

Hon. Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government
By Email: S.Watts@ministers.govt.nz

08/09/2025

Dear Minister,

I am writing to raise my concern about local authorities appointing unelected representatives to council committees and subcommittees, with full voting rights.

With voting local elections underway this week, New Zealanders have the opportunity to appraise their local candidates and hold to account their elected representatives. However, not all decisionmakers around council tables will be subject to this democratic test.

Local authorities across the country have increasingly added unelected members to committees with voting rights. These members are often appointed by mana whenua, but may also include representatives of youth, business, or environmental lobby groups.

Regardless, voters expect that decisionmakers can be held accountable and unelected appointees simply do not meet this standard. This undermines the democratic process and the integrity of the system.

This issue is especially relevant as rising rates place pressure on household budgets. The ballot box is the only real accountability mechanism available to ratepayers – but that accountability disappears when councils appoint unelected individuals. Appointees who are not answerable to voters have no democratic incentive to reject wasteful spending or keep rates affordable.

With ACT's support, the Government has moved to defend local democracy by restoring the public's right to vote on the existence of Māori wards. However, I am concerned that this move fails to address the greater problem of unelected members. Councils may move to counter a public vote against Māori wards by appointing unelected mana whenua representatives to council committees, along the lines of Auckland Council's Independent Māori Statutory Board.

In fact, in some territories we see councils with both Māori ward councillors and unelected mana whenua representatives, as is currently the case at Wellington City Council.

To address this, I have drafted the *Local Government (Restoring Democratic Integrity) Amendment Bill*. This Bill would ensure that unelected members of committees or subcommittees do not have voting rights and do not count towards quorum. This protects a council's ability to access outside expertise when appropriate, while making clear that voting power must rest with those who have the public mandate and who are accountable to voters.

I urge you to consider adopting this as a Government Bill. This would reinforce the Government's commitment to local democracy and help rebuild public confidence in local decision-making.

Please find attached to this letter a copy of my Bill.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Cameron Luxton", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Cameron Luxton MP
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