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LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW ZEALAND SURVEY REPORT

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CONDUCTED BY
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LISTENING TO NEW ZEALAND

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INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of a survey of 956 adult New Zealanders in August 2012 for the New Zealand Council for Infrastructure Development. The survey looked at:

- how New Zealanders rate the value they receive from their local and regional councils
- how knowledgeable they are about the people who represent them at local level and their council's policies
- how supportive they are of the Government's proposals to change the focus of Local Government through an amendment to the Local Government Act 2002
- how they view their council's regulatory performance and the effect of the Resource Management Act
- whether they believe there are too many councils and whether there should be amalgamation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Government clearly has public support for its approach, outlined in the Local Government Act 2002 Amendment Bill, to refocus the purpose of local government.64% of ratepayers and56% of respondents overall support a change for Councils to focus on "providing good quality local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and business". Support levels are even higher among National Party, Maori Party and Conservative Party supporters.

Party Vote 2011 General Election	% Support change
ACT New Zealand	65.6%
Conservative	82.9%
Green Party	39.0%
Labour Party	50.2%
Mana Party	42.0%
Maori Party	72.4%
National Party	77.4%
New Zealand First Party	53.6%
United Future	100.0%
Other party	55.6%
Was not eligible to vote	21.1%
Chose not to vote	39.1%
Don't know or can't remember	28.9%

Total	56.1%

Only 18% overall support keeping the focus on the four well-beings, as it is now.

The impression from the overall ratings of performance and respondent comments is of a sector that in general performs only satisfactorily. This is not to say that all councils are seen in that way; a few respondents clearly believe they receive excellent service. However, comments from respondents are strongly negative and suggest that a belief that local government is inefficient and generally wasteful is deep seated.

A contributing factor is possibly the apparent lack of connection between ratepayers and their councils. It was surprising to find that, despite the reform of Auckland local government, Aucklanders appear to be remote from their council, with poorer knowledge of what local government does and less understanding of their council's policies than ratepayers in other areas.

The survey reveals a different set of priorities between ratepayers and non-ratepayers. For example, more than half of ratepayers feel that their council should reduce or remove some of its activities to reduce council rates. This is not the case for non-ratepayers; only 30% feel this way. A higher percentage of non-ratepayers than ratepayers are prepared to consider rates increases to fund extension or enhancement of council services and their priorities are different: non-ratepayers would want to see increased rates going to fund environmental protection and social services, while ratepayers would want to see investment in infrastructure.

39% of respondents feel that change is required to the Resource Management Act, even though close to 60% of respondents do not feel that they have ever been treated unfairly as a result of the application of the RMA. On average, respondents do feel that the RMA is having a slightly negative effect on individual rights and the economy.

Ratepayers do think there are too many councils in the country, but that sentiment does not extend to support for a full provincial councils concept. Concerns are around loss of local democracy, local identity and "community" and there is a perception that provincial councils would increase rates and costs.

Key findings:

Knowledge and understanding of local government:

- Respondents were more likely to know the name of their local mayor than that of their Member of Parliament. 78% said that they knew their mayor's name, in comparison with 65% who said that they knew their Member of Parliament's name.
- Only 33% of respondents said that they knew the name(s) of the councillor or councillors who represent their area or ward.
- Less than half of those who know their mayor's name also know their councillors
- Aucklanders are less likely to know the name of their mayor, councillors or Member of Parliament than people in other parts of the country.
- 36% have some understanding of the role and activities of local government.

- Auckland ratepayers were less likely than non-Auckland ratepayers to have good or strong understanding of what local government does.
- Only 28% of respondents said that their knowledge of their councils' policies was "good" or "strong".
- The level of Auckland ratepayers who say that they do not understand their council's policies is almost double that of ratepayers from other areas.

Council performance – Value for money:

- Around a third of all respondents rated each council service measured as neither good value nor poor value.
- None of the services surveyed achieved a combined "good value" plus "excellent value" rating that was 50% or more.
- Sewage is seen as the best value service, with an overall combined "good value" plus "excellent value" score across all councils of 49%.
- Water and sewage received the highest "excellent value" ratings, with 11% and 8% respectively, but "excellent value" ratings on all other services were at 5% or less.
- Cost control was rated worst, with 39% rating it as "poor value" or "extremely poor value".
- 47% of Auckland Council respondents rate their council's cost control as "poor value" or "extremely poor value".
- Auckland Council ratepayers consistently rate the value for money of their council's services lower than ratepayers in other areas rate the services from their councils.
- Respondents and ratepayers outside Auckland generally felt that they got better value from their local council than from Central Government, but poorer value from their regional council.
- As a contrast, Auckland ratepayers rated the value for money overall from their council as poorer than the value from Central Government.

Funding methods:

- Respondents would like to see more application of user pays and less use of rates to fund investment by councils
- There is majority opposition to all regional tax options surveyed.

Changes in Council activities:

- 52% of ratepayers believe that their council should reduce activities to achieve lower rates.
- First choice for reduction or removal of activities is Cultural activities.
- Last choice is reduction or removal of infrastructure services.
- 48% overall said that they would not be happy for rates to rise to extend or enhance services. **Only 7% overall said that their council should increase rates to extend or enhance services.**
- "Infrastructure" was the first choice (57% overall) for use of additional rates, but receives more support from ratepayers than from non-ratepayers, who would prefer to see enhanced environmental protection and social services.

- "Environmental protection" is second choice overall for enhanced or extended services.
- "Cultural activities" is the last area that people would consider for enhanced or extended services that increased rates.

Regulations:

- 56% of ratepayers have had to deal with their council's regulations.
- Nearly half of them overall said that the experience was satisfactory, but only 14% said that it was positive.
- Generally, the experience for non-ratepayers was more positive than for ratepayers.
- On average, respondents rated their council's performance with its regulatory functions as "satisfactory".
- Auckland ratepayers rate their council's performance lower than other ratepayers rate their councils'.

Resource Management Act (RMA)

- 57% of respondents said that neither they, nor any organisation they worked with, had been unfairly treated or penalised by the Resource Management Act.
- 12% of respondents said there had been unfair treatment.
- A third of respondents rated the RMA as having a negative effect on the economy, while a third rated it as having neither a positive nor negative effect.
- 30% rated the RMA as having a positive effect on the environment. 16% said that it was having a negative effect.
- 37% of respondents rated the RMA as having a negative effect on individual rights.
- Auckland ratepayers assess the RMA's effect on individual rights more negatively than other ratepayers.
- 50% of respondents are not sure whether current resource management law should be changed, although 35% would like to see change to the law.

Main purpose of councils:

- There is little doubt that the population generally thinks that councils have lost focus on what is important and need to refocus on core public services, infrastructure and regulation. 80% of respondents agreed with that.
- On the other hand, a majority, 59%, believe that providing for the four wellbeings does reflect the needs of residents.
- 80% believe that it should be up to communities to decide on what services are provided and how much they should pay for them.
- Overall, 56% of respondent supported a change in line with the Government's proposals for local government focus.
- Only 18% supported retaining the focus as it currently is.

Auckland Council model:

- 22% of Auckland ratepayers assess the impact of the local government reform which created the Auckland Council as more positive than negative. Among all respondents, 36% rate it as more negative than positive.

- 27% of all respondents felt that creation of the Auckland Council would have no effect on other regions or communities in New Zealand and an equal percentage felt that it would force further amalgamations of councils.
- 18% think that it will disadvantage other regions in New Zealand.
- Only 11% of ratepayers from outside Auckland feel that their councils will need to "lift their game" to compete with Auckland.

Provincial Councils:

- 39% of all respondents think that there are too many councils in New Zealand. 24% disagree.
- In general, ratepayers (and in particular, Auckland ratepayers) were more likely than non-ratepayers to think that there were too many councils
- Most agreement is based around the cost of duplication of services and staff functions, and the perceived cost savings from reducing the number of councils.
- Most disagreement is based around loss of local knowledge and "community" if there were fewer councils.
- Community focus, local democracy and local identity were all perceived as being significantly weakened by a provincial council approach. Rates, costs and bureaucracy were also perceived to increase and services reduce.
- Economic development and "Voice with central Government" were seen as being enhanced by a provincial council model.
- Overall opposition to the provincial council concept was slightly higher than support, but was just within the margin of error for this survey. 20% were neutral on the idea, indicating that they could move either way.

REPORT

1. Knowledge and understanding of local Government

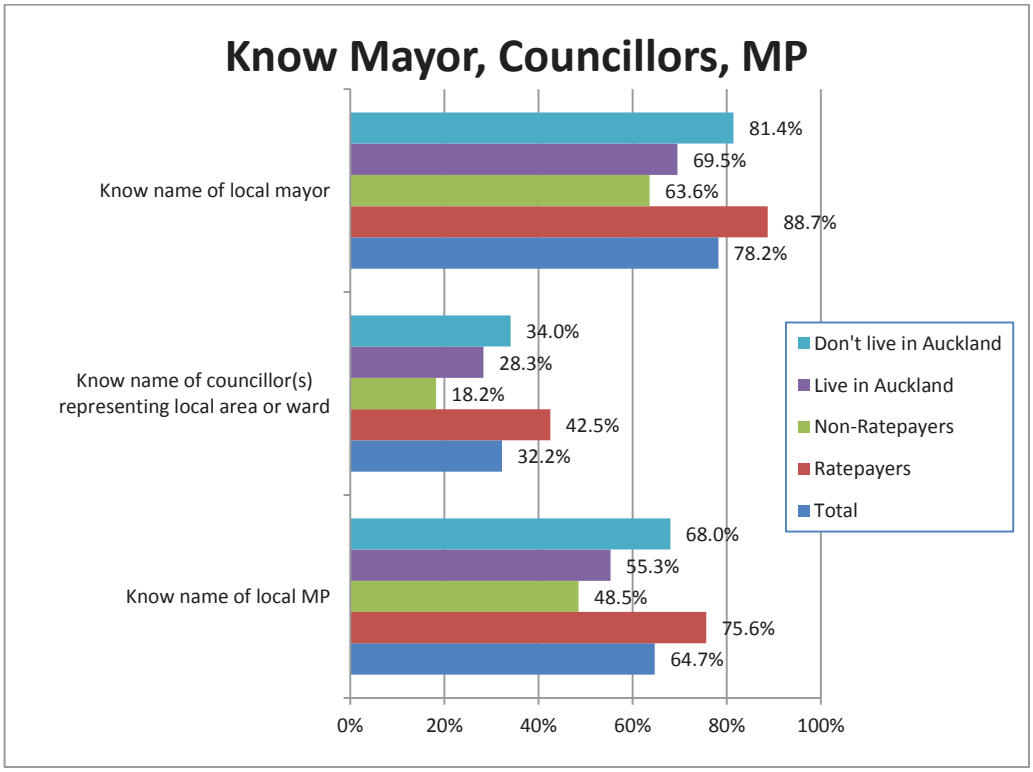
1.1 Mayors, Councillors and Members of Parliament

As the first part of a gauge of how aware respondents were about local government, respondents were asked if they knew the name of their local mayor, their councillors and, as a comparison, their Member of Parliament.

Overall, respondents were more likely to know the name of their local mayor than that of their Member of Parliament. 78% said that they knew their mayor's name, in comparison with 65% who said that they knew their Member of Parliament's name. They are far less likely to know the name(s) of the councillor or councillors who represent their area or ward: only 33% said that they knew the name(s).

Less than half of those who know their mayor's name also know their councillors. Among those who don't know who their mayor is, hardly any knew their councillors.

Ratepayers are generally more knowledgeable, but are no different from all respondents in being more than twice as likely to know the name of their local mayor as the name of councillors. Aucklanders are less likely to know the name of their mayor, councillors or Member of Parliament than people in other parts of the country. Note that the level of knowledge of the local mayor's name is above the 47.5% average turnout level of voters in the 2010 local body elections, but knowledge of councillor names is generally below that voter turnout level.



1.2 Local Government role

Respondents did not have a deep understanding of the role and activities of local government in general, with 36% having only some understanding, 18% a little understanding and 6% saying that they did not understand what local government does. As might be expected, ratepayers had a stronger understanding than non-ratepayers, but 38% of ratepayers still described themselves as having only some understanding.

Auckland ratepayers were less likely than non-Auckland ratepayers to have good or strong understanding of what local government does.

Understanding of role and activities of local government	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
I have a strong understanding of what local government does	11.5%	15.5%	5.8%	9.0%	17.4%
I have quite a good understanding of what local government does	29.0%	32.1%	23.9%	26.5%	33.6%
I have some understanding of what local government does	35.4%	37.7%	33.0%	42.8%	36.3%
I have a little understanding of what local government does	18.2%	12.2%	26.3%	15.5%	11.3%
I do not understand what local government does	5.9%	2.4%	11.0%	6.1%	1.5%
Total	100.0%	99.9%	100.0%	99.9%	100.1%
Base	913	668	239	217	716

1.3 Local Government policies

While 47% of ratepayers said that they have a good or strong understanding of the role and activities of local government, the same cannot be said for their understanding of the policies of their councils. Only 28% said that their knowledge of their councils' policies was "good" or "strong".

Auckland ratepayers are more likely than other ratepayers to have "some" understanding of their council's policies, but are significantly less likely to have a "strong" or "good" understanding and the level of Auckland ratepayers who say that they do not understand their council's policies is almost double that of ratepayers from other areas.

Understanding of the policies of current local or regional council	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
I have a strong understanding of their policies	5.1%	7.3%	1.7%	5.1%	8.0%
I have quite a good understanding of their policies	18.2%	20.4%	14.9%	13.6%	22.2%
I have some understanding of their policies	37.9%	44.7%	29.0%	48.3%	43.8%
I have a little understanding of their policies	28.7%	22.1%	36.9%	24.0%	21.4%
I do not understand their policies	10.1%	5.6%	17.3%	9.0%	4.6%
Total	100.0%	100.1%	99.9%	100.0%	100.0%
Base	913	676	248	217	525

2. Council performance – Value for money

2.1 Services

Asked how they rated the value for money they received on a range of 18 services (including administration and cost control) provided by their council, respondents overall rated the services more positively than negatively on 11 and more negatively than positively on 7.

Around a third of respondents rated each service as neither "good value" nor "poor value". No service had a combined "good value" plus "excellent value" rating that was 50% or more: sewage came closest, with an overall combined "good value" plus "excellent value" score across all councils of 49%.

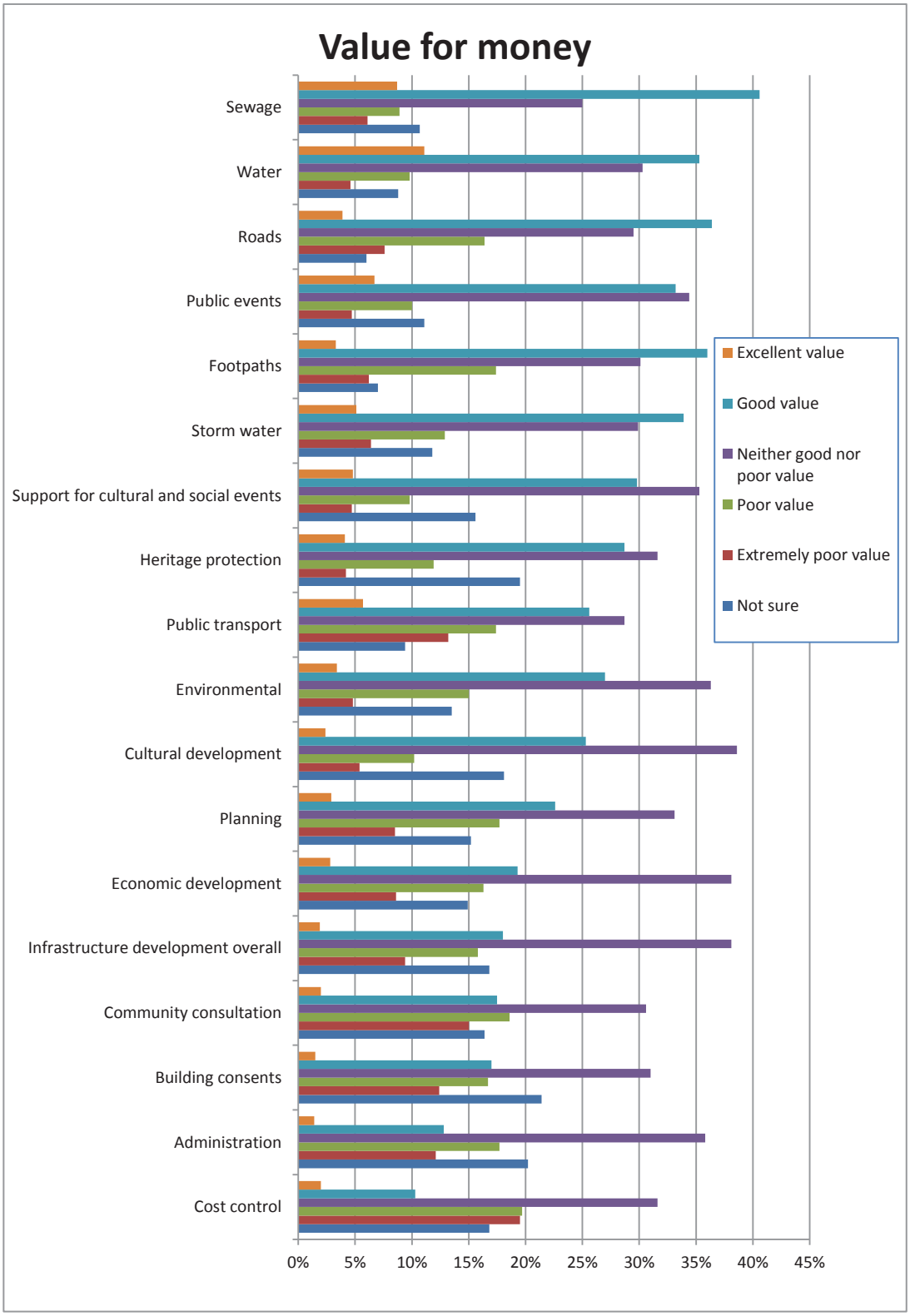
Water and sewage received the highest "excellent value" ratings, with 11% and 8% respectively, but "excellent value" ratings on all other services were at 5% or less.

Cost control was rated worst, with 39% rating it as "poor value" or "extremely poor value".

In rating the services from their local council Auckland Council ratepayers consistently rate the services lower than ratepayers in other areas rate the services from their councils. Typically, more Auckland Council ratepayers answer "neither good value nor poor value" on all services measured. In contrast to the overall results, 7 of the services were rated more positively than negatively and 11 more negatively than positively.

47% of Auckland Council respondents rate their council's cost control as "poor value" or "extremely poor value".

The following chart gives the overall views.



Comments from respondents on the value from services were very heavily negative rather than positive. View covered a range of topics and included:

Auckland Council:

"Council should focus on the service rather than the infrastructure. Any discussion about 'improving roads' or 'developing infrastructure', for example, shows inadequate thought about what's really important. I would rather see discussions around reducing transportation costs by reducing the amount of infrastructure our governments build and maintain."

"I HATE the Auckland Super City! We were never asked if we wanted to be part of it. My rates have gone sky high and now with the new water rates scheme it is just crazy. As for transport - it's all about the City side of the Harbour Bridge. So if I think I am getting value - the answer is NO! How can such a large body govern such a diverse area - rural, urban and city - we all have different needs! Bring back separate Councils!"

"Council takes from acquired areas to give more to Central City and original city areas."

"The critical issue for Auckland is improved public transport - trains every ten minutes, complete the Queen Street loop, and extend regular trains (including weekends) at least to Pukekohe. The bus service is an unmitigated disaster. Unreliable, slow, and a card ticketing system that is subject to failure."

Other Councils:

"I don't believe ratepayers - i.e. home owners - should be paying for public transport. This should be user pays. Ditto cultural. Building consent and compliance way over the top. It may provide good revenue for the council but it's making housing in the city unaffordable. Our regional council has moved a hundred miles from the role it was set up for and ignores ratepayers wishes clearly communicated in a referendum."

"I guess I find the council better than Auckland as I am paying environmental rates in Hamilton but no separate rates for water and sewage. With competition from the base parking fees have dropped in town. The roads are being improved everywhere I drive at the moment but these are main routes so not really local councils but I do like the walk ways in my area."

"They have gone away from their core functions and moved more into the warm fuzzies spending money on things that are not viable and taking risks. They will not make a hard choice as they are to intent on protecting their own image"

"I receive no water, sewerage, stormwater, footpath or public transport services. The reason the road is sealed is because it leads to a beach so the govt. subsidy applies. What services? Any other `services` seem to be in the form of controls on what you are allowed to do."

"These costs are not shown separately in information I've seen (certainly not on my rates bill). I support a council being involved in many of these areas but I am unable to judge whether they are delivering value for money."

"Just from the point of view of where I live, the council is extremely remiss in attending to problems we have. Our neighbourhood has gone from one of first home with value to rentals with no redeeming value for long term residents. The council do not do anything up here. We have an area that has been proposed as reserve, since the time of that decision we have not seen anything happen at all. Nothing nice to show that a reserve is there but in central Hutt they keep on spending. We are the very poor relatives here."

"There seems to be too much red tape and costs associated with this. We pay $4,000 a year for our house rates and on top of that have to pay for water and rubbish collection, seems pretty high for what the council actually does."

"We live in a rural community, no sewage, no water, no stormwater considerations, no footpaths, pay to use the library and pools. Our wages have gone up 2% in five years and we live hand to mouth each week.....we live on a tight budget. Why can't the council instead of raping the working class???? Our rates have risen $500 or more in three years. Greed perhaps? Or poor management? When the average New Zealander is doing it hard the councils still go ahead with projects that the community clearly doesn't want- for example Waipa Council and the new Velodrome. The community clearly did not want this expense so by a hair splitting majority vote it still goes through. It is wrong. The majority of people in the community would never ever use the facility so why is it catering for such a small minority.....?"

"My council is extremely poor at listening to me or any rate payers and does as it pleases without any consultation"

"Too much money on admin; new chambers for self etc. It is a crime that the water in beautiful Queenstown must be chlorinated. Sewerage/stormwater control must be improved so no risk of contaminating lake and drinking water should not come from lake. Great support of recreation. Too much money straightening roads and adding lighting where it increases CO2, costs and light pollution and really only enhances "perceived safety". Consultation had been very good- seems to be lessening with time."

"As the process is not transparent and/or posted it is impossible to say whether or not value is being obtained - councils just spend without notifying rate payers of what they are doing."

"As a rural property owner my rates are enormously high. I pay for my own sewage, water, rubbish collection, have no footpaths, public transport. Every year my rates increase but my property value has decreased! Where is the value for money in that?"

"Generally good but could be done more with greater speed."

"I don't think our council assesses value for money in decision making. Cross council policies are not coherent. Council is run from a cost plus mentality and while every other business and government department I can think of has reassessed costs and priorities, our council has just carried on with a business as usual approach."

"Our present council has taken over from a series of councils that let a lot of things slide. It is trying to get things back to a good base point, so it is hard to fairly judge it - although some comments from the mayor and others have me worried."

"They use debt too much to cover the costs of things we can't afford."

"Council's resources should be more devoted to basic infrastructure issues, and less to pretty but non-specific environmental outcomes, whose costs are clear but whose benefits are not. If Councils were to focus on their core activities, they could substantially cut both expenditure and rates, which would make their cities and regions more attractive places for the people who live there. Councils should exercise caution and fiscal prudence in the implementation of any unnecessarily burdensome and impractical regulatory processes and activities. Unnecessary administrative costs and regulatory activities are a deviation from Council's core functions and should not burden ratepayers. If local government wants to be of assistance to the people they govern, a less hidebound and wasteful bureaucracy would be a good start."

"I believe the NPDC is doing a fine job within their budget."

"We have an excellent infrastructure system that is well ahead of other councils. The Council has invested a lot but it was needed."

"There appears to be too much cross over between the two bodies. Regional Council has developed far beyond what it was envisaged when set up. Councils appear to be in patch protection mode rather than looking at bigger picture and what can be achieved. Upper Hutt and Hutt City are really a complete entity and therefore should be one council instead of duplication of services with little or no cost benefit to rate payers."

"Like most other ratepayers in my area I feel our District Council spends too much on 'wants' rather than 'needs' but when they do spend it I think they get value for our money (hopefully)!"

"Why should we have to pay for services that we do not use or are not interested in like public transport and cultural development should be user pays, councils should stick to core business, not social housing etc."

"I realise the Council don't have endless funds, but the basics of having decent roading (repaired in a timely manner too), maintained footpaths, lighting, drainage, rubbish collection, water supply and sewage should all be prioritised over a lot of other "warm fuzzies" they promote (like putting up sculptures). Council seems to be growing larger in staffing size - are we getting value for money?

"They are reasonably good, but I want them to concentrate on what is their function, not all the other rubbish like dubious and expensive) art in the street, cultural activities, etc. Stick to the knitting!!

2.2 Overall value for money

Respondents were asked whether overall and taking into account all of the services they received, they felt they got value from their local city, district or unitary council; their regional council (if they did not live in a unitary council area); and, as a comparison, Central Government.

Respondents and ratepayers outside Auckland generally felt that they got better value from their local council than from Central Government, but poorer value from their regional council.

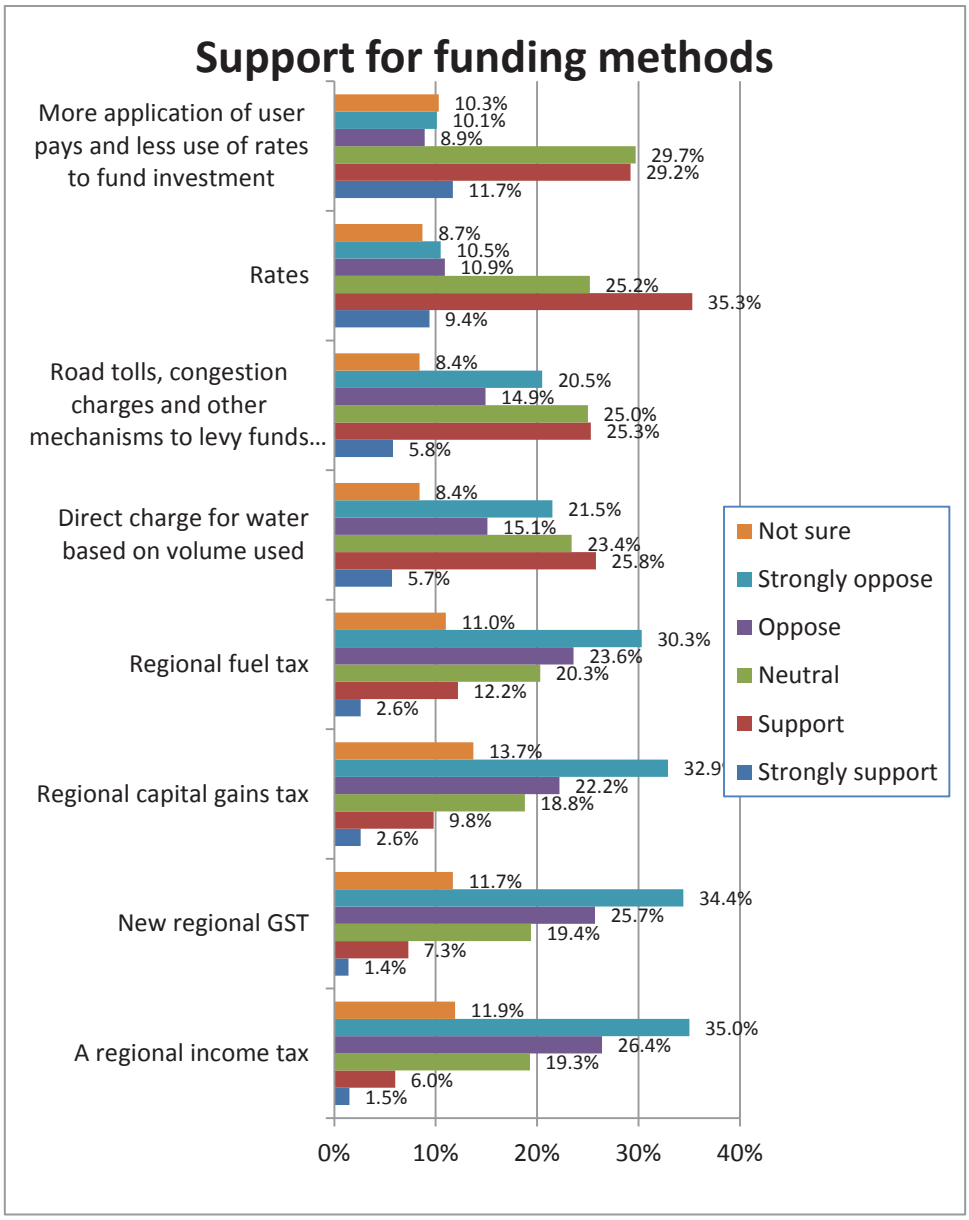
Following the trend on the individual services provided, Auckland ratepayers rated the value for money overall from their council as poorer than the value from Central Government. Auckland ratepayers rated Central Government value consistently with other ratepayers and respondents overall.

Value for Money	Local city, district or unitary council	Regional council	Central Govt.
All respondents			
Yes	7.0%	5.3%	4.8%
Mostly	36.3%	26.8%	33.3%
Mostly not	19.0%	17.2%	19.7%
No	20.2%	17.7%	21.5%
Not sure	15.3%	18.2%	18.5%
All ratepayers			
Yes	6.3%	3.9%	3.9%
Mostly	40.8%	29.3%	36.9%
Mostly not	20.2%	19.2%	23.0%
No	23.5%	20.9%	22.5%
Not sure	7.5%	11.2%	12.0%
Auckland ratepayers			
Yes	1.8%		3.7%
Mostly	30.9%		33.4%
Mostly not	23.7%		25.1%
No	33.4%		23.0%
Not sure	9.3%		14.9%

3. Funding methods

Respondents would like to see more application of user pays and less use of rates to fund investment by councils. Presented with a list of funding methods and asked which they thought should be able to be used by councils, around 20% to 25% of respondents are neutral on all options.

There is majority opposition to all regional tax options. Ratepayers are more opposed to a new regional income tax than non-ratepayers. Auckland ratepayers are very much more supportive of direct charging for water than ratepayers in other areas.



81% of respondents overall could not think of any other ways in which councils should be able to fund services. Ratepayers were a little more forthcoming, with 22% of all ratepayers and 26% of Auckland ratepayers making suggestions. While a few ratepayers suggested a poll tax, most suggestions were clustered around making better use of funds already available (including reducing operating costs/staffing costs, investment to produce revenue, broadening the paying base and focusing on core services:

"Effective use of income (rates etc.), stop arguing & wasting time."

"By being smarter with their planning / undertaking of projects"

"Auckland Council has a lot already, it's the allocation of money/expenditure that is the issue." (Auckland ratepayer)

"Reduce their internal costs as well as operating costs which was supposed to happen when the so called big city was formed." (Auckland ratepayer)

"Take less money for themselves and put it towards the town."

"Lower council pay packets and far fewer perks."(Non-ratepayer)

"Less use of contractors."

"Less consultants more council staff decisions, they are paid well enough, consultants far too expensive and centred on hourly rates." (Auckland ratepayer)

"Sell their assets."

"Not just user pays, but also polluter / causer of problem pays. I would support all of the above charging mechanisms if they went towards truly innovative service delivery" (Auckland ratepayer)

"Charge polluters (water + solid waste). The more volume you produce, the more you'll be charged. Stiff penalties for 'dumpers'."

"Bring efficiency and improve productivity to current council services."(Auckland ratepayer)

"Cut costs and spend money wisely. Councils are not good at managing other people's money." (Auckland ratepayer)

"Stop wasting funds on unnecessary expenditure and things that shouldn't concern the council." (Auckland ratepayer)

"Get the base right stop doing things they like and do what's required."

"Reduce services and focus on core activities." (Auckland ratepayer)

"Don't spend council money on buying land or buildings, councils shouldn't have assets; they are supposed to mend, repair, preserve, keep our cities clean and green." (Non-ratepayer)

"Buy more service companies like Orion to produce long term income streams."

"Ownership of revenue receiving public assets, e.g. Lines companies, Ports."

"Joint ventures with independent organisations including businesses, trusts and interest groups."

"Run enterprises such as Christchurch airport. Issue bonds for particular projects such as a new convention centre."

"More national government financial support, e.g. shares of taxes rather than additional taxes. Operate profitable businesses."

"All residents should pay not just ratepayers" (Auckland ratepayer)

"A levy on non-property owning residents (People who use Council services - but don't pay rates.)"

"They need a system where a person who doesn't pay rates should have to contribute to local infrastructure."

"Maybe they could relax their bylaws and let the community take responsibility for some projects (like parks etc.)."

4. Changes in council activities

4.1 Reduction in activities

Respondents were asked whether they would like to see their council reduce some of its activities, if it meant lower rates for them. People who were not ratepayers were also able to answer this question, to gauge differences between ratepayer opinion and non-ratepayer opinion, given that council funding is largely from ratepayers (although it can be argued that non-ratepayers do pay rates indirectly through rent).

10% overall said that their council should not reduce activities to lower rates. This level was consistent between ratepayers and non-ratepayers.

43% overall believe that their council should reduce activities to achieve lower rates. There is a significant difference here between ratepayers and non-ratepayers: 52% of ratepayers agreed that activities should be reduced while only 30% of non-ratepayers agreed with this.

60% of non-ratepayers would want to wait to see what services would be impacted before supporting or opposing reduce council activity; however, only 38% of ratepayers felt this way.

Having given their opinion, respondents who said they supported reduced activities and those who said that they would want to see the impacts were given a list of local government services or responsibilities and asked which of them they might like to see reduced or removed in order to prevent rates increases.

Results differ between those who said they would like to see reduction in activities to reduce rates and those who were not sure, and would like to see which services might be impacted.

There are also difference between ratepayers and non-ratepayers, and between Auckland Ratepayers and non-Auckland Ratepayers.

Cultural activities (including sports, events, shows, festivals)

- If any services or responsibilities are to be reduced or removed, cultural activities (including sports, events, shows, festivals) would be the first choice. 62% overall nominated this area. Among those who want to see a reduction or removal of activities, over 70% of ratepayers and over 55% of non-ratepayers chose this option.
- Among those who would want to see what was proposed for reduction or removal, selection of cultural activities to reduce or remove is lower, but at 41% is still the first choice, particularly with non-Auckland ratepayers.

Economic development

- Economic development activity is the second area of choice for reduction or removal, but has minority support, being chosen by a third of respondents.
- Note that reduction in this area is less supported by ratepayers (30%) than non-ratepayers (45%).
- Auckland Ratepayers are less supportive of reducing or removing economic development activity than ratepayers in other areas.

Social services (including activities relating to housing, health, education, support for socially disadvantaged, law and order)

- At 27%, social services is the third choice area overall for reduction or removal.
- However, this area is the second choice, just ahead of economic development, among the 44% who would definitely like to see a reduction.
- Almost as many people overall (32%) chose this area as chose economic development.

Environmental protection

- This area is fourth choice. It has its highest level of support among non-ratepayers and Auckland ratepayers.

Infrastructure services (including, transport, water, rubbish collection, libraries, parks)

- This area is last choice, with only 16.3% support overall.
- In general, non-ratepayers are more likely than ratepayers to accept reduction in infrastructure services.
- Auckland ratepayers, even if they definitely want to see councils' services or responsibilities reduced or removed to reduce rates, are clearly not supportive of infrastructure services or responsibilities being reduced or removed.

Services or responsibilities reduced or removed	Overall	Would like to see reduction				
		Total for reduction	R/payers	Non-R/payers	AKL R/payers	Non-AKL R/payers
Infrastructure services (including, transport, water, rubbish collection, libraries, parks, etc.)	16.3%	14.1%	10.2%	30.4%	6.8%	11.2%
Economic development	33.8%	31.7%	29.9%	46.6%	24.9%	31.3%
Social services (including activities relating to housing, health, education, support for socially disadvantaged, law and order)	26.8%	33.0%	33.7%	39.6%	42.5%	31.3%
Cultural activities (including sports, events, shows, festivals)	62.3%	66.1%	75.1%	57.9%	74.6%	75.2%
Environmental protection	23.6%	23.6%	21.3%	37.2%	29.7%	19.0%
Other	16.6%	11.2%	13.4%	8.0%	13.5%	13.4%

Services or responsibilities reduced or removed	Total	Would want to see what might be affected				
		Total wait to see	R/payers	Non-R/payers	AKL R/payers	Non-AKL R/payers
Infrastructure services (including, transport, water, rubbish collection, libraries, parks, etc.)	16.3%	13.8%	14.0%	20.2%	2.6%	17.9%
Economic development	33.8%	26.5%	34.9%	33.5%	28.0%	37.2%
Social services (including activities relating to housing, health, education, support for socially disadvantaged, law and order)	26.8%	13.1%	14.8%	17.6%	19.2%	13.3%
Cultural activities (including sports, events, shows, festivals)	62.3%	41.1%	55.6%	49.0%	37.1%	61.8%
Environmental protection	23.6%	16.8%	18.0%	23.9%	19.3%	17.5%
Other	16.6%	17.1%	24.0%	20.1%	33.8%	20.6%

4.2 Extension or enhancement to services

Respondents were also asked whether they would like to see their council reduce some of its activities, if it meant lower rates for them. Again, people who were not ratepayers were also able to answer this question.

48% overall said that they would not be happy for rates to rise to extend or enhance services. There was a difference between ratepayers and non-ratepayers: a majority (55%) of ratepayers did not want to see increased rates compared with 33% of non-ratepayers.

Only 7% overall said that their council should increase rates to extend or enhance services. There was no significant difference between ratepayers and non-ratepayers.

45% of non-ratepayers would want to wait to see what new services would be provided before supporting or opposing reduced council activity. As with the analysis on reduction in rates, only 37% of ratepayers felt this way.

All respondents who said they supported increasing rates to enhance or extend council services and those who said that they would want to see what new services would be provided before giving an opinion were given a list of local government service or responsibility areas and asked which of them they might like to see enhanced or extended.

As with reduction or removal of services, results differ between those who said they would like to see reduction in activities to reduce rates and those who were not sure, and would like to see which services might be impacted. In this instance, because only 7% would want to see rates increase to fund extended or enhanced services, the opinions of those who would want to see what services would be offered carry significantly more weight.

Infrastructure services (including, transport, water, rubbish collection, libraries, parks, etc.)

- Infrastructure was the first choice (57% overall) for use of additional rates, just as it was the last choice to use to reduce rates. This indicates both the importance placed on council delivery of local infrastructure and an expectation of council focus in this area.
- Ratepayers (62%) place more importance on this than non-ratepayers (50%).
- If rates were increased, 71% of Auckland ratepayers, well above the average, would want to see the additional expenditure placed into infrastructure.

Environmental protection

- This area is second choice if rates were to increase. However, it has higher priority among non-ratepayers (62%) than ratepayers (48%).
- Non-ratepayers select this area as their first choice.

Social services (including activities relating to housing, health, education, support for socially disadvantaged, law and order)

- Overall in third position, the social services area is the second choice for enhanced or extended services among non-ratepayers.
- Auckland ratepayers rate this lower than non-Auckland ratepayers.

Economic development

- Economic development activity is fourth choice for enhanced or added services.
- Auckland Ratepayers are less supportive of enhancing or adding economic development activity than ratepayers in other areas.

Cultural activities (including sports, events, shows, festivals)

- This area was selected as the first area to have services or responsibilities reduced or removed to reduce rates, and it is the last area that people would consider for enhanced or extended services that increased rates.

Services or responsibilities enhanced or added	Overall	Would like to see addition				
		Total for addition	R/payers	Non-R/payers	AKL R/payers	Non-AKL R/payers
Infrastructure services (including, transport, water, rubbish collection, libraries, parks, etc.)	56.5%	68.9%	53.4%	98.2%	40.4%	61.8%
Economic development	36.7%	50.5%	46.5%	60.1%	3.5%	39.3%
Social services (including activities relating to housing, health, education, support for socially disadvantaged, law and order)	52.9%	67.4%	64.8%	77.0%	43.7%	42.6%
Cultural activities (including sports, events, shows, festivals)	30.6%	41.3%	53.7%	24.7%	29.8%	22.2%
Environmental protection	54.4%	56.8%	50.4%	70.7%	66.1%	47.3%
Other	5.3%	3.4%	4.0%	2.7%	0.0%	7.8%

Services or responsibilities enhanced or added	Overall	Want to see what services can be provided				
		Total wait to see	R/payers	Non-R/payers	AKL R/payers	Non-AKL R/payers
Infrastructure services (including, transport, water, rubbish collection, libraries, parks, etc.)	56.5%	46.4%	63.7%	43.6%	71.0%	61.8%
Economic development	36.7%	29.3%	37.3%	31.3%	29.5%	39.3%
Social services (including activities relating to housing, health, education, support for socially disadvantaged, law and order)	52.9%	43.1%	41.0%	57.9%	34.9%	42.6%
Cultural activities (including sports, events, shows, festivals)	30.6%	24.6%	23.2%	33.0%	27.2%	22.2%
Environmental protection	54.4%	46.2%	47.0%	60.4%	45.8%	47.3%
Other	5.3%	5.1%	7.1%	4.2%	4.3%	7.8%

5. Regulations

5.1 Experience with council regulations

Respondents were told that their council now has most of the responsibility for administering and enforcing local and national laws to process building consents, register dogs, enforce alcohol and noise restrictions, control land and water use and many other activities which affect people, businesses and the built and natural environment. They were asked whether they had experience in dealing with council regulations.

45% said they had. Among ratepayers the level is higher, at 56%, with only 27% of non-ratepayers saying they had experience in dealing with council regulations. The level was lower (39%) among Auckland ratepayers than ratepayers elsewhere in the country (60%).

Those who had dealt with council regulations were asked whether their experience had been positive or negative. Nearly half of them overall said that the experience was satisfactory, but only 14% said that it was positive.

Generally, the experience for non-ratepayers was more positive than for ratepayers.

Experience in dealing with council regulations	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
Positive	14.2%	13.0%	18.5%	5.8%	14.2%
Satisfactory	48.6%	47.2%	53.7%	38.3%	48.8%
Negative	37.3%	39.8%	27.8%	55.9%	37.0%

5.2 Council regulatory performance

All respondents were asked to give their impression of how well their council performed its regulatory functions. On average, respondents rated their council's performance as "satisfactory". Non ratepayers tend to rate it slightly higher than ratepayers, and Auckland ratepayers rate their council's performance lower than other ratepayers rate their councils'.

Impression of how well the council performs its regulatory functions	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
Excellent	1.8%	2.0%	1.5%	0.0%	2.6%
Very good	7.4%	7.5%	7.4%	2.0%	9.0%
Good	18.3%	18.0%	19.3%	24.1%	16.4%
Satisfactory	35.2%	39.8%	27.6%	34.0%	41.4%
Unsatisfactory	17.9%	19.0%	15.0%	21.8%	18.2%
Most unsatisfactory	5.4%	6.3%	4.0%	5.9%	6.4%
Not sure	14.0%	7.4%	25.3%	12.3%	6.1%

6. Resource Management Act

6.1 Fairness

A majority of respondents, 57%, said that neither they, nor any organisation they worked with, had been unfairly treated or penalised by the Resource Management Act (RMA). 12% of respondents said there was unfair treatment; this opinion was slightly higher among Auckland ratepayers.

Respondents were asked for reasons for their opinion. A selection of comments follows:

Treated Unfairly

"The key issue is that the RMA is not about mitigating effects on the environment. It balances the social, economic and environmental elements and needs to set a balance between these. Too many, including councils focus purely on the environmental component. Auckland for example is not a pristine environment as so needs different requirements than for example Milford Sound, but often the same criteria are used. Cities are for humans, and the rest of the country should focus on the rest of the ecosystem."

"It's a matter of fairness. The little bloke has to dot every i and cross every t, while local and Central Govt get THEIR projects fast tracked (and paid for by the little bloke)."

"By the council not enforcing the RMA and allowing a neighbour to build a track that caused major water run-off on to our property. Instead of requiring the neighbouring property to put in drainage the council dug a huge drain across our property (wasting public funds and cutting off a piece of our land) which in time caused the land to slump away."

"Building consent personnel seem to act according to what side of the bed they got out of - such as being over the top pc or more easy going with the rules and regulations which, in turn, can alter your plans and desires drastically."

"It stifles development. It looks after a small minority of NZers. Most of us don't want to see our environment destroyed, but the RMA makes it expensive, and takes far too long, and gives a very small portion of the population too much say. The RMA needs a huge overhaul to get rid of the red tape."

"If you can pay the price (if you are well off) you are better off than those who can't afford."

Not Treated Unfairly

"Not personally. But the RMA is important. There has been too much destruction of Historic buildings in central Auckland, and Ponsonby, also construction of overly huge factories and distribution warehouses in Penrose and others built near pristine waterways around Manukau Harbour, Otahuhu and Highbrook. Just wondering how the RMA worked here? It's necessary but way too much consent for things that are making Auckland - NZ's ugliest city."

"I have had considerable contact with the RMA and while the outcomes have not always been to my agreement the process and transparency has, in my view, been relatively thorough and fair."

"Have not had any cause to undertake development, nor has any development been undertaken near us."

"What I have wanted to do has not been affected by the RMA, rather by the Council's own activities & plans."

"Never had dealings with RMA."

"But I do feel that the Heritage organisation has too much of a say in areas where development is necessary."

"I think the RMA is good, while not perfect it allows some sort of governance over what people could do with building, land use etc."

"The RMA works well. Each council develops their own District Plan and there is plenty of opportunity for public input during those regular reviews."

"I have felt as though my point of view has been listened to even if the final outcome hasn't necessarily been my ideal."

"Let's be honest here; the current proposed reforms is more to do with business wanting less government involvement with developments that are not popular or supported by local communities. Let's maintain that level of scrutiny otherwise who's to stop some developer infilling a city green belt for profit and no regard to community impact. Reflect on why such laws were passed in the first place; again, laws are not about convenience as seems to be the agenda with such proposals. Town planning is the reserve of local council district plans subject to consultation/review every 4 years - such public input should be respected and central government should not accommodate less control - show some backbone!"

Not Sure

"Tried to get resource consent to build on a rural section spent large amount of money (we had done much to improve environment planted 200 native trees, wanted to build sustainable house etc.) and couldn't build as proposed as could be seen from road for 10 sec. Process was expensive and outcome inconsistent with positioning of other houses in region. We pay high rates yet must pay again for this type of thing. Our rates used to include this type of activity. Rates up over years yet now consents not included... Once council farmed out this type of activity to an "independent" company (who are not voted in) costs have only increased."

"I am not sure if the problem was directly related to the RMA, but the problem was discovered by someone specifically hired to weed out non-compliance to the finest detail, the problem found was unreasonable and an inefficient use of ratepayers dollars."

6.2 Effect of the RMA

Respondents were asked whether, in general, they felt the RMA was having a positive effect on the economy, environment and individual rights.

In rating the effect of the RMA on individual rights and on the economy, more respondents rated it negatively rather than positively.

The following tables show the ratings for each factor:

6.2.1 Effect on the economy

A third of respondents rated the RMA as having a negative effect on the economy, while a third rated it as having neither a positive nor negative effect. Respondents who were not ratepayers rated the effect more positively than ratepayers. Auckland ratepayers definitely thought that the effects were more negative than positive, with 44% rating it negatively.

Effect of RMA on economy	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
Positive	4.1%	4.9%	2.7%	1.7%	5.8%
Slightly positive	11.5%	11.0%	12.6%	6.3%	12.3%
Neither positive nor negative	32.3%	28.0%	39.6%	24.5%	28.9%
Slightly negative	18.5%	23.2%	10.4%	21.9%	23.6%
Negative	15.7%	19.0%	10.2%	21.9%	18.3%
Not sure	17.9%	13.8%	24.4%	23.7%	11.2%

6.2.2 Effect on the environment

The RMA had its best rating on this factor, with 30% rating it as having a positive effect. 16% said that it was having a negative effect. Ratepayers, except for Auckland ratepayers, have a slightly more positive view of the effect on the environment than non-ratepayers.

Effect of RMA on environment	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
Positive	8.5%	10.3%	5.6%	4.2%	12.0%
Slightly positive	21.9%	21.2%	23.6%	18.5%	21.9%
Neither positive nor negative	36.2%	37.5%	34.6%	38.7%	37.2%
Slightly negative	9.9%	10.0%	8.8%	8.4%	10.5%
Negative	6.5%	7.3%	5.3%	10.3%	6.5%
Not sure	17.0%	13.7%	22.1%	20.0%	12.0%

6.2.3 Effect on individual rights

The RMA received its most negative rating on this factor, although a third of respondents still rated it as having neither a positive effect nor a negative one. 37% of respondents rated it as having a negative effect. Again, Auckland ratepayers rated it more negatively on this factor than other ratepayers.

Effect of RMA on individual rights	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
Positive	3.4%	3.7%	2.9%	0.5%	4.5%
Slightly positive	8.0%	8.2%	7.8%	8.6%	8.0%
Neither positive nor negative	33.6%	28.4%	43.0%	22.4%	30.1%
Slightly negative	20.2%	24.8%	12.4%	24.9%	24.7%
Negative	16.8%	20.9%	9.5%	23.0%	20.3%
Not sure	18.1%	14.1%	24.3%	20.7%	12.3%

6.3 Change to the RMA

This appears to reflect personal experience:

- Among the 12% of people who believe that they or an organisation they work with has been untreated unfairly as a result of the RMA, nearly 75% want to see change
- Those are not sure whether they have had unfair treatment resulting from the application of the RMA and those who say that they have not been treated unfairly are largely not sure whether change to the Act is needed.

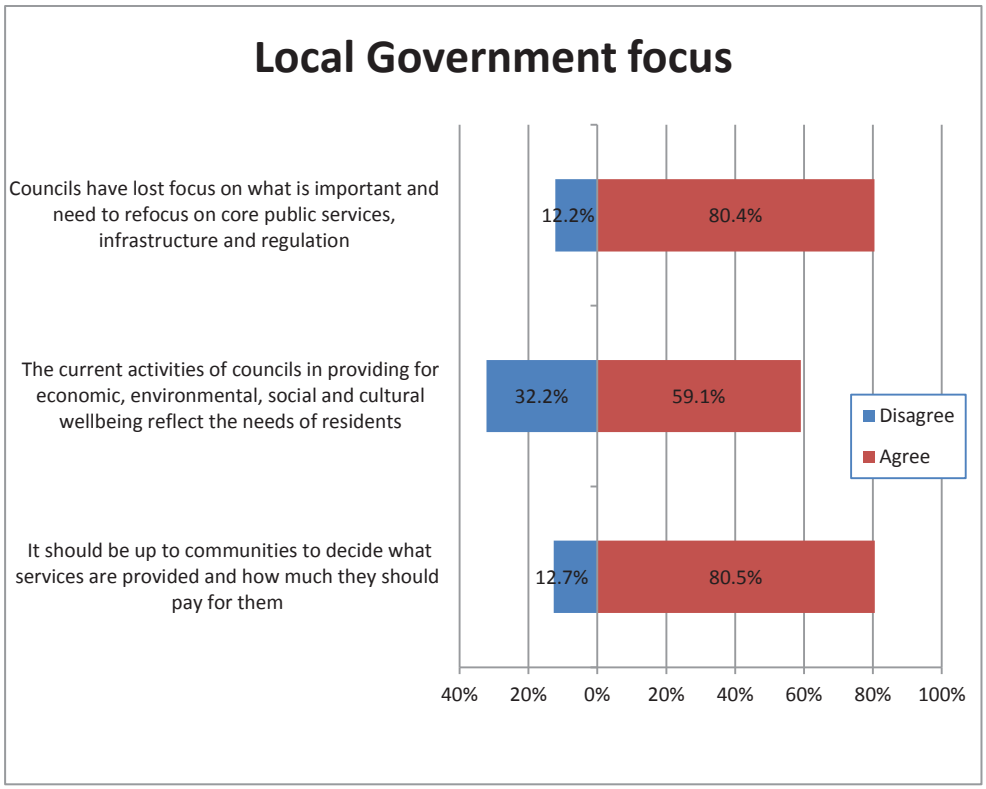
Like to see change to current resource management law	Total	In your opinion, have you, or any organisation you work with, ever been unfairly treated or penalised by the RMA?		
		Yes	No	Not sure
A. Change	35.7%	73.2%	31.1%	28.2%
B. No change	14.6%	5.1%	20.5%	5.6%
C. Not sure	49.7%	20.4%	47.7%	60.3%

7. Main purpose of councils

Respondents were asked whether they thought that councils had lost focus on what is important and needed to refocus on core public services, infrastructure and regulation; whether they thought the current activities of councils in providing for economic, environmental, social and cultural wellbeing reflect the needs of residents; and whether they thought that it should be up to communities to decide what services are provided and how much they should pay for them. The question reflected the Government's proposed changes to the Local Government Act 2002.

Respondents clearly believe that councils need to refocus. 80% agreed that it was necessary, with 24% strongly agreeing.

On the other hand, a majority, 59%, believe that providing for the four wellbeings does reflect he needs of residents. This could suggest that respondents may hold a view that councils moved too far in pursuit of the wellbeings following the change of the Local Government Act in 2002.



Respondents also strongly believed that communities should decide on what services are provided and how much they should pay for them.

Auckland ratepayers were much more likely to support a change in focus and were evenly split on whether the current activities of councils in providing for economic, environmental, social and cultural wellbeing reflected the needs of residents.

Overall, 56% of respondent supported a change in line with the Government's proposals for local government to focus on 'providing good quality local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and business'. Only 18% supported retaining the focus as it currently is.

Support for purpose for Local Government	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
Should cover the 'social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities' (the four well beings) as it is now	18.3%	18.4%	18.2%	16.3%	19.0%
Change to focus on 'providing good quality local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and business'	56.1%	63.7%	42.9%	59.9%	64.7%
Neither of these	4.5%	3.3%	6.8%	5.5%	2.7%
I'm really not sure	21.1%	14.6%	32.1%	18.4%	13.6%

Comments from respondents on this included:

Should cover the 'social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities' (the four well beings) as it is now

"Local government's most important reason for being is to reflect the needs and views of the community."

"I think it's stupid arguing about this. The vast majority of local government expenditure is already infrastructure. The things which people regard as "nice to haves" are a fraction of the budget. 75% of my rates is roads, water supply, wastewater, sewage, parks and libraries. All core Council services. The other 25% is basically their regulatory functions (another core service) and democracy. I'd rather pay for democracy than have inflicted on us what has happened in Auckland - most of the big $$ services are now in CCOs at arm's length from the Council where the democratically elected representatives have stuff all influence."

"Removing the four wellbeings from the role of local government would have a negative long-term impact on the country. Services would become increasingly concentrated in the two main cities and local communities would become less viable. The key issue is

making councils more effective and efficient, which is unrelated to which services they provide."

"The environmental roles of LG are incredibly important as central government has so few resources in this area (DoC funding is decreasing). Ensuring community well-being through the local council is a vital part of its reason for being. Those who argue for simpler functions are not seeing the hidden costs of poor environmental decisions."

"My council has not done any of the things in your examples or those highlighted by the media & I wonder if it is just one or two that are causing the publicity & most are fine. Local government should serve their communities in the ways that the majority of their community asks not just the whingers & publicity seekers."

"What is the point of an elected council if it is just a defacto government department with no ability to reflect the attitudes of its people?"

*"Unfortunately where I live the councils have tended to live by the changed (*proposed*) wording rather than the original (*current*)- I don't believe our council has ever considered the social or cultural well-being of our community - I would like to see more enforcement of the old (*current*) wording."*

"None of the problems facing society have one answer. For example, child abuse/neglect occurs for complex network of reasons. Some of which are definitely central govt remit, others are more community related and so fall in remit of council... Highly centralised services need to be backstopped by more local solutions enabled by well thought through council funded interventions."

"I would feel extremely uncomfortable about removing the word "environmental" from the statement. I think we do far too much damage to our environment already. I think removing an obligation to the environment from the local government statement would provide an excuse to completely disregard all environmental impacts."

Should change to focus on 'providing good quality local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and business'

"Councils are too ready to pick up projects outside their core business, after funding has been refused by normal channels and when the project fails they take no responsibility or make any accountable. If some of these projects were workable then they would be funded through the normal channels. They should not get involved in retail business and use the rates from other business to compete against them in the market place. e.g. they take rates off accommodation providers, then build accommodation complexes (Hotels etc.) to compete against those that the take the rates that help build/fund these complexes"

"Let's get efficient and not so vague social wellbeing committee-based jibber jabbing, ensure a healthy economic climate and the rest will follow. Just ensure the truly under privileged are taken care of."

"Should cover the 'social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities' (the four well beings) AND 'provide good quality local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and business' in a balanced, measured way."

"I think local government should listen more to the community, as it is really the servant of the community. I think when people are elected to Government and local government, they forget that they are using the people's money and go ahead without enough consultation at to what the people think is best for the community."

"I would prefer that council money is invested in upgrading community parks where drainage is poor and pathways are submerged when it rains, instead of investing money in the V8 car racing!!"

"Councils were never set up to get involved in all the social issues they seem to have taken on - they seem to have listened to every pressure/minority group that has ever requested their involvement but never consulted their ratepayers !!"

"Local government should be about infrastructure and public good. It should not be about social services; that is the role of central government. It should not be about growing bureaucracy and it should not be about promoting the causes and interests of the politicians or the people who work for the council; it should be about the causes and interests of its population. It definitely should not presume to know better than its population."

"I believe it needs to change to a more economically focussed purpose as opposed to what appears to be a strong cultural focus at the moment."

"LG should be totally focussed on infrastructure and services. They get far too involved with 'warm and fuzzy' stuff that should be left up to community groups."

"The main role of Council is regulation, roads and rubbish. Do that properly (including decent public transport), reduce bureaucracy, and cut rates."

"Focus on the basics (water, sewage, roads, etc.) and if people want the extras (social, cultural, etc.) then they pay for it themselves. I think it is unfair to expect people who don't participate, for example, in sport or cultural activities, to be subsidising those who do. The social and cultural activities are people's choice but having clean water, sewage separation, rubbish collected and good roads are essentials."

"Local Govt should be providing services to maintain the infrastructure of the town/city in the first instance. Without being able to operate a town/city properly the citizens it's meant to be serving are the ones who suffer."

8. Auckland Council model

8.1 The Auckland experience

Respondents were asked their opinion of the impact of the local government reform which created the Auckland Council. The overall assessment was more negative than positive, an assessment shared by both Auckland ratepayers and ratepayers from other areas.

36% of Auckland ratepayers felt that the impact was more negative than positive, with 22% assessing the impact as more positive than negative.

Impact of the local government reform which created the Auckland Council (Super City)	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
Very positive	2.0%	1.5%	2.9%	3.2%	1.1%
Mostly positive	15.6%	15.5%	16.3%	18.5%	14.8%
Neither positive nor negative	25.1%	26.4%	22.4%	36.2%	23.8%
Mostly negative	13.4%	15.0%	10.3%	27.3%	11.8%
Very negative	8.2%	8.1%	8.5%	8.3%	8.1%
Not sure	35.7%	33.5%	39.7%	6.5%	40.4%

Reasons given for those opinions included:

Positive

"There is more opportunity for efficiency.... however, the efficiency is yet to be realised."

"One organisation can now make decisions. It is avoiding decades of delay."

"Should in time reduce council staff thus reducing costs."

"The same service should be given across the whole city which is a good thing. Policies can be developed which focus on the good of all of Auckland without the egos of multiple councils and councillors getting in the way. I think we will see lots more benefits in years to come."

"I don't live in the area but from the outside amalgamation, in the long term has to have huge cost savings across the board." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"I say this from afar but it seems that the new Council is better able to plan the future in a 'big picture' way whereas multiple councils only looked out for their own patch." (Non-Auckland respondent)

Neither Positive nor Negative

"Auckland is up there on the other island so to some extent doesn't really impact on me down here in New Zealand..... My only concern is that some of our locals might decide that we should do it down here..... We have tried that and with the current establishment and its failing miserably. It has turned into a place where people are overpaid for being complete and utter idiots with no accountability for their incompetence..." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"Local communities have been greatly affected without 'real' consultation on the formation of the Super City and integration costs have been greatly under-estimated and the benefits overstated."

"It's positive that it reduced the amount of councillors but negative in being too grandiose with plans."

"I think it is too early to tell."

"Hasn't delivered significant improvement yet but am prepared to give it more time."

"Well, I meant it has overall not been the best, but I do applaud Len Brown for his efforts especially the trains, the revamping of train stations and opening up of Onehunga station."

"I have no feeling for anything being dramatically improved or degraded by the amalgamation. I have yet to see any evidence that is has provided significant cost savings or improved levels of service."

"Short sighted planning still seems to rule the council."

"Too soon, especially with regard to real input of community boards." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"Not being an Auckland resident the changes have not directly affected me and so I can only go on what I have read and heard, in some instances the changers have reduced costs, increasing local government efficiency, which is a positive, however, many residence are facing increased costs while at times officials seem intransigent and obstructive to issues that are out of the ordinary." (Non-Auckland respondent)

Negative

"The smaller communities/areas are being charged for services/rates that don't apply to them or receive no benefit from but are still expected to contribute towards."

"From my perspective the "Super City" has done little or nothing for the area, they do however seem to like spending ratepayers' money a lot on what appear to be very personal agendas. They also sent an overly large delegation to the conference in Queenstown at the ratepayers expense...appeared like a junket trip for the boys and girls to me."

"Service from the previous council was relative to the financial aspirations of the council and its ratepayers."

"It was supposed to bring fairness and equality in rates, water charges etc. Staff attrition would mean savings. None of this has happened, and overall charges rise out of all proportion to annual inflation."

"The mayor has too much power, Council is out of control on expenditure and treat ratepayers with total disdain. Unfortunately though I am only too aware one cannot beat the bureaucrats; they do as they want not as they should for the betterment of the community. As far as I am concerned they couldn't care less about the very people who pay their salaries"

"Rates have increased without any increase in services, as we live rurally. Funding for unsealed roads has been basically wiped with the money now going to a rail system that will have no benefit to the rural rate payer. Rate payers should contribute on a per use basis and they should not be calculated on property valuation as often does not equal the services that are provided. A pensioner that has lived in a property for most of their lives should not have to pay high rates just because the area they now live in has increased in value, the services they receive have not changed and are the same services that are provided for a lesser valued property in another suburb, this is not a fair system."

"They said they would save money for rate payers yet they are increasing rates and building rail extensions that most of Auckland's public will never use."

"A lot more money wasted trying to get things to be "compatible". Silly ideas from other areas changing systems that are already working perfectly well in others (e.g. yet another cumbersome wheelie bin for rubbish, when bags are perfectly fine)."

"The change has not brought through any real savings to rate payers. Capping rates bills because they are so large but then not really comparing the figure with the previous year's rates has the increases out of proportion with what they had stated. The council needs to get in budget advisors from Mangere that deal with needy families to do their

budget; currently they seem to think that ratepayers are a never ending source of revenue. The council needs to look at what services that it provides and what are its core services. I know that there are lots for festive and cultural things that go on in Auckland. I know there is economic benefit from major events like Volvo yachting, cruises but central businesses that benefit from these events should be paying for this, not general ratepayers. They need to sort out the basics of what they are doing before the extras are added in."

"Most of the power has shifted to unelected CCOs. The organisation has become incredibly bureaucratic and 'siloised'. Local accountability has gone. And the former Auckland City Council culture (which was the worst of the 7 Councils) has predominated. Oh and it cost a truckload of money to do the amalgamation - and the costs keep going up." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"I think people work better in smaller 'groups' for the good of a more 'local' area. We do not respond well to being part of a large conglomerate. People like smaller 'tribes'!!!" (Non-Auckland respondent)

"You don't hear anything good about it on the news, only bad." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"People who live in certain areas are missing out already where their local council would once have been helpful to them." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"It has created a top heavy system that is even further away from collaboration with the community." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"It is too big & will lose contact with the ratepayers so existing just to serve its own ends. It will be patronising rather than the servant of the people. It appears to be imposing one size fits all solutions when they actually have many constituencies." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"It appears that they have managed to affect everyone negatively in some way." (Non-Auckland respondent)

"Many areas that were once well looked after by their local councils are being neglected under this new system. The main centre is profiteering out of outer areas' rates. A very bad move."(Non-Auckland respondent)

"When speaking to friends and family members who currently live in Auckland they all say that processes for getting things done are taking far longer and at more cost than previously." (Non-Auckland respondent)

8.2 Effect on other areas

Respondents were asked what they thought would be the effect of the creation of the Auckland "super city" on other regions and communities outside of Auckland.

27% felt that it would have no effect and an equal percentage felt that it would force further amalgamations of councils. Auckland ratepayers are even more likely to think that it will have no effect than those in other areas.

18% think that it will disadvantage other areas.

While 21% of non-ratepayers felt that other regions would need to lift their game to compete with Auckland, ratepayers in areas other than Auckland do not feel as strongly about that; only 11% thought that would be an effect of the Auckland Council model.

Non-ratepayers generally see it having more effects than ratepayers do.

Effect of the creation of the Auckland "super city" on other regions and communities outside of Auckland	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers
No effect	27.3%	28.3%	25.5%	31.5%	27.4%
Major effect	12.9%	10.2%	17.3%	14.3%	9.1%
Other regions will be disadvantaged	17.6%	19.1%	15.1%	12.6%	20.9%
Other regions will benefit	8.4%	4.6%	15.0%	10.6%	3.0%
Other regions will need to lift their game to compete with Auckland	14.9%	11.7%	20.7%	14.0%	11.1%
It will force further amalgamation of other councils	27.4%	32.1%	19.9%	26.3%	33.7%
It will not force further amalgamation of other councils	7.3%	6.7%	7.9%	9.4%	6.0%
Other	8.9%	9.7%	7.7%	4.4%	11.2%

9. Provincial Councils

9.1 Number of councils

While nearly 30% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that there were too many councils in New Zealand, 39% thought that there were. 24% thought that there were not.

In general, ratepayers (and in particular, Auckland ratepayers) were more likely than non-ratepayers to think that there were too many councils.

How strongly do you agree or disagree that there are too many councils in New Zealand?	Total	Ratepayers	Non-ratepayers	Auckland Ratepayers	Non-Auckland Ratepayers

Strongly agree	14.3%	16.9%	10.3%	14.0%	17.6%
Agree	24.7%	27.1%	20.5%	29.0%	26.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	28.8%	28.5%	28.4%	32.0%	27.6%
Disagree	15.2%	14.2%	17.5%	14.2%	14.2%
Strongly disagree	8.3%	7.8%	9.5%	3.1%	9.0%
Not sure	8.7%	5.5%	13.8%	7.8%	4.9%

Reasons given for those opinions included:

Agree

Most comments appear to be around the cost of duplication of services and staff functions, and the perceived cost savings from reducing the number of councils.

> *"It is the proliferation of small regional councils with overlapping regional councils which are an issue - Auckland was too large and diverse and should have had an empowered regional authority for all of the infrastructure and left all of the 4 cities to reflect local needs - now we are lost in an Auckland City takeover of Auckland..."*
>
> *"From the point of view of the people who pay, the less bludgers you're supporting the better."*
>
> *"Don't need all the council staff for each area, can join forces and save money which in turn benefits the people of the community, e.g. can amalgamate HR, legal services, stationer supplier etc. like the govt has already done with some govt departments, don't need lots of silos wasting money when you can have one and save heaps."*
>
> *"Take Napier, Hastings and HB as an example, total population of around 200K. Three councils and three times the waste of money, also the regions direction is not unified."*
>
> *"The fact there are 5 in Wellington plus a regional council for a small population. It's even worse in the provinces with vast areas under multiple councils but with small population bases."*
>
> *"Here in the Wairarapa we have three district councils, 30+ elected members yet only 40,000 residents. Amalgamation has happened in the late 1980's with the county councils, catchment boards etc. It is logical that the time for further amalgamation has come. The current and medium term economic situation here in NZ and globally will require it shortly if action is not taken now."*
> *"Because of the cost involved in providing council offices, staff etc. in smaller communities when one or two representatives from those areas could convey the needs and problems to a larger council so should be a major cost saving."*

Neither Agree nor Disagree

"Because in some areas it might be beneficial and in other areas it might bring unbearable burdens on people."

"Don't know enough about other areas. Rodney/HBC/Wgp areas generally were better off separate from Auckland - we are a different area, we work and live differently so should be separate."

"Smaller towns shouldn't be grouped in with large cities, as they have different needs. They would get more sympathetic support from a council more in touch with the rural and smaller towns."

"If Auckland is the basis for reducing Councils, then it does not have any evidence to show this was a good thing. Local representation has gone. Some Councils undertake their local authority role very well, others are not so good. Who is to say if a merged council will be any better or worse?"

"Because the size of a council is unrelated to how well it performs. People focus on reducing the number of councils as a quick fix to everything they see wrong with councils but it wouldn't fix anything - at worst it would make poorly performing councils bigger, less accessible and more difficult to change. The key issue (again) is to improve the performance of councils. This needs to involve better governance (getting better people to stand for council), better leadership with a clearer strategic focus and goals, skills in partnering with their own community (too often councils treat their community like irritants) and the organisational structure to encourage innovation both within council and in the community."

"People need to have input into their own locality so reduction in the number of Councils is not straightforward. Too few councils and locals do not get a say. Too many and the costs go up."

Disagree

Most comments appear to be around local knowledge and "community" factors.

"Smaller entities have their 'fingers on the pulse' and in tune with their ratepayers requirements. No savings in bigger councils."

"When local government behaves like central government then that sense of community spirit disappears. Only people from their own local community understand their own community. Len Brown will never understand what it's like to live in Browns Bay or Remuera because he's from the south. Learn from the Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger - they have had an amalgamated local govt for decades and cannot solve their problems. I believe they are reversing this. Why is NZ always going backwards when others have already taught - Don't go there. Don't amalgamate local Govt!!! It's money - that's all!!"

"By having a larger number of councils they are able to be more in touch with the area's needs and can have a better impact on dealing with any local issues."

"It wasn't long ago since central government reform brought about the councils we currently have now - why change it all - it costs money to change a system that is working fine. It was central government that changed it all and will do it again for their own ends - it won't help the smaller communities.

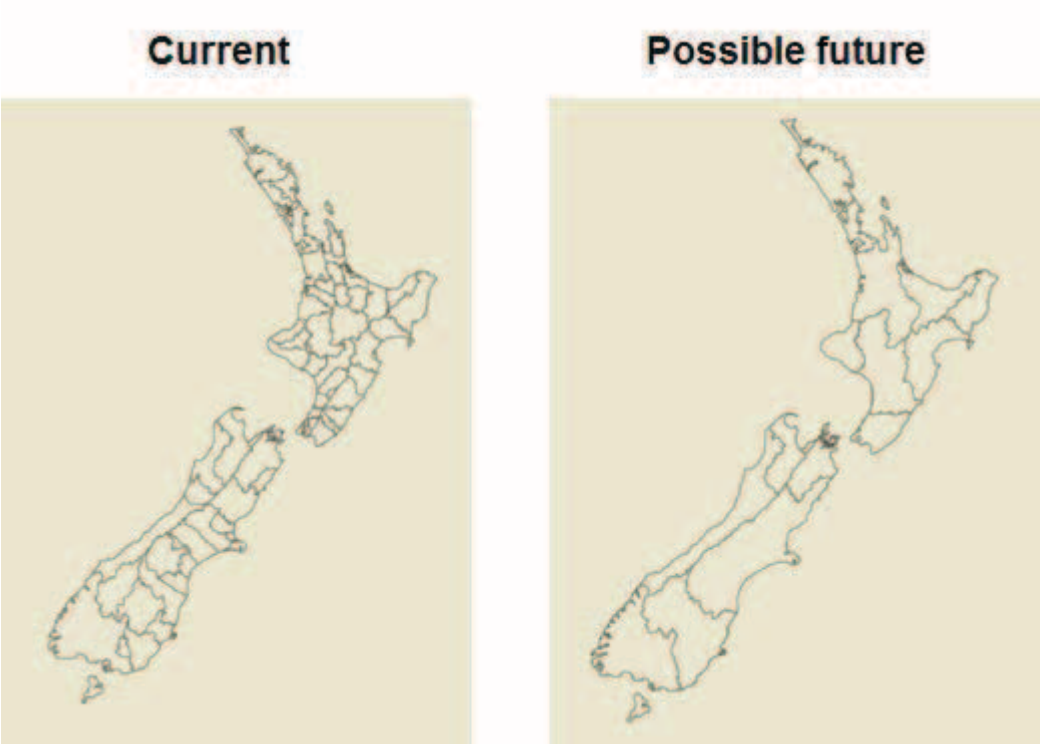
"Councils are there to serve a community of interest, reducing councils reduces their ability to serve the community"

"I believe each community has its own needs that don't necessarily fit with bigger regions. Councils that are too big become disconnected and impersonal from the various communities, losing sight of the needs of the people they've been elected to serve."

"Each individual council that is elected is elected to represent and look after their local communities needs and the people in these communities expect that, and in most cases get it, once you lose this contact with the locals and a larger council takes on these responsibilities then the smaller communities will suffer, and the larger will benefit at their expense"

9.2 Creating Provincial Councils

Respondents were advised of a suggestion that New Zealand's 78 current councils could be reformed into 12 or 14 provincial councils. They were shown the following map:



To see what respondents thought the advantages and disadvantages of this might be, they were given a list of factors and asked whether there would be an improvement, no change, or deterioration.

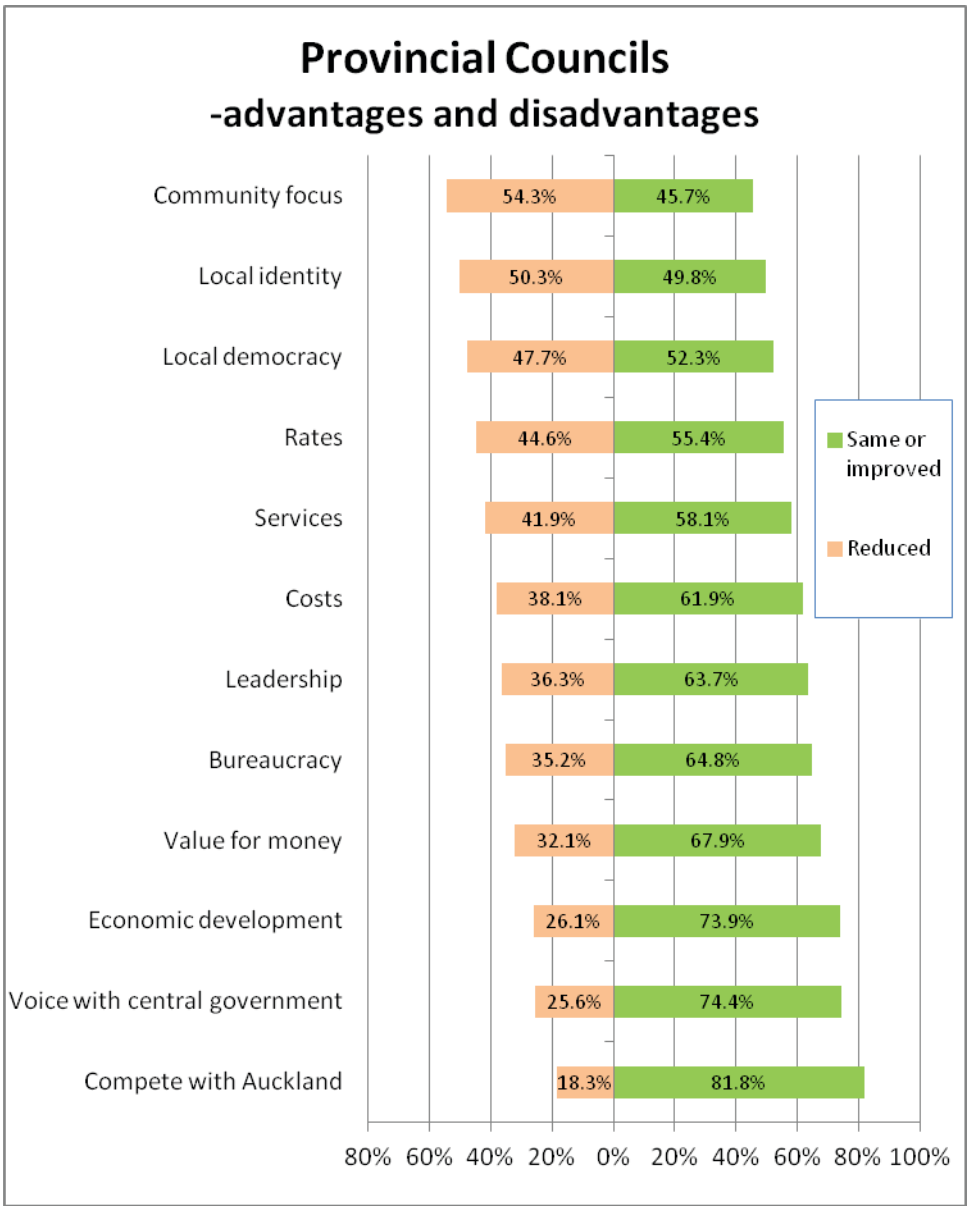
The key concerns appear to be around "localness": community focus, local democracy and local identity were all perceived as being significantly weakened by a provincial council approach.

Rates, costs and bureaucracy were also perceived to increase and services reduce. However, in apparent contradiction, value for money was perceived to slightly improve.

Economic development and "Voice with central Government" were seen as being enhanced by a provincial council model.

The following chart shows, for each factor measured, the level of respondents who felt that a change to a provincial council would keep the factor the same or increase it, versus the level that thought the factor would be reduced by the change. For example, 54% felt that there would be less community focus with provincial councils and 46% thought it would be the same or more community focus.

Note that for most factors, an average of 32% of respondents felt that there would be no change. The exception was competition with Auckland, where 60% of respondents felt that there would be no change.



To complete the questioning on the Provincial Councils concept, respondents were asked whether they generally supported or proposed the idea of amalgamating local councils into larger bodies covering their regions.

Opinion was largely split. Opposition was slightly higher than support, but was just within the margin of error for this survey. 20% were neutral on the idea, indicating that they could move either way.

APPENDIX 1 – SAMPLE

Sample

This survey is of 956 respondents who are members of Horizon Research's HorizonPoll panel. Post-sample iterative rim weighting was used to match Statistics New Zealand national population averages for age, gender, personal income, education level, and ethnicity and Elections New Zealand figures for party vote in the 2011 general election.

The sample has a maximum margin of error at a 95% confidence level of±3.2% overall.

Respondents completed surveys between August 10 and August 26, 2012.

Ratepayers

60% of respondents indicated that they paid rates to a council.

Analysis

All analysis shown in this report is taken from the weighted data. Tables showing the overall position are based on the total sample.

Respondent comments

All verbatim comments from respondents are captured and available from the Horizon Research system.

Contact

For more information about this survey or additional analysis, please contact Grant McInman, Manager, Horizon Research, telephone 021 076 2040, email gmcinman@horizonresearch.co.nz.

APPENDIX 2 – Tables by political party support

Impact of the local government reform which created the Auckland Council (Super City)	Total	Party Vote at general election 2011												
		ACT New Zealand	Conserv-ative	Green Party	Labour Party	Mana Party	Maori Party	National Party	New Zealand First Party	United Future	Other party	Was not eligible to vote	Chose not to vote	Don't know or can't remember
Very positive	2.0%	29.9%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	31.7%	5.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mostly positive	15.6%	27.6%	11.2%	14.4%	18.5%	0.0%	11.5%	14.5%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.8%	28.9%
Neither positive nor negative	25.1%	5.0%	13.5%	33.3%	28.4%	0.0%	10.6%	31.6%	42.0%	58.9%	65.8%	0.0%	14.5%	16.1%
Mostly negative	13.4%	0.0%	24.8%	17.7%	14.0%	26.3%	10.6%	12.4%	13.8%	0.0%	0.0%	12.6%	10.9%	4.8%
Very negative	8.2%	0.0%	30.2%	9.8%	9.4%	0.0%	0.0%	8.0%	10.3%	0.0%	0.0%	73.9%	5.7%	0.0%
Not sure	35.7%	37.5%	16.4%	24.8%	29.6%	42.0%	61.5%	33.6%	24.8%	41.1%	25.0%	13.5%	56.2%	50.3%

Like to see change to current resource management law	Total	Party Vote at general election 2011												
		ACT New Zealand	Conserv-ative	Green Party	Labour Party	Mana Party	Maori Party	National Party	New Zealand First Party	United Future	Other party	Was not eligible to vote	Chose not to vote	Don't know or can't remember
Change	0.0%	73.8%	35.7%	19.3%	26.7%	26.3%	73.4%	40.6%	34.0%		40.4%	86.5%	32.2%	30.6%
No change	32.1%		6.9%	28.0%	13.9%	31.7%	9.9%	11.8%	26.4%				7.3%	28.6%
Not sure	0.0%	26.2%	57.4%	52.7%	59.3%	42.0%	16.7%	47.6%	39.6%	100.0%	59.6%	13.5%	60.6%	40.8%

Support for purpose for Local Government	Total	Party Vote at general election 2011												
		ACT New Zealand	Conserv-ative	Green Party	Labour Party	Mana Party	Maori Party	National Party	New Zealand First Party	United Future	Other party	Was not eligible to vote	Chose not to vote	Don't know or can't remember
Should cover the 'social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities' (the four well beings) as it is now	18.3%	34.4%	11.5%	41.1%	21.9%	58.0%	27.6%	8.0%	28.3%	0.0%	43.5%	78.9%	2.5%	21.8%
Change to focus on 'providing good quality local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and business'	56.1%	65.6%	82.9%	39.0%	50.2%	42.0%	72.4%	77.4%	53.6%	100.0%	56.5%	21.1%	39.1%	28.9%
Neither of these	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	5.5%	6.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	10.9%
I'm really not sure	21.1%	0.0%	5.5%	14.4%	21.6%	0.0%	0.0%	14.2%	12.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	54.4%	38.5%

How strongly do you agree or disagree that there are too many councils in New Zealand?	Total	Party Vote at general election 2011												
		ACT New Zealand	Conserv-ative	Green Party	Labour Party	Mana Party	Maori Party	National Party	New Zealand First Party	United Future	Other party	Was not eligible to vote	Chose not to vote	Don't know or can't remember
Strongly support	14.3%	0.0%	17.9%	10.5%	10.3%	0.0%	5.8%	18.6%	17.8%	0.0%	31.5%	0.0%	0.7%	7.1%
Support	24.7%	53.0%	30.8%	24.4%	19.8%	19.9%	70.0%	24.4%	30.3%	41.1%	0.0%	0.0%	8.6%	40.5%
Neutral	28.8%	30.3%	22.4%	26.0%	33.7%	22.1%	13.5%	28.1%	17.9%	0.0%	43.5%	17.5%	44.1%	33.7%
Oppose	15.2%	0.0%	14.2%	21.5%	17.8%	58.0%	10.6%	12.8%	15.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%	13.0%
Strongly oppose	8.3%	0.0%	14.7%	14.3%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	11.0%	0.0%	0.0%	73.9%	0.7%	0.0%
Not sure	8.7%	16.8%	0.0%	3.3%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	7.0%	7.6%	58.9%	25.0%	8.5%	27.7%	5.7%

Amalgamation of local councils into larger bodies covering their regions	Total	Party Vote at general election 2011												
		ACT New Zealand	Conserv-ative	Green Party	Labour Party	Maori Party	National Party	New Zealand First Party	Mana Party	United Future	Other party	Was not eligible to vote	Chose not to vote	Don't know or can't remember
Strongly support	8.6%	5.0%	11.9%	9.2%	8.9%	5.8%	11.6%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.2%
Support	25.7%	57.5%	30.9%	14.1%	24.4%	59.4%	26.9%	31.4%	27.6%	41.1%	90.8%	21.1%	17.4%	13.8%
Neutral	20.1%	20.8%	13.1%	29.0%	11.7%	0.0%	22.4%	17.3%	39.6%	58.9%	9.2%	0.0%	23.8%	40.4%
Oppose	18.4%	0.0%	11.6%	30.0%	14.9%	5.5%	20.0%	20.9%	32.9%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	10.3%	27.1%
Strongly oppose	18.8%	0.0%	27.0%	17.3%	27.6%	29.3%	14.3%	25.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	73.9%	25.3%	2.9%
Not sure	8.5%	16.8%	5.5%	0.4%	12.6%	0.0%	4.8%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	22.4%	14.6%