

Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of local government is a key part of National's plans to lift living standards. Labour's policy not only involves an ever-increasing tax burden but a constant dumping of new and expanded responsibilities onto councils that inevitably drives up rates. Examples include new Treaty, prostitution, gaming, dogs, climate change, STV voting system, building and resource management laws. National's approach is about constraining the burden of rates and local government regulation on the community. We want strong, streamlined local democracy that delivers quality infrastructure and services.

NATIONAL WILL:

- Work with Local Government NZ to review compliance costs for councils

A review is required of legislation like dog control, resource management, building, gaming and prostitution to reduce the costs to councils of providing services. Decisions about devolving services and functions between central and local government need to be made on the basis of who can most efficiently deliver services and to cut duplication in planning and consultative requirements. National will amend the Local Government Act to remove the requirement for duplicate planning documents and put in place a simpler process by which councils decide on their planning and consultative needs.

- Repeal the special iwi consultative requirements and separate Maori representative provisions.

All citizens, regardless of ethnicity, should have an equal say in local government decision-making. National will repeal Labour's separate Maori seats on councils, and make it so councils have no need to consult iwi more than any other group in the community.

- Rewrite the Rating Powers Act.

Councils, in setting rates, should be primarily focussed on who benefits from services. We will rewrite the Rating Powers Act so councils must give primary consideration to who benefits from services when setting their rates.

- Undertake a thorough cost-benefit analysis of the new drinking water and air-quality standards.

New standards on issues like air quality and drinking water will involve hundreds of millions of dollars of public expenditure, and National is not satisfied that they have been subjected to a proper cost-benefit analysis. We will review whether nationally imposed standards are justified and, if made compulsory, will contribute to councils' cost of compliance.

- Require all councils to report their financial accounts to a common standard.

There is no consistency in financial reporting requirements of councils, so it is impossible to compare the expenditure, revenue, liabilities and assets of the 86 councils and to consolidate balance sheets. We will require councils to report their financial accounts to a common standard, and require Audit NZ to present a consolidated annual financial report to Parliament on local government.

- Require all local body elections to be run under First Past the Post.

In the wake of serious errors in the 2004 elections and confusion over the multiple types of voting systems, during which voters struggled with up to three different voting systems, National will require that all local elections be conducted under the First Past the Post system.

- Ensure communities of interest determine ward boundaries

Communities of interest should be the primary driver in determining ward boundaries. National will rewrite the Local Government Act to ensure boundaries are primarily drawn on the basis of communities of interest and not the rigid + 10% population formula.

- Repeal the requirement for all dogs to be micro-chipped from 1 July 2006.

The issues of dog control are radically different in rural communities compared to urban communities, so we believe the decision to microchip dogs should be left to each council to decide.

- Limit the Department of Conservation's role to providing advice on biodiversity and heritage issues.

National believes DOC should focus on providing advice on biodiversity and heritage issues to councils rather than directing or appealing decisions of locally elected representatives.

- Advance local government reorganisation.

National will advance local government reorganisation on a case-by-case basis. We do not subscribe to the view that big is necessarily better, and note that some of the highest consumer satisfaction surveys come from small councils. We believe that the greatest gains can be made by clarifying the roles between district and regional councils.

- Amend the swimming pools legislation to make compliance more practical.