7 August 2026

Hon Simon Watts and Hon Chris Bishop

Waihou-Piako-Hauraki-Coromandel Head Start proposal

On behalf of Thames-Coromandel District Council, Hauraki District Council and Matamata-Piako District Council, we are pleased to submit our jointly endorsed proposal seeking acceptance into the Government's Head Start programme for local government reform.

On 4 August, each of our councils formally resolved to support this proposal and to work together on the next stage of developing a new unitary authority for the Waihou-Piako-Hauraki-Coromandel area.

This proposal reflects a shared belief that local government reform presents an opportunity to align governance with the communities, landscapes and catchments that define this part of New Zealand. Rather than starting with existing administrative boundaries, we have deliberately started with the natural systems, economic connections and communities of interest that already bind our districts together.

The proposed area overlaps with the rohe and areas of interest of Pare Hauraki, Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Hauā, Raukawa and Ngāti Hinerangi. The new authority would carry forward existing Treaty settlement obligations and continue to work in genuine partnership with iwi and hapū. The community engagement undertaken shows support among respondents for an 'eastern Waikato authority', alongside a consistent expectation that no area be dominated by a larger centre.

We believe this proposal is particularly well aligned with the Government's objectives because it builds upon, rather than replaces, existing collaborative programmes. It complements the proposed Pare Hauraki Catchment Authority, aligns closely with existing catchment management approaches, and supports implementation of Sea Change – Tai Timu Tai Pari, New Zealand's first marine spatial plan. These existing initiatives demonstrate that the geography of our proposal already reflects how environmental, economic and community issues are increasingly being managed.

Throughout development of the proposal we have engaged with iwi leaders, post-settlement governance entities and mana whenua organisations whose interests span the proposed area. While formal engagement would continue during the detailed design phase, we have been encouraged by the recognition that a catchment-based approach provides a logical platform for strengthening existing commitments and long-term environmental stewardship. We remain committed to ensuring that detailed design is undertaken alongside iwi and hapū so that existing statutory relationships are maintained and strengthened.

We are also confident that the proposal satisfies the Government's five assessment criteria.

- It supports the new planning system by bringing regional and district planning responsibilities together within one authority while retaining strong collaboration across the wider Waikato.
- It simplifies local governance by replacing overlapping regional and territorial responsibilities with clearer accountability for communities.
- It provides sufficient organisational and financial scale to strengthen specialist capability, improve long-term resilience and deliver more efficient investment across a connected sub-region.
- It maintains strong local voice through directly elected statutory local boards that preserve local decision-making and community identity.
- Finally, and importantly, it is deliverable. The three councils have already agreed guiding principles through a Memorandum of Understanding, have established a clear implementation pathway and recognise that the detailed design stage is the appropriate process for working through governance, financial, legislative and transition matters with Government and affected parties.

We wish to register our concern about the limited time available for councils and communities to fully consider the reform proposals - particularly alongside other significant legislative changes occurring. We note we already have existing commitments to collaboration and shared services.

Our preference would have been to continue operating under the current arrangements for maintaining effective local representation, responding to local priorities and providing high-quality services and delivery. However, we chose to engage in this process to provide greater certainty for our communities and shape our own future – rather than enter a Back Stop process that would remove this opportunity.

The intent of the three councils is to progress true community engagement and due diligence. Through this process, if red flags are identified, and in accordance with the agreed principles (as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding) councils may seek to exit from this process.

We respectfully request that Ministers accept the Waihou-Piako-Hauraki-Coromandel proposal into the Head Start programme so that the next stage of detailed design can commence in partnership with Government officials, iwi, affected councils and our communities. We look forward to discussing the proposal with you and your officials.

Yours sincerely

Mayor Toby Adams Hauraki District Council	Mayor Ash Tanner Matamata-Piako District Council	Mayor Peter Revell Thames-Coromandel District Council

Encl.: Hauraki Māori Trust and Pare Hauraki Collective - Support for the Waihou-Piako-Hauraki-Coromandel Headstart Proposal.

6 August 2026

Mayor Revell, Thames-Coromandel District Council

Mayor Adams, Hauraki District Council

Mayor Tanner, Matatmata-Piako District Council

Tēnā ra koutou e ngā Koromātua

SUPPORT FOR THE WAIHOU-PIAKO-HAURAKI-COROMANDEL HEADSTART PROPOSAL

The leadership of Pare Hauraki confirms our strong support for the proposed Waihou-Piako-Hauraki-Coromandel Headstart Proposal, as proposed jointly by Thames-Coromandel District Council, Hauraki District Council, and Matamata-Piako District Council.

We look forward to the Government approving this proposal as part of the Simplifying Local Government Reform programme. The next steps will involve Pare Hauraki to continuing to work with councils and the Crown to ensure the future arrangements deliver enduring social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits for all communities across our rohe.

As Mana Whenua of this catchment area, we have carefully considered the options presented through the reform process and the implications for our people, our whenua, our awa, our moana and our future generations. We acknowledge the extensive engagement undertaken by the three councils with mana whenua as Treaty partners.

Our support for the Waihou-Piako-Hauraki-Coromandel proposal reflects the strong alignment between this option and the cultural, environmental, and community relationships that are the identity of Hauraki. Throughout the engagement, our iwi consistently highlighted the importance of maintaining and strengthening the connections that exist across the Hauraki landscape, including our shared whakapapa, catchments, waterways, coastal environments, and communities. The Waihou-Piako-Hauraki-Coromandel proposal best reflects these realities providing a governance footprint that aligns with the natural and cultural systems that have shaped our rohe for centuries and creates a strong foundation for future partnership between councils and mana whenua.

We are particularly encouraged by the proposal's recognition of:

- the importance of maintaining meaningful relationships with mana whenua as Treaty partrners;
- the protection and enhancement of the Pare Hauraki identity and whakapapa connections;
- the commitment to honour Treaty settlement obligations, including statutory acknowledgements, and established iwi-council relationships;
- integrated catchment-based management approaches for the Waihou, Piako, Coromandel and coastal environments;
- the need for strong local representation and community voice; and
- opportunities to strengthen regional collaboration and build long-term resilience.

Importantly, the proposal also creates an opportunity to build stronger and more consistent partnerships between local government and mana whenua from the outset, rather than seeking to establish or strengthen those relationships after significant decisions have already been made.

The proposal aligns closely with our aspirations embodied within the Pare Hauraki Collective settlement arrangements and the ongoing focus on whole-of-catchment management. We note that the Waihou-Piako-Hauraki Coromandel geography generally aligns with the catchment areas and environmental connections that are central to many of our collective aspirations for freshwater, biodiversity, coastal environments, and cultural wellbeing.

We also acknowledge the commitment made by the three councils to work alongside Mana Whenua to develop an enduring framework for engagement and partnership throughout the transition process and into any future local government entity. We view this commitment as an important step toward ensuring iwi voices continue to be heard and that decisions affecting our taonga reflect mātauranga Māori, tikanga, and our responsibilities as kaitiaki. This commitment provides a strong foundation for genuine partnership and meaningful Mana whenua involvement in shaping the future governance and wellbeing of our region.

Let us move forward together.

David Taipari

Chair
Hauraki Māori Trust Board

Paul Majurey

Chair
Pare Hauraki Collective