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District Council

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13 August 2026

Council amalgamation update

The following joint media release was issued by the Mackenzie, Waimate, Waitaki and Timaru District Councils on 10 August 2026.

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 for 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.



Read the outline proposal at waimatedc.govt.nz/amalgamation

Public notices moving online

Waimate District Council will now publish public notices on its website following recent legislative changes.

Legislation passed by Parliament earlier this year modernised public notification requirements for local authorities, allowing councils to publish public notices on their websites. The change makes it easier for residents to access information online while also reducing publication costs.

The new approach applies to a range of statutory notices, including those relating to Council meetings, dog control, freedom camping, rates and other matters where public notification is required by legislation.

Public notices will be published in the News section on Council's website and shared on Council's Facebook page. Residents are encouraged to check these channels regularly or sign up to NotifyMe to receive public notices and other Council updates straight to their inbox.

For those without internet access, public computers are available at the Waimate Library, where Council information can be viewed.

100% dog registration for fifth year in a row



For the fifth straight year, the Waimate District has recorded a 100% registration rate for all known dogs.

According to the 2025/26 Dog Control Annual Report, there were 2,867 registrations from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026. The figure includes the following: 2,841 (pet, working, and rural pet), 4 (dangerous), and 22 (menacing). The total represents an increase from 2,758 in 2024/25.

There were also zero disqualified or probationary owners, no prosecutions, and fewer infringement notices and service requests than in 2024/25.

Although several animal and person attacks were reported, Council reports that the dog behaviour/safety programme has been an overall success. 'Wolfie' the retired greyhound remains as popular as ever.

Mandated under the Dog Control Act 1996, the Dog Control Annual Report covers a 12-month period that runs from 1 July to 30 June. Council approved the 2025/26 report at an Ordinary Council Meeting on 21 July 2026.

The full report is available at waimatedc.govt.nz/dogs

Chief Executive announces resignation



After nearly a decade serving as Chief Executive of Waimate District Council, Stuart Duncan has announced his resignation.

Mr Duncan said the decision had been made after considerable reflection and was driven by a desire to ensure the Council is well positioned for the future. "While this has been a difficult decision, I believe the timing is right for a new Chief Executive to lead the organisation through the significant changes facing local government, including the Government's Head Start pathway and wider sector reforms," he said.

Mr Duncan has served as Chief Executive for nearly 10 years and said it had been an extraordinary privilege to work alongside elected members, staff, and the wider community.

"Leading the Waimate District Council has been the most rewarding role of my career. I have been fortunate to work with an outstanding team of councillors

and staff whose commitment to serving the community is second to none. I am immensely proud of what we have achieved together."

"The Waimate District is an exceptional place to live, work, and raise a family. Throughout my time here, I have been continually inspired by the resilience, generosity, and spirit of our community. It has been a privilege to serve the people of this district."

Mr Duncan also expressed his gratitude to Council staff. "Our staff work tirelessly every day to deliver essential services and support our community. Their professionalism, dedication, and commitment to public service are remarkable, and I leave with absolute confidence in their ability to continue serving Waimate well." While stepping away from full-time executive leadership, Mr Duncan said he hoped to remain involved in governance and public service in a more balanced capacity.

"I leave with deep gratitude, immense pride, and confidence in the future of both the Council and the district. Waimate has a strong future ahead, and I wish the Council, staff, and community every success."

Mayor Craig Rowley acknowledged Stuart's contribution to both the Council and the district. "On behalf of the Council and our community, I want to sincerely thank Stuart for his outstanding leadership and commitment over the past decade. He has guided the organisation through significant challenges and change while maintaining a strong focus on delivering for our district. We wish Stuart all the very best for the future and thank him for the lasting contribution he has made to Waimate."

The recruitment process for a new Chief Executive has begun and is being led by executive recruitment company Sheffield. Mr Duncan will continue in the role until 25 September 2026 and will work with elected members to ensure a smooth transition.

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