Mackenzie DISTRICT COUNCIL

Mackenzie Messenger

From the Mayor's desk - 21 October 2026

Hello

Well, it's been 12 months in the office of the Mayor and the new council and what a year it has been.



For some of our ratepayers it would appear nothings changed however this couldn't be further from the truth. My initial introduction into the new role was nothing short of a baptism of fire with an initial trip to Wellington where we were consciquently told Local Government would be subject to a Tsunami of reform. Starting with head start – AKA – amalgamation of local government into potential unitary authorities and the disillusion of Regional Councils. This was also coupled with the need to have to start forming a new water identity with Timaru District Council as I had been informed by the Department of Internal Affairs that the Water Unit that we had proposed to bring in house in the previous Triennium wasn't going to cut the Muster with Government Officials. (I was some what annoyed by this prospect as we had gone to a lot of effort to potentially make an in house unit work), but I was calmly told over a cup of coffee that all our problems 'would go away' if we complied. Not being one to be pushed around easily there was some reluctance to agree, however in this case we weren't left with a lot of choice. Government officials havnt been left wanting in knowing that the MacKenzie is a stoic district with its own identity ever since...

We have since formed a new joint water services identity with Timaru District Council and the business will operate as a stand alone company known as Central South Island Water Ltd. It has its own board of directors and chair with the primary goal of operating our water services for the two districts. This new company will be fully operational by 30 June with official kick off 1 July 2027.

Outside of this we have been wading through the proposed Headstart – Unitary Authority process with our neighbouring councils. We have had excellent engagement with Timaru, Waimate and Waitaki in the process and were well on our way to forming some good outcomes for all collective ratepayers – however – only as Central Government can do – they through the spanner in the works and put the entire process on hold! Again, we are nothing short of bouncing off the walls as we await the outcome of the election. I did have a meeting with National MP – Miles Anderson a couple of weeks ago who informed me the process would continue if National got back into power. We will wait with baited breath.



Toilets at Hamilton Drive, Tekapo

On a positive note, we have received $2.5 million in funding from MBIE to enable the MacKenzie District to go to a user pays model for public toilets and fund some upgrading of existing toilets that are at the end of their use by date. Currently we have budgeted $800 000 for toilet cleaning and maintenance of our existing toilets in the MacKenzie that equates to around 4% of your rates. Unfortunately, with the high popularity of the MacKenzie District comes the burden of public toilets and keeping them clean and

operable. This has now placed an unfair burden on the ratepayers and needs to be offset by charging our visitors. We will have a system for local ratepayers for access which will be implemented in the near future. The high through put of visitors using our public toilets is also loading up our sewage systems and ponds – which when built, weren't designed to cope with the high vistor numbers we are experiencing

On a second positive note, I received a phone call from the Minister Of Tourism – Louise Upson who informed me we would receive (again if elected) a larger portion of the International Visitor Levy – IVL. National have promised we would receive approx. $11.4 million over the next 4 years – approx. $2.5 million increasing each year for 4 years in which we could utilise these funds for operating costs and maintenance in the normal business of the council. In the case of an $800K toilet cleaning account this would go along way to offset this cost and many others.

It goes without saying this prospective economic windfall hasn't come about without the constant lobbying of staff, council members, community board members and the wider community to Government Officials and to every ones credit they have listened.

Going forward we will continue to lobby Ministers where appropriate and advocate for the wider district.

The next 12 months are going to be a continued path of change with the RMA reforms coming, Regional Spatial Plans and Land Use Plans to name a few things. At a personal level I have a strong interest in the new RMA rules and what this potentially could look like. The Regional Spatial Plan is another area I am keenly interested in. I have watched the MacKenzie go through a district plan review and the contentious Plan Changes 13,18 and 23. These have been a great financial burden on all our rate payers and there are areas in here that arnt fit for purpose. While I wont go into detail here, council is taking a long hard look at what fits and what doesn't. We are working to ascertain what the future might look like under the new rules and how this would (or) could impact the MacKenzie District.

On the Short-Term visitor Accommodation front we have instructed council officers to pursue and level the playing field in this space. Between Tekapo and Twizel we have near 900 Short Term Visitor Accommodation providers that may not be operating according to the rules. We have many business owners that have paid the appropriate financial contributions and operate as the law requires, however there are many that are not. Again, this is about equity and fairness to every ratepayer. When we have properties that have been divided up many times and are effectively operating as motels by default and not paying the appropriate rates, fees or developer contributions then they have in essence robbed the ratepayer. Again this comes back to the straining infrastructure costs and the need to maintain and upgrade which falls on the back of rates. This will be pursued and I expected positive outcomes.

On a side note to this, due to the amount of public exposure I have been contacted directly by one of AirBNBs Policy Officials of which I will be meeting in the very near future to discuss some of these issues. We will advise the wider community of progress on this matter in due course.

To finish up for now, we are entering into the summer season, tourist traffic is increasing as is the heat. I suggest when travelling everyone leaves a bit earlier than they normally would. I know now when driving to Fairlie from Twizel, I always allow an hour and half for travel time. Tourist traffic can be slow and frustrating at times so keep aware and be calm. We want you all to arrive at your destinations safely. And on the heat – temperature front, have a hmmm moment before doing something that could lead to fire. The weather people are telling us the Elno effect this year is going to be a monster so coming with that is the increased fire danger. We've seen enough wild fires in the MacKenzie over the last 5 years so we don't particularly want any more.

Until next time

Thanks Scott.

Report an issue or problem?

Contact us on 0800 685 8514, email info@mackenzie.govt.nz or use MyMDC - mackenzie.govt.nz/mymdc



The risk of wildfires

With a developing El Niño expected to influence New Zealand's weather patterns over the coming months, it is important that we all make what preparations we can to decrease the risk of wildfire.

The wildfires at Lake Pukaki and Lake Ōhau in October 2020 remind us how quickly fire can spread and how devastating it can be.

Acting now can reduce the risk to ourselves and to our community. Fire and Emergency is working with the council, Environment Canterbury and the Department of Conservation to reduce the risk of wildfires being started by human activities, and to limit the opportunities for fires to spread, so that our whole community is safer.

Actions you can take to reduce the risk to your home from wildfire



- Create a safety zone (also called defensible space) around your home
- Keep the grass short around your home, including the garage, garden shed and other buildings
- Clear gutters to remove dead leaves, debris and pine needles
- Clear the area around your deck of dead leaves, debris and other material that will burn easily
- Move your firewood stack off the deck and at least 10 metres away from the house
- Remove highly flammable plants close to your house and other buildings. You might be surprised how quickly some common plants will burn compared to others
- Remove branches of trees overhanging your home and outbuildings
- Make sure the access to your property, including your gateway and drive, is at least 4 metres wide and 4 metres high so emergency vehicles can reach you

Find out more at checkitsalright.nz > Reduce your risk > Protecting your property

Put on the list for the next long weekend

- Enclose the spaces under your home, such as the edge of your deck or the gap between wallboards and the ground, where embers could blow in and set fire to your house.
- Check any wooden fences around your property, and replace any sections that are joined to the house. If the fence catches fire it can set your house alight too.
- Plant low flammability species on your property.

Low flammability plants



Landscaping with low flammability plants can help reduce the impact of wildfire around your home, other buildings, and other valuable assets like crops.

Choosing less flammable plants can help starve a wildfire of fuel, reducing the fire intensity, and help protect your home, buildings and valuable assets from intense heat.

Many of New Zealand's native and exotic species have low or low-moderate flammability and are therefore ideal for planting around your property or to protect valuable assets.

Find out more at checkitsalright.nz > Reduce your risk > Low flammability plants

Information request responses are available online

One of the important functions of any council is to respond to requests for information under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA).

The questions that are asked cover a wide range of topics and the responses are now being proactively published on the council website. However, for privacy reasons, information that would identify an individual are not published.

New responses are published at the end of each month, at mackenzie.govt.nz > Council > Information Requests

Booking Facilities



Are you planning an event, and would like to see if a community centre or public open space within the Mackenzie District is available? Booking schedules are available on our website.

Schedules for hall and event venues at Albury, Fairlie, Tekapo and Twizel are under mackenzie.govt.nz > Services > Parks, Venues and Recreation > Halls & Event Venues

To book a facility, contact Council on 0800 685 8514 or email info@mackenzie.govt.nz

Head Start local government reform: Update



In August 2026 Mackenzie District Council, together with Timaru, Waimate and Waitaki district councils, submitted a proposal to the government for a Mid-South Canterbury/North Otago Unitary Authority, as part of their nation-wide scheme to reform local government (Head Start).

In September 2026 the government announced it would take extra time before deciding which local government reform proposals should progress to a detailed design stage under the Head Start pathway.

They indicated that more work would be required before Cabinet would be able to make final decisions and that the overall programme would be paused until after the national election.

The Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions & Transport (MCERT) has indicated that the next step will a series of planned workshops in early 2027 to address the key challenges identified through the Head Start proposals.

The challenges still to be addressed include: the lack of consensus across the wider region regarding potential council amalgamations; the absence of a clear approach to incorporating regional council functions into a unitary authority model; potential governance structures; the delivery of region-wide functions; and how local representation and community voice could be maintained.

As this edition of the Messenger goes to print, there is currently no clear timeline for the next stages of the process, or of the introduction of the Government's proposed supporting legislation.

Mackenzie, together with Timaru, Waimate and Waitaki district councils, submitted a proposal for a Mid-South Canterbury/North Otago Unitary Authority. The proposal document can be downloaded from Council's website at mackenzie.govt.nz > Council > Government Reform.

Fairlie and Twizel Swimming Pools



Strathconan Pool in Fairlie has reopened for the 2026-2027 season.

Twizel Community Pool will reopen on Saturday 21 November.

Usual pool opening hours are as follows*:

Fairlie

School Term	6:00am - 6:00pm
Weekends / Holidays / Public Holidays	6:00am - 9:00am 12:00pm - 6:00pm

Twizel

School Term	8:00am - 6:00pm
Weekends / Holidays / Public Holidays	10:00am - 6:00pm

* These hours are subject to change by the swimming pool contractor. Please confirm with the contractor on the day.

Water Restrictions

There are no water restrictions currently in force in the Mackenzie District.

Why do we have water restrictions?

In some years a range of factors mean that we need to put water restrictions in place to ensure our supplies can cope with demand.

In Mackenzie district our water comes from a variety of rain-fed sources, and we have a range of local climates and average rainfall totals. We are a district which is growing with new properties being built and new people moving to join us. We are also starting to see the impacts of climate change and over the coming years our district will face increasing extreme weather conditions. All of these have an impact on our water supplies.

It often seems that water is abundant, but drinkable tap water is not an infinite resource - only about 1.2% of the planet's water is suitable for drinking. Safe drinking water is also expensive to produce and supply to our houses.

During extreme dry spells we put in place water restrictions to ensure we are all using water wisely. When we're in a drought, we don't know when it's going to end, so restrictions are a smart and proactive way of conserving water and minimising wastage.

Our restrictions limit outdoor water use. This means we can focus on having water for use in our homes and for our commercial customers. It is important that people aren't letting their hoses run wild when water is scarce.

When we have water restrictions in place you will find the information on our website, we post regular reminders on our Facebook page and in our newsletters, and you will see the arrow on our road-side water restriction boards around the district. We have five stages of water restrictions that we can apply during dry spells:



Long Term Plan update



Councillors continue to work on the Long Term Plan (LTP) with a focus on what may be topics for consultation. While those topics still need to be finalised Council has set up an ongoing communication portal.

If you would like to share your thoughts with Councillors on the upcoming LTP please follow the link at letstalk.mackenzie.govt.nz or send an email to feedback@mackenzie.govt.nz