



Councils unite behind Head Start proposal to reshape local government

The mayors of the Timaru, Mackenzie, Waimate and Waitaki districts have jointly lodged an ambitious proposal to the Government under the Head Start programme.

The plan, submitted to the Ministry of Cities Environment Regions and Transport on Sunday, proposes to create a single, stronger unitary authority across one of New Zealand's most economically significant regions.

The proposal is the product of months of intensive work, honest debate and close collaboration between the partner councils, who share strong communities of interest across their economies, river catchments and outlook.

The new region takes in the five districts of Waitaki, Waimate, Mackenzie, Timaru and Ashburton. It stretches from Aoraki/Mount Cook, the nation's highest peak, down through the region's mighty braided rivers to the Pacific coast.

The mayors describe the region as a genuine powerhouse for the country – home to the Waitaki Valley hydro schemes that help power the North Island through the HVDC link, some of New Zealand's most productive agricultural land and food processing industries, and internationally renowned tourism destinations.

Timaru District Mayor Nigel Bowen said the proposal reflected a shared, long-term vision rather than simply a redrawing of boundaries.

"This has been a genuine team effort, and I'm proud of what our four councils have achieved together in a very short space of time," Mayor Bowen said.

"We've chosen to take this opportunity to design a future council that will work for all our communities. This region powers New Zealand in the most literal sense, and this proposal is about making sure our local government is as capable and ambitious as the place it serves."

Mackenzie District Mayor Scott Aronsen said the collaboration had been constructive and forward-looking throughout.

"We've had open, honest conversations around the table, and that's exactly what a decision of this scale deserves," Mayor Aronsen said.

"For our smaller and rural communities, this is about securing better services, stronger representation and real resilience for

the future. Working together, we can achieve things none of us could deliver alone."

Waimate District Mayor Craig Rowley said the process had been about keeping options open while doing the hard work properly.

"There's been a huge amount of effort go into getting us to this point, and I want to acknowledge everyone involved," Mayor Rowley said.

"This proposal keeps our district's voice at the heart of any future arrangement. It's practical, it's ambitious, and it makes sure smaller communities like ours are heard every step of the way."

Waitaki District Mayor Mel Tavendale said the partnership recognised the deep connections across the wider region.

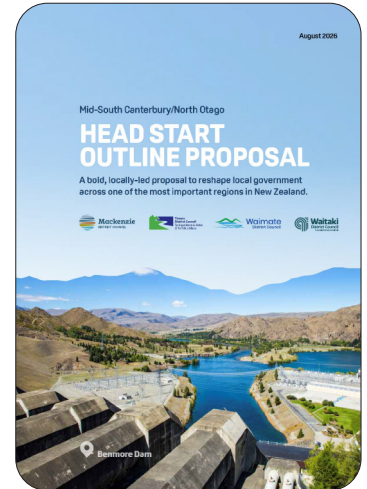
"Our communities are linked by our rivers, our economy and our way of life, and this proposal reflects that reality," Mayor Tavendale said.

"We've listened carefully to our communities throughout, and I'm pleased we can put forward something genuinely locally led. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build something better together."

The partner councils have proposed to include the Ashburton District in the final proposal, recognising that a larger footprint could offer greater scale, a broader rating base and stronger regional capability.

The mayors say the proposal offers central government a single, capable regional partner for infrastructure investment, transport, and environmental management across a nationally important part of the South Island.

For further information on Headstart, including the whole media release, go to our Lets Talk page at letstalk.mackenzie.govt.nz > Local Government Reform - Head Start.



Fairlie Community Board Projects

Following the success of the Dog Park and the new BBQ by the playground, the Fairlie Community Board are keen to hear the community thoughts on new possible projects.

Do you have a great idea for something that would contribute to the community, which the Community Board could get behind?

Have your say at letstalk.mackenzie.govt.nz > Fairlie Community Board Projects 2026



News & Information - Continued



Did you know?

You can now watch Mackenzie District Council meetings live online.

If you miss the livestream, you can find the videos and catch up on our website. Look for the meeting details on our Meetings and Agendas section of the website at mackenzie.govt.nz > Council > Meetings and Agendas



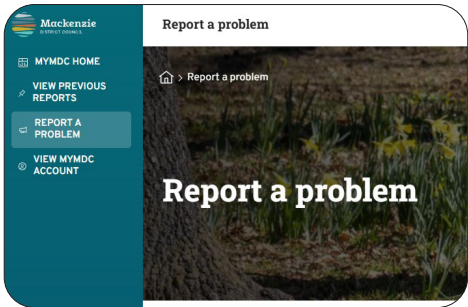
MyMDC

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Current job openings

Position	Part time/Full time	Location	Applications Due
Customer Services Officer	Full Time	Fairlie	Wednesday 26 August 2026

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Dates of upcoming meetings

Date	Meeting	Time*	Location
Tuesday 25 August	Finance Committee Meeting Council Chambers, Fairlie	9:30am	Fairlie
Tuesday 25 August	Council Meeting Council Chambers, Fairlie	11:00am	Fairlie
Tuesday 1 September	Council Workshop Council Chambers, Fairlie	9:30am	Fairlie
Tuesday 8 September	Council Workshop Council Chambers, Fairlie	9:30am	Fairlie
Tuesday 8 September	Water Committee Meeting Council Chambers, Fairlie	2:00pm	Fairlie
Tuesday 15 September	Council Workshop Council Chambers, Fairlie	9:00am	Fairlie

The public are welcome to attend meetings. Occasionally times and venues change so please call and check beforehand. There is a public forum at the beginning of each Council and Community Board meeting and members of the public are invited to address Elected Members on relevant matters.

Agendas for scheduled meetings are available two days before the meeting (with the exception of late papers, which are added to the agenda when available). Agendas for extraordinary meetings are made available as soon as practicably possible. (Extraordinary meetings are meetings held outside the published meeting schedule and are called when a decision cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting).

Once published, agendas are available at mackenzie.govt.nz > Council > Meetings and Agendas

* The length of the meeting will depend on the agenda.

