

Local Government Timeline

(at August 2010)

This timeline selects some key events to present a historical perspective to the development of local government in New Zealand.

1842 **Gazetting of Wellington as a council**

1846 **Municipal Corporations Ordinance**

This ordinance created the earliest form of European-style local government in New Zealand. Before this, the only recognised geographical divisions were Māori tribal boundaries. The Ordinance applied to settlements having a population of 2,000 or more. It provided for elected councils and the levying of rates based on property ownership. Non-ratepayers could be enrolled on payment of a prescribed fee.

1846 **Constitution Act (UK)**

This Act provided for the establishment of two or more provinces in New Zealand. The provinces of New Ulster and New Munster were established.

1852 **Constitution Act (UK)**

This Act provided for the establishment of six provinces with elected provincial councils. Over the next few years these councils set up a number of municipalities, often haphazardly, in Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, and Otago.

There was a notable lack of uniformity of powers, responsibilities, and constitution between these provinces.

1867 **Municipal Corporations Act**

This Act attempted to regularise the establishment of municipalities. It also authorised municipalities to undertake a wide range of functions and services which realised their important role in the social, economic and administrative life of a community.

1876 **Abolition of Provinces Act**

This Act abolished the provinces set up in 1852 and gave the government the responsibility for the local administration of the whole country.

Unlike its 1867 predecessor, this Act was mandatory for existing and future municipalities.

The Counties Act and the Municipal Corporations Act

These Acts established sixty-three counties and 45 municipalities in New Zealand and laid the foundation for our present systems of rural and urban local government.

1920 **The number of municipalities and counties had reached 246.**

1946 **Local Government Commission Act 1946**

This Act established the first Local Government Commission as an independent body with responsibility for continually reviewing all local authorities.

1950s Reduction in number of territorial authorities

In the 1950s some reduction was achieved in the number of territorial authorities as a result of recommendations made by a number of Local Government Commissions and government-appointed committees.

1950 Special purpose authorities

The number of special purpose authorities responsible for the administration of harbours, health, education, water catchments, drainage, and pest destruction had reached 537.

1953 The Town and Country Planning Act

Under the new Town and Country Planning Act it became mandatory for councils to prepare a district scheme to promote and safeguard the health, safety and general welfare of the inhabitants and all amenities.

1953 Local Government Commission Act

This Act severely curtailed the powers given to the Commission in 1946. It could no longer initiate inquiries and its recommendations for reform were more easily overturned by the introduction of new polling provisions. The Act introduced an appeal authority to hear appeals against any decisions of the Commission.

1956 Health Act

1963 The Auckland Regional Authority established

The ARA was created as a directly elected regional council to carry out a range of regional planning and delivery functions in the Auckland metropolitan area and adjoining rural districts.

1974 The Local Government Act

Merged the municipal and counties legislation and provided for the creation of regional and united councils and territorial local authorities.

1977 The Town and Country Planning Act

Extended previous planning legislation to include matters of national importance such as the relation of Māori to their land, regional plans and maritime planning authorities.

1977 Reserves Act

Vested ultimate authority for reserves and domains in the Minister of Lands and required the development of management plans for all reserves.

1981 Public Works Act

1986 The Local Government Amendment Act

This Act reformed the electoral franchise by abolishing rating qualifications for property occupiers. Voting eligibility extended from ratepayers to residential electors using the parliamentary rolls as the base for local rolls.

1987 Conservation Act

1987 The government announces a comprehensive review of local government.

1988 Local Government Amendment Act (No 3)

This Act suspended existing reorganisation procedures and required the Local Government Commission to prepare final reorganisation schemes for New Zealand by 1 July 1989.

At the time of the final reorganisation schemes there were:

- 205 territorial authorities with the various names of county, city, borough, town, and district councils
- 22 regional authorities, made up of the Auckland Regional Authority, Wellington, and Northland Regional Councils and 19 united councils
- more than 400 special purpose authorities.

1989 Local Government Amendment Act (No 2)

This amendment to the Act gave local government wider powers. It led to or introduced:

- a reduction to seventy-four territorial local authorities redesignated as city or district councils (including Chatham Islands County Council) and 13 regional councils
- the abolition of most special purpose authorities
- major restructuring of local authorities at committee and staff levels.

1991 Resource Management Act

Major reform of legislation dealing with the environment, providing an integrated approach to environmental management.

1991 The Local Government Act

This Act introduced significant new disciplines on local authorities to achieve greater accountability and transparency. The local bodies were to prepare annual plans in consultation with their communities; to set out their objectives, policies and performance standards; and to report publicly on their performance against these criteria.

1992 Amendments to the Resource Management Act

Further amendments to the Resource Management Act replaced some fifty previous statutes, notably including the Town and Country Planning and Water and Soil Conservation Acts.

The cornerstone of the RMA is the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. It defines the functions and responsibilities of various authorities and persons on resource management issues. These include the relevant ministers and local authorities.

1992 The Local Government Law Reform Act

This Act introduced new changes, especially affecting regional councils. One regional council was abolished and the three territorial authorities in the former region were constituted as unitary authorities undertaking regional as well as territorial functions.

The same amendments also:

- introduced new procedures and criteria to apply to the creation of new directories
- placed additional disciplines on regional councils in deciding whether to undertake functions in-house or to contract them out

- constrained the powers of regional councils to engage in public relations and public information activities and in tourism promotion
- gave the Minister of Local Government new powers to initiate reviews of local authorities
- established the Auckland Regional Services Trust.

1996 Dog Control Act

1996 The Local Government Amendment (No. 3) Act

This contained financial management provisions that required all local authorities to prepare long-term financial strategies together with funding, borrowing, and treasury management policies.

2001 The Local Electoral Act

This Act modernised the statutes dealing with local government's electoral processes. Key changes include:

- the ability of communities and/or councils to adopt transferable voting systems (STV)
- the ability to create separate Māori wards
- the ability to have a mix of wards and 'at large' electorates at the same time
- an enhanced representation review, required to be undertaken at least once every six years which also included the requirement that the establishment of community boards also be examined.

The new Act also allowed the use of regulations and best practice as a way of dealing with much of the technical detail associated with the elections.

2002 The Local Government (Rating) Act

This Act modernised the previous Rating Powers Act 1988, which was widely regarded as difficult to interpret. The new Rating Act provides councils with flexible powers to set, assess and collect rates. Its features include:

- the creation of a new targeted rate able to be applied to characteristics of properties
- a change in liability from property occupiers to owners.
- clarification as to the unit of liability.

2002 The Local Government Act

This Act completely replaced the previous LGA 1974. It is widely regarded as a radical departure from the previous way in which local authority powers and functions had been prescribed. It builds on the planning and policy regimes that were introduced in the 1996 Local Government Amendment (No 3) Act. Among its features are:

- the introduction of general empowerment which means that councils can do whatever is require to achieve their purpose as long as it is within the law and not given exclusively to another agency
- a clear statement of purpose for councils which emphasised local democracy and the promotion of social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being in a sustainable way
- a statement of principles to govern the way in which councils undertake their business
- clarification with regard to relationships with Māori
- a modernised by-law making power

- an enhanced community based long-term planning framework.

Underpinning the new Act is a much clearer obligation to engage with communities in decision-making procedures and to seek to work in a collaborative way with other agencies.

2003 The Gambling Act

This Act was designed to provide an overarching framework for regulating and controlling the growth on gambling, and minimising resulting harm. It introduced a new role for territorial authorities of setting policies to control the location and number of class 4 (non-casino pokie) gaming machines.

All territorial authorities were required to adopt their first policies during March 2004 and must review them at least every three years.

2003 Prostitution Reform Act

This Act began life as a private member's Bill and gives local authorities the power to regulate the location of brothels.

2005 Public Records Act

This Act sets a framework for record keeping in public offices and local authorities. Its purpose is to promote local government accountability through reliable recordkeeping, enhance public confidence in the integrity of local government records and protect New Zealand's documentary heritage