



PSA 

Local Government

Kāwanatanga-ā-Rohe

PSA Local Government Sector Committee Submission on the Water Services Entities Bill

July 2022

About the PSA Local Government Sector Committee

The Public Service Association – Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi is a union with approximately 80,000 members across five sectors. The Local Government Sector consists of approximately 9,000 members.

The Local Government Sector Committee is a democratic structure within the PSA representing members working in local government, including those directly affected by the proposed changes

This submission

This submission is a partner to the PSA submission, and it endorses the submission of Te Rūnanga o Ngā Toa Āwhina.

Sector Committee response to the Bill

1. There is general acknowledgement amongst members that the current system is not meeting the needs of our communities, and needs reform if it is to meet the needs of communities into the future.
2. There is a lot of uncertainty among our members about what the reforms will mean, fuelled by a range of opposing claims, some more accurate and unbiased than others. Our members are very aware of the political game being played around three waters. We believe the Government needs to be more proactive in presenting the facts to people.
3. The Local Government Sector Committee is concerned about some of the claims that have been made in opposition to the Bill that have gained public momentum, in particular, in relation to the proposed role Māori will have in the entities.
4. The Local Government Sector Committee supports a governance model with equal seats at the decision-making table for Māori. There are already good examples of equal decision making models working well (eg: The Waikato River Authority).

5. The Local Government Sector Committee is particularly interested in ensuring accountability to the local level. We generally want democratic participation and accountability, we acknowledge that this proposal reduces the direct involvement of councils, but we realise it's necessary. We support the various clauses in the Bill that try to address this.
6. Anecdotally the Local Government Sector is aware of situations where members are concerned that they would be going against their employer if they spoke out when employed by those councils that have taken a stance against three waters.
7. The Local Government Sector Committee is also concerned about smaller areas being "overridden" by larger councils. We know that on the flip side, those smaller councils will benefit from the input and expertise of being serviced by larger entities. We support the changes made in response to the working group's input to help address this issue.
8. The Local Government Sector Committee does not support privatisation or contracting out of water services. We question why the legislation has clauses that allow for divestment, and why it does not simply contain a clause that prohibits divestment. More rigor is required in the legislative triggers or drivers. We would like to see the legislation strengthened particularly in relation to not allowing for the contracting out of the delivery of water services. We note that it would be difficult but not impossible to achieve the divestment thresholds in the proposed Bill.
9. The Local Government Sector believes that in the transition process:
 - Workers should not be disadvantaged due to the transition to new water services entities
 - Employee contract terms and conditions should be improved or at a minimum retained at the current levels
 - Contract terms and conditions should not be eroded due to this change.
10. This is an opportunity to create well functioning, well-resourced entities that attract workers through good terms & conditions, pay and training opportunities; creating a working environment where staff want to stay and work.

Nga mihi,

PSA Local Government Sector Committee