membership. There are no subdivisions in any of the community boards, and accordingly there is no issue for us to consider with regards to fair representation. We are satisfied that the proposed communities and community boards will provide effective representation for each specific community.

Commission recommendations

65. The Commission recommends that for all future representation reviews the Council ensures that:

- it meets all statutory requirements with regards to public notices; and
- the reasons for any non-compliance with the +/-10% rule are clearly set out and included as part of the Council's initial and/or final representation proposals.

Conclusion

66. We have made this determination pursuant to section 19R of the Local Electoral Act 2001 having considered the information before the Commission and the requirements of sections 19T, 19W and 19V of the Act.

Local Government Commission

Commissioner Brendan Duffy (Chair)

Commissioner Bonita Bigham

Commissioner Sue Bidrose

Temporary Commissioner Gwen Bull

13 January 2025