

Submission

Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill

Submission to: Governance and Administration Committee

27 August 2025

Contact Details

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Submitter

Forest Owners Association represents New Zealand forest growers who produce timber. New Zealand's 1.75-million-hectare production forest estate employs nearly 40,000 people across the supply chain. 8,500 people are employed directly in forest harvesting, silviculture, engineering and management roles. Forestry is the country's fourth largest export earner. In 2025, the forest growing sector was worth \$6.35 billion in export value. Plantation forests play a significant public good role in helping New Zealand meet its net-zero emissions targets by 2050 through carbon sequestration and providing feedstocks to meet growing demand for bioenergy, and for high-value products that offer an alternative to those made from fossil fuels. This vital role is only going to increase in the future.

Summary

Forest Owners Association supports a number of the proposals of the Local Government (System Improvements) Bill (the Bill). We support the overall aim of improving the operation of local government. However, we have concerns about the framing of local government's role, particularly as it relates to biosecurity.

New Zealand faces significant challenges from invasive pests and weeds, which threaten its unique biodiversity, agriculture, and ecosystems. Species like possums, stoats, and wilding conifers disrupt native habitats and endanger endemic flora and fauna.

Local governments play a crucial role in managing these threats through regional pest management plans, biosecurity initiatives, and community engagement programs. They collaborate with national agencies like Biosecurity New Zealand, iwi, and local landowners to implement control measures, monitor biosecurity risks around critical assets, and promote education around prevention. Funding and policy support from councils also enable targeted eradication efforts and long-term ecological restoration projects.

There are many forestry companies who support local Predator Free efforts, many of which are collaboratively resourced by local government. Council's involvement provides two unique elements that would be difficult to fill from the private sector or central government:

- 1) Operational coordination – councils are often well placed, using community property, to coordinate and facilitate operational programmes like Predator Free initiatives, which often need to be executed across a combination of public and private land

- 2) Connection between rural and urban – councils often have a critical social role in bridging the rural-urban divide by scaling initiatives at the local level.

Urban areas represent the front line for wider biosecurity incursions into New Zealand, these are high biosecurity risk areas due to their population size, trade movement and both domestic and international ports, airports. These areas require a collaborative approach for surveillance and response planning to ensure that biosecurity risks are well managed.

We are concerned that the proposed amendments reduce and remove local government's ability to deliver these functions effectively and efficiently.

The description of Core services (11A), and those elements listed below this need to be amended to more accurately reflect the wide range of activities and services that councils, including biosecurity and asset protection. This function of asset protection has a critical public good element that is an important component of local government.

We do not object to the submission being made public, and we are happy to speak to this submission.

Dr Elizabeth Heeg
Forest Owners Association