



NORTHERN ACTION GROUP INC.



Electoral Boundaries and Names

NAG submission to the Representation Commission

December 2019

"Campaigning to get Democracy for the people of North Rodney"

Electoral Boundaries and Names: NAG submission to Representation Commission

Introduction

The Northern Action Group Inc. (NAG) The Northern Action Group Inc. is an apolitical organization of people wanting better local governance for North Rodney. Founded in 2009 NAG has had a long history, and much frustration, in dealing with the drive for centralisation, amalgamation, and reduction in local representation and provision of local services, that has been the hallmark of government policy in New Zealand for many decades.

This submission is in response to the NZ electorate boundary review document: “Proposed Electorates 2019” from the Representation Commission(the Commission). We provide our comments on and an objection to some of the boundaries proposed for the Helensville and contiguous electorates and to the choice of name. We suggest alternatives that better reflect the criteria the Commission is obliged to have regard to under the Electoral Act 1993.

Representation: Related Legislation

Electoral Act: National-Territorial Alignment disparity

The Electoral Act 1993 (the Act) includes a guarantee of a minimum number of 16 general electorate seats in the South Island, so ensuring representation in more sparsely populated areas. The population of the South Island, as calculated at the latest census, is divided by 16 with the resulting figure being fixed as a quota to divide the North Island into electoral districts.

Adjustments to representation boundaries are required by the Electoral Act to have regard to a concept of uniform levels of representation. Despite this Dr Jean Drage¹ has shown that representation levels for **local** government vary widely across local authorities. She argues for a minimum representation ratio in New Zealand’s local councils similar to that applied to the electorate seats for our general elections.

This lack of coherence between the Electoral Act, Local Electoral Act and Local Government Act and their application is an ongoing concern. Auckland Council has repeatedly drawn attention to the conflicts created by the lack of alignment of electoral and local government

¹ Local Government in New Zealand - Challenges & Choices: Edited by Drage, Jean and Cheyne, Christine.

boundaries and has made representations to the Minister that Auckland Council should have the flexibility to facilitate that alignment².

Key principles for the establishment of both local authority and electoral boundaries are reflected in the criteria the commission must consider: i.e.

- community of interest;
- facilities of communications; and
- topographical features.

Failure to align electoral and local authority boundaries creates an artificial separation within communities and areas that otherwise have common interests. Fair and effective representation is important in the selection of representatives for both national and local government. It does not help the resolution of matters of local concern when representatives from particular communities with common interests in their local governance have different and possibly conflicting policy perspectives or interests at the national level³. Alignment to unify the representation of interest of local communities is increasingly important as the ratio of residents to representatives has progressively increased for both local and national government elections.

Local government amalgamations, noticeably in Auckland, have produced a significant increase in the number of voters represented by each councillor or local board member. This disparity impacts on the level of involvement that our communities have in local government as seen by voting stats⁴. Since “disengagement” is given as the major reason for non-voting⁵, is reasonable to contend that lower levels of representation (higher representation ratios) result in lower levels of voter interest and more voter apathy⁶.

Alignment of electoral and local authority boundaries should be expected to increase the level of local interest and unify voter support across the relevant area. This is more important in larger local government authorities like Auckland Council, where alignment with and support of the electorate MP increases the chance that the concerns of the citizens in remote local communities will be attended to. Unity of both national and local representation purpose with communities should increase voter interest in turning out to vote, both in the national and local government elections.

While there is no specific obligation on the Commission to ensure alignment with local authority and boundaries, having regard to criteria which are common to both local and national government representation – i.e community of interest, facilities of

² Auckland Council; “Enhancing local government for Aucklanders: Progress Update – Recommendation of the Local Government Commission”; November 2018

³ The Rodney Local Board area currently has three Electorate MPs as its representatives. It also has list MPs living in the same area but this is simply by their choice of place of residence.

⁴ Department of Internal Affairs statistics show that there is increased voter participation where councillors represent fewer voters. https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Services-Local-Elections-Local-Authority-Election-Statistics-2016?OpenDocument

⁵ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/voting-and-political-participation>

⁶ <https://www.lgnz.co.nz/assets/21be72b868/Elections-Fact-sheet-19.pdf>

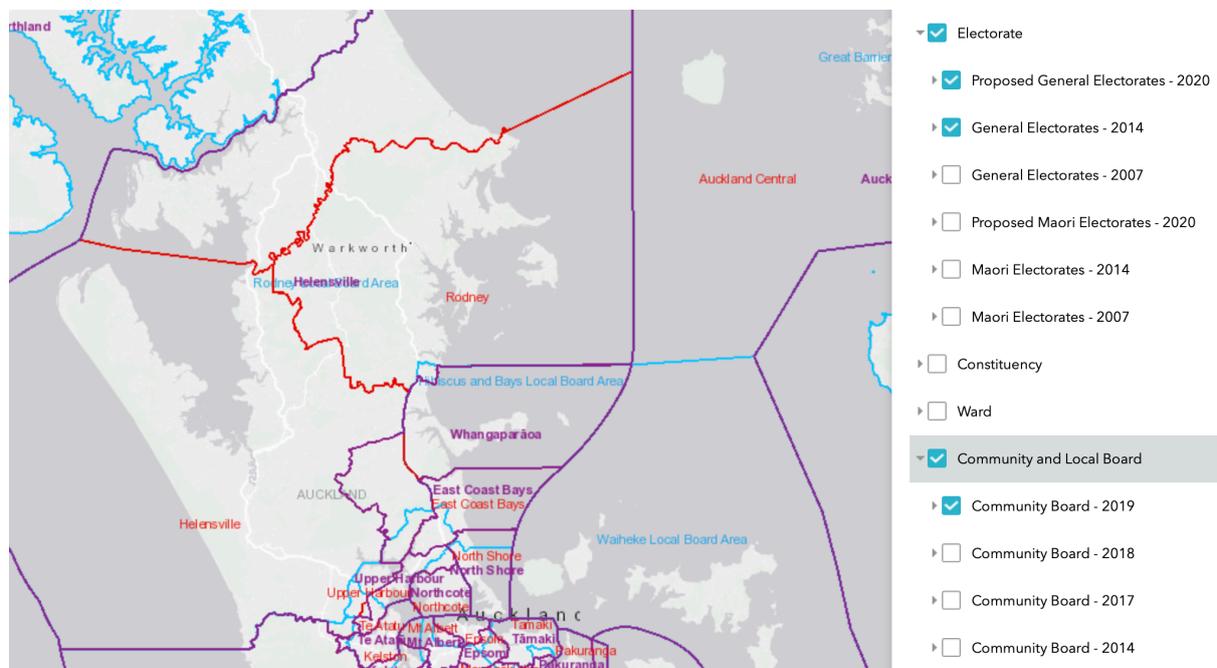
communications and topographical features - should provide the incentive for alignment with local authority boundaries wherever possible.

In the current proposed electorate revision it appears the Commission has clearly taken steps to pursue this alignment of the proposed Helensville electorate with local board boundaries. The shift of the Helensville southern boundary up to the current local board area boundary; the movement of the northern Rodney boundary up to the northern Local Board area boundary; and the shift of the lower Rodney boundary to exclude Whangaparāoa and align with the local board boundary, are all positive alignment moves.

Our objection regarding boundaries is to the proposed deviations from the Rodney Local Board area boundaries for the electoral boundary redistribution.

The proposed electorate boundaries

A comparison of the current and proposed electorate boundaries with the Local Board area boundaries can be seen in the Stats online map:



Starting point: Rodney Local Board Area

The proposed electorate boundary basically, and we say positively, uses the Rodney Local Board area as a starting point.

The Commission's report gives total 2018 electoral population as 4,700,435 (Table 1) NZ.Stat online currently shows the usually resident population count as 4,699,755. (the 0.01% difference presumably due to adjustments).

The same NZ.Stat 2018 Census gives the population of the Rodney local board area as 66,417. This places the area within the range (61,654 - 68,144)⁷ set by the Commission for an electorate.

The current Rodney electorate is over quota because it includes the more urban population of Orewa and Whangaparāoa, which are not part of the Rodney Local Board area (and which the proposed new electorate area excludes).

We therefore believe that the current Rodney local board area is the appropriate starting point for revision and redistribution of electorates – rather than Helensville, which is characterised in the Commission report as the starting point for adjustments in the area.

Northern Rodney

The Northern boundary of the Rodney Local Board area is a natural geographical boundary and has traditionally been used as a boundary for separate representation and governance. Merger of the northmost Rodney and Kaipara communities has been proposed and was considered, but the most recent review (by the Local Government Commission) concluded that there was little common community of interest and no strong community support for such a change.

Accordingly we support the proposed extension of the existing Rodney electorate to the north to the Local Board area northern boundary.

South-West Rodney

While NAG has continued to support the proposal for North Rodney to provide for its own local governance, there is an established history of association with the Southwest Rodney area around Kumeu and Helensville. The two areas border the southern shores of the Kaipara Harbour and arguments for their combination include reducing the complexity of the management of that ecologically important harbour by different groups with responsibility for different shorelines.

One of the options proposed by the Local Government Commission for consideration was the establishment of two Local Boards – one for North Rodney and one for South-West Rodney, recognising the different communities of interest. Community of interest surveys⁸ undertaken by the Local Government Commission in its consideration of NAG's application for a North Rodney Unitary Council showed that there is not a strong community of interest between the North and Southwest Rodney areas. The community of interest for both groups is firstly local, and then to the Auckland region generally.

However, given the requirement that the population for any electorate must be at the level of the Rodney local board area taken as a whole, we support inclusion for the purposes of electorate representation. Alignment of the boundaries with the local board boundary

⁷ Table 1 Commission "Proposed Electorates 2019" document.

⁸ Local Government Commission Community of interest Survey November 2017

would add value for the communities in that the councillor for the area, and the Local Board, will be representing the same group of citizens as the electorate MP.

Southern and South East Rodney

The Commission proposes three area changes where the electorate boundaries are not aligned with those of the Rodney local board area. (By inclusion and exclusion we mean by reference to the Local Board areas, not the current electorate areas).

1. Included is an area of Te Atatu in the South currently part of the Waitakere Local Board Area; parts of the Henderson-Massey Local Board area and part of the Upper Harbour local board area. These Areas have an urban development focus and have their main community of interest outside their local communities is with Auckland rather than Helensville.
2. Excluded is the area of Coatesville and Diary Flat. This area is predominately larger lifestyle semi-rural blocks and unlikely to develop quickly into higher density urban communities. Communities of interest in this area are likely spread between the local centers of Albany, Silverdale and Orewa and general Auckland.
3. Included is a small section of area between Hatfields Beach and Waiwera, that is more typically associated with Orewa as a community of interest. Waiwera generally is the point of geographical separation between the North Rodney area and the more populous areas to the south and along the coast. We assume this particular area has been proposed for inclusion in the proposed Helensville area only in order to balance population numbers.

Boundary Recommendation

On balance, since the population of the Rodney Local Board area is within the electorate limits prescribed, and the proposed Helensville electorate appears broadly to be designed to align with that Local Board area, we lodge an objection to the current proposed boundaries of the proposed Helensville electorate where they depart from full alignment.

We consider full alignment of the electorate boundaries with the Rodney Local Board area boundaries (i.e with the retention of the excluded areas and exclusion of the included areas) will allow the Commission to stay within the requirements of the Act and best meet the criteria for re-assignment.

We appreciate that this will mean adjustments to the affected proposed electorates in the south and east. As these are peri-urban or urban areas with their main community of interest outside of small local communities being with central Auckland, we do not see that adjustment to these boundaries to satisfy the requirements of the Act will produce any inequitable distortions or conflict with the Commission's consideration criteria.

NAG does not have the resources to undertake the necessary rebalancing to make suggestions. To assist the process of alignment of local board and electorate boundaries in the Auckland region generally we recommend the Commission liaise with Auckland Council.

Electorate Name

The name “Rodney” has a long history of association with the mainly rural and coastal community area from the formation of the electorate in 1871 and the County Council in 1876, when provincial government was abolished. (We attach a brief history of the changes in the local government area as an **Appendix**.)

Rodney County and subsequently Rodney District each took their names from Cape Rodney (opposite Little Barrier Island), which Captain James Cook named on 24 November 1769 after Admiral Sir George Brydges Rodney.

The first Rodney electorate was represented by four MPs from 1871 to 1890. Its first recreation was from the 1946 election to 1978, and it was then recreated for a single term six years later for the 1984 election.

The Rodney electorate was again recreated ahead of the change to mixed-member proportional (MMP) voting in 1996.

Areas containing Cape Rodney have persistently been associated with the name, whether for representation or governance purposes. While the area has had different boundaries over the years, the eponymous name has consistently been preferred, including when the Helensville borough was incorporated in 1989.

The Commission acknowledges the significance of the Cape Rodney geographical landmark on page 9 of its report, when it says in relation to the proposed new electorate name Whangaparāoa “A new name is needed as the electorate no longer contains Cape Rodney”.

This is simply a matter of how the changes have been presented.

It was the Northland and Rodney and Upper Harbour areas that had to be reconfigured to meet the quota, not Helensville.

If the Rodney electorate had been presented as the starting point (since it had to lose population to comply) the proposal would have been presented as: adding parts of Northland to Rodney, adding (a reduced) Helensville to Rodney, removing Whangaparāoa from Rodney (and any other consequent adjustments). Thus retaining the Rodney name for the area containing the Cape would have seemed obvious.

When the boundaries of the Local Board area and the electorate are generally the same, and appear to have been made so intentionally by the proposed changes, changing the name of the electorate to Helensville has no justification.

Retaining the name Rodney when North Rodney and Helensville are combined has precedent (from its origins, from the fact that the area contains the Cape, and from when the Helensville Borough was incorporated into the Rodney District Council) and changing it will add unnecessary confusion amongst voters (who vote in both national and local government elections).

Whether or not the Commission accepts our recommendation that the boundary of the Rodney electorate be fully aligned with that of the Rodney Local Board area, we object to the name “Helensville” being given to the proposed new electorate and would like to see the historical, traditional, and established name “Rodney” retained.

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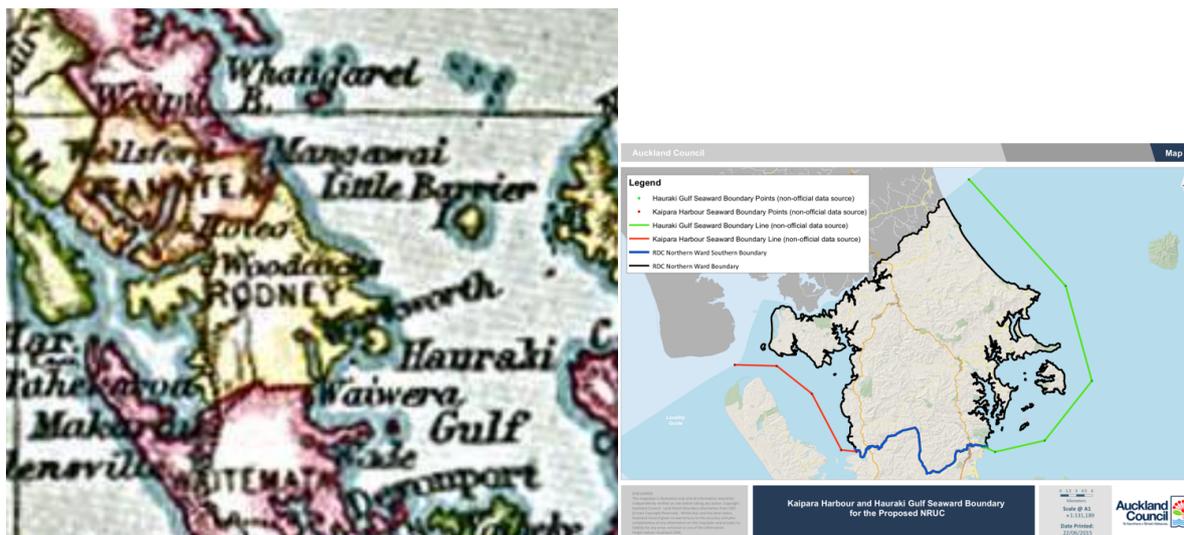
For questions or follow-up please contact:

Chairman: William Townson: bimon@xtra.co.nz or
William Foster: foster.bill@me.com

Appendix:

Rodney County, District, and Local Board area: the history

The Rodney County Council was formed in 1876 [1901 population 3,678] when provincial government was abolished. It had the same general southern boundary then (i.e Waiwera to Makarau) as for the Northern Action Group's (NAG's) proposal for a North Rodney Unitary Council (NRUC) [est. 2016 population 22,000] to the Local Government Commission (Commission).



Rodney County of 1876 alongside the NRUC area proposed by NAG 2015

After 98 years, in 1974, the Rodney County Council area was forced to amalgamate with part of the former Waitemata County Council to triple the size of the administration.

Then, in 1989, the Rodney District Council was formed by the amalgamation of Helensville Borough and Rodney County Council in the wide-ranging local government reforms that amalgamated some 850 local bodies into 86 regional and territorial authorities.

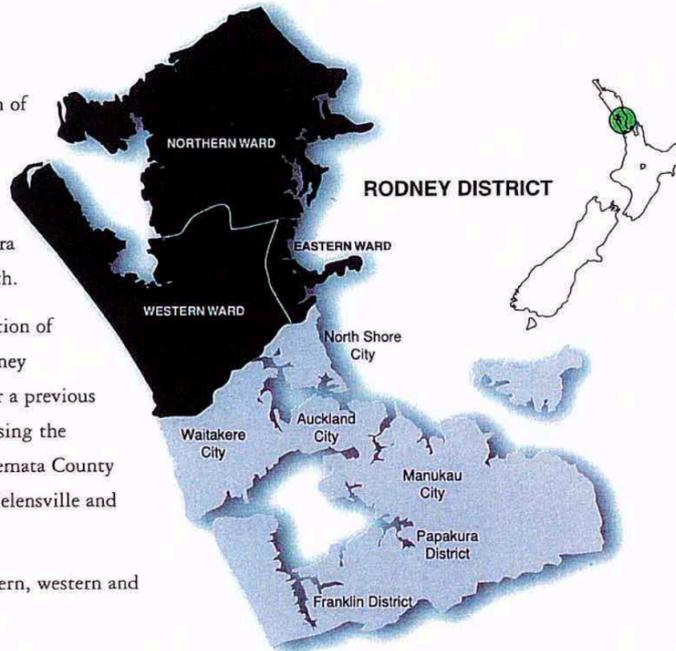
The additional areas brought in were largely urban and peri-urban and the predominantly rural people of North Rodney had little community of interest with the added communities.

● About Rodney District

Rodney District stretches between coasts just north of metropolitan Auckland. It is the most northern of the seven local authority areas that make up the Auckland Region. Its neighbours are Waitakere and North Shore Cities to the south and the Kaipara District (part of the Northland Region) to the north.

The district was formed in 1989 by the amalgamation of the Helensville Borough and Rodney County. Rodney County Council had been constituted in 1974 after a previous amalgamation of a smaller Rodney County comprising the northern part of the present district, and the Waitemata County comprising the present Hibiscus Coast, Wainui, Helensville and Kumeu areas.

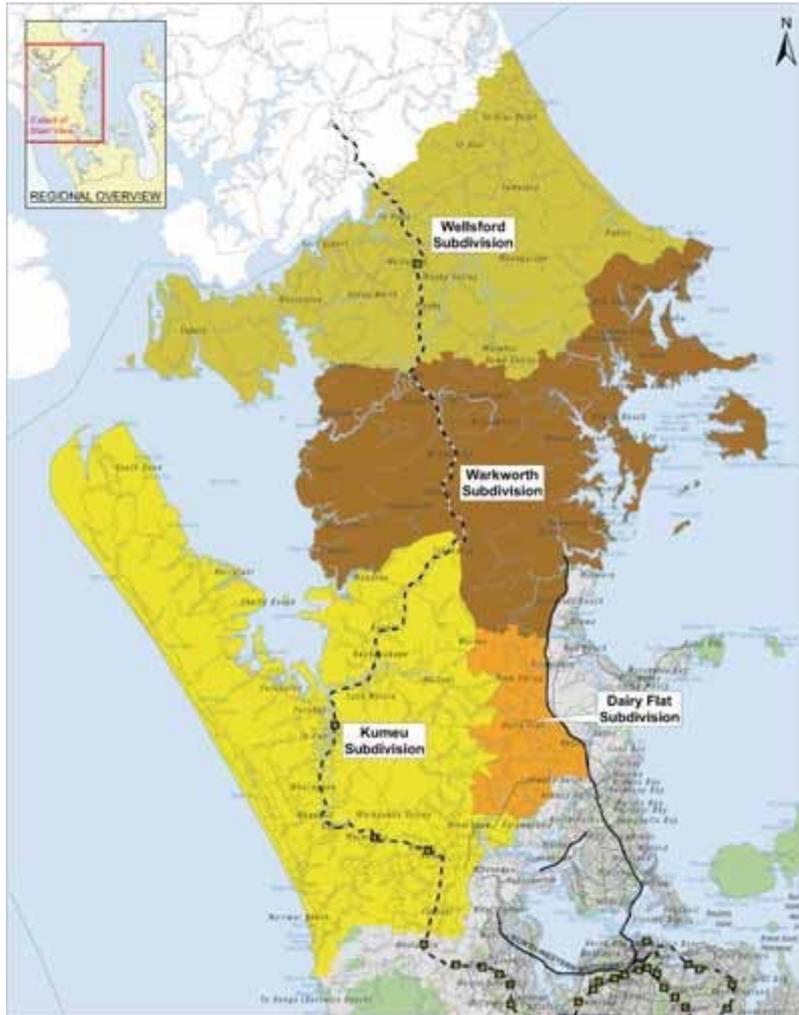
Rodney District comprises three wards - the northern, western and eastern wards.



Rodney District Council (from 2002/3 Annual Report)

In September 2008 the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance was established and its report in March 2009 recommended a “super city” for Auckland, including the Rodney District Council area.

Implementation of the amalgamation saw a reduction in the Rodney area as some of the Eastern ward (Whangaparāoa) area was excluded.



Current Rodney Local Board Area (one ward, 4 subdivisions)

The North Rodney community has consistently argued for its own local self-governance and NAG pursued an application for a Unitary Authority (approximately the area of the Wellsford and Warkworth subdivisions) in November 2013.

Work of the Local Government Commission in relation to that application has provided knowledge about communities of interests for the area.

End.