

## **Submission on the Local Government (Auckland Council) Bill**

To the Committee

This submission is made by **Sisters of Mercy Wiri**.

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We wish to appear before the committee to speak to our submission.

### **Introduction**

Sisters of Mercy Wiri is a not for profit community based provider of social services with a social justice and community development focus, based in Wiri, a suburb close to the Manukau City Centre.

As an active non-governmental organisation it delivers a range of services and programmes. The agency also contributes to a number of regional forums that focus on improving social outcomes, health and well being in the region. Through its ministry the agency embodies the mission of the Catholic Religious Congregation of women, Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand. The Sisters of Mercy were originally founded by Catherine McAuley in Dublin in 1831 to work with the poor, especially women and children.

We welcome the opportunity to be heard by the Auckland Governance Legislation Select Committee.

### **Summary**

Sisters of Mercy Wiri acknowledges this initiative by the Government to address the concerns and issues around the governance arrangements for the Auckland Region. Firstly, there is need for cohesion within the region and a central forum to put in place regional policies, determine strategic region-wide planning and urban development, control regional assets and develop regional tourism and economic growth. In particular, specific areas, such as those regarding transport and roading and regional parks, for example, are best planned for, provided and maintained by one body.

However, Sisters of Mercy Wiri have some serious concerns with the Local Government (Auckland Council) Bill and its intent. As is pointed out in the introduction to the Local Government (Auckland Council) Bill, Auckland is the region where nearly one third of the population of New Zealand choose to live. All people living within the region have the right to be part of the region and to feel as if they belong. Communities, built up over many years, are being

destroyed and possibly separated from wider communities that they have worked with for years.

The rationale for the haste with which the Bill has been enacted is unclear, as is the fact that the findings of the Royal Commission have been rejected (apart from the concept of one council for Auckland, and enhanced powers for the Mayor). The recommendations of the Royal Commission were the result of consulting with 3,500 Aucklanders. This consultation has, for the most part, been disregarded. The views of the citizens and those who live in the region are paramount and must be reflected in the final result. The Government's motives are suspect. How can any Government make such major decisions as the establishment of a new 'Super City', without more time, care and consultation? Mistakes will be costly and they will be made unless more care is taken. The lack of information about the costs involved and any meaningful analysis of the detrimental effects of the sweeping changes proposed are also of concern. The new "Super City" as proposed in the Bill will result in the destruction of so much that is of value to people living in the region.

**With this in mind Sisters of Mercy Wiri submits that**

**1. All the councillors are elected on a ward basis, and the number of councilors be increased to 30.**

This will ensure a fairer basis of representation across the region. Each councillor will be directly responsible to the population that elected him/her. It will also improve the chances for broader ethnic representation on the Council. To adequately represent the 1.4 million people of the Auckland region the number of councillors needs to be increased to 30.

**2. There is direct Maori representation on the Council.**

To ensure Maori representation on the proposed Auckland Council we strongly support there being three Maori seats (two to be elected from the Maori roll and one to be appointed by regional Mana Whenua).

**3. There There is effective local representation and decision making on local issues.**

There needs to be a tier of governance between the Council and the 20 to 30 local boards with limited powers proposed in the Bill. The six local councils proposed by the Royal Commission would give people living in the region more access to their elected members on community and local issues that affect them. Local boards should exercise local governance over its area with services planned, funded and delivered locally wherever possible.

Assets and liabilities belonging to communities should be controlled by these councils. In Manukau, libraries and swimming pools that are provided free of

charge to the users are greatly valued. Many communities can not afford to provide their own facilities nor pay for public facilities. Neither should the assets of our community to be privatised or sold off, for example, airport shares. Local parks and sports facilities need to be protected by a local council.

**4. The Mayor's role is to lead the Council in establishing a vision for Auckland**

The Mayor should then promote and articulate the agreed vision. The Deputy Mayor and all chairs of committees should be appointed by the Council and not the Mayor. This would provide appropriate checks and balances and allow proper debate and scrutiny. The Mayor of Auckland should have the same powers as all other Mayors in New Zealand.

**5. The Mayor and Councillors should be elected by proportional Representation (and not first past the post) in order that they have a majority mandate.**

Consideration should be given to alternative methods of voting, for example STV, to ensure that the voice of the majority of electors is heard, and the elected representatives do in fact represent more than 50% of the population.

**6. The regional parks network must stay intact (with potential additions as the need arises).**

It is important that the establishment of an Auckland Council does not lead to an erosion of the regional park's niche. Over structuring, over-development, commercialisation, and a proliferation of leases and licences would fundamentally change regional parks. Regional parks must not lose their character, which is highly valued by the people of Auckland. The regional parks network must not be placed within a CCO or trust, which would distance the parks from the accountability and democratic transparency that comes with having governance by elected members, open committee meetings and requirements to consult over the policy and management of the parks.

**7. Community assets must remain in public ownership.**

All community assets must remain in public ownership, and not be privatised. Dividends should not be paid on any essential public asset. Any excess should be reinvested in public assets or returned to the relevant ratepayers.

**8. The integration of water services should be managed by the Auckland Transition Agency, rather than Watercare.**

This service should be integrated in the same way that all the services are being integrated, namely by the Auckland Transition Agency rather than Watercare.

## **9. Communities of interest must be safeguarded.**

Sisters of Mercy Wiri strongly supports Clause 19, Section 2(a), which states that the local Governments Commission must 'so far as practicable, provide effective representation of communities of interest within Auckland'. Section 2(c) also reinforces that existing boundaries of local board areas be maintained as far as possible.

## **10. The Social Issues Forum be replaced by a Board similar to the Social Issues Board proposed by the Royal Commission.**

The measure of any democratically elected Government, especially local government, is the social well being of the people who elect it. A Social Issues Board must be accountable to those who elect it.

## **Conclusion**

We urge the decision-makers to take cognisance of the many people, particularly, those whom we service in our day to day work, who have made clear to us, that they fear the changes the Government seems to be imposing. For many, it is too difficult a task to engage in the submission process to have their voice and views tabled.

The question, 'Who is local Government for?' must be asked. The undue haste, the lack of planning and consultation, and the unproven and untested model that is proposed in the Bill for the local governance of the Auckland region suggest that ideology and only ideology is the raison d'être. There can be no mistakes in the restructuring of the local bodies that make up Auckland. The lifestyles of the citizens and the communities should not be sacrificed. The model proposed by the Local Government (Auckland Council Bill) we do not support. A far more acceptable model, in our view, is that proposed by the Royal Commission.

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Signed  
Sister Anne Hurley

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Signed  
Sister Margaret Martin

**24 June 2009**