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Representation Review  
Canterbury Regional Council  
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**Submission on the Canterbury Regional Council (ECAN)  
Representation Review**

I wish to make a submission on Ecan's Representation Review. In particular, I am concerned about the number of councillors proposed in this review and the process undertaken to date to determine the representation arrangements for the Canterbury region.

It needs to be said that it is great to see democratic elections will be held for the whole of the Canterbury regional council in New Zealand's local elections in 2019. It will remain a blight on the history of local government in the Canterbury area that we have had limited ability to decide our decision makers for the last three electoral terms.

It is vitally important that decisions made in this representation review set the scene for political representation across the region for the future. It is therefore most concerning to read in the report to the ECAN council on 21 June 2018 that the proposed council arrangements are the result of at least 4 workshops held for the ECAN councillors (elected and unelected). My concern about this process is two-fold:

1. You have already made a decision and are now about to defend it, rather than look at the options available to you along with a public debate, before making your decision. Consultation on this basis is tokenism.
2. This decision was made by the whole council, half of whom are not democratically elected. Appointed commissioners (whether called councillors or not) should not be part of this decision-making process on future representation on the Ecan council.

While you might argue that the representation review process is spelt out for you by the Local Electoral Act 2001 and the Local Government Commission guidelines, there is a clear difference here in that Canterbury has not had a fully elected council now for 8 years. Therefore, you need to ensure that this process is both factual and transparent. When the 21 June 2018 report to Council continually refers to the recommendation that the total number of members elected increase from 7 to 13, this statement is clearly misleading. The total number of councillors elected in 2007 (the last election when the Ecan council was

fully elected) was 14 so the number of elected councillors recommended is not an increase. For the public record, this must be correct.

My submission relates largely to the number of representation positions recommended in this review, my argument being based on the principles of fair and effective representation. I believe the number of Canterbury regional councillors elected in 2019 should be 14.

My argument is that:

1. The current population of the Canterbury region is 612,280, a significant increase on the population in 2007 when it was 520,600 (378,512 of whom were registered electors).

In 2007 the representation ratio (the average number of electors per elected member) for the Canterbury regional council was 27, 037. This representation ratio was much higher than the national average for regional councils which was 20, 131.<sup>i</sup> This means that the Canterbury region had fewer councillors than other regional councils in New Zealand, a fact that could hardly be called fair.

With 14 councillors elected in 2019 and an increase in population statistics of almost 100,000, the representation ratio will be higher. With every regional councillor in the Canterbury region representing more electors than in other regions, there is little fairness or evenness across local authorities. Therefore, the Canterbury regional council should have the maximum number of councillors allowed – 14.

2. These 14 councillor positions should be allocated across the region (with every constituency having two councillors) to ensure that voters are offered choice at the 2019 local elections. With voter turnout continuing to decline it is important that voters feel they have options when voting for their representatives. Having two seats in each constituency provides voters the opportunity to vote strategically and to feel they are effectively represented.

The Royal Commission on the Electoral System suggested that effective representation should reflect 'significant characteristics of the electorate, such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class, locality and age' and 'encourage close links and accountability between individual and their constituencies'.<sup>ii</sup> This strong link promotes healthy government, protects the rights of citizens and ensures their voices are heard.

The royal commission also recognised the need for more than one representative within a constituency to provide voters with choices, be they demographic, political or policy.<sup>iii</sup> More than one councillor also means that the workload can be shared and electors are more likely to know at least one elected councillor and so engage in the political process.

3. While 14 councillor positions (or two in every district) will mean that Ecan will not comply with the +/- 10% rule in the Local Electoral Act 2001, there is room for exemptions. As outlined in this legislation, Section 19V (3) provides local authorities with the grounds for exemption on the basis of isolation and / or effective representation of communities of interest.


And this exemption applied to Ecan in 2007. The Local Government Commission in its determination agreed with exemptions argued on the grounds of the size of this very large area and its particular challenges in terms of over and under representation in the southernmost constituencies, stating that 'effective representation of the communities of interest in this constituency, given its size, geography and communities of interest, requires enhanced representation beyond the requirements of fair representation'.<sup>iv</sup>

It is most concerning that this previous exemption to the 2007 Canterbury regional council's representation arrangements is not part of the report presented to councillors on 21 June 2018. Do they even know?

4. Finally, I would argue that democracy needs to be rebuilt in the Canterbury region. After 8 years of central government appointed commissioners, it is essential that the new councillors are elected by a majority of electors in 2019. For this to happen, the Council should already be planning an extensive campaign around the 2019 local elections.

I would like the opportunity to discuss this submission with the elected councillors. Please contact me if you would like further information.

Yours sincerely



Jean Drage

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<sup>i</sup> Department of Internal Affairs, *Local Authority Election Statistics 2007*, p. 48

[https://www.dia.govt.nz/Pubforms.nsf/URL/Local\\_Authority\\_Election\\_Statistics\\_2007.pdf/\\$file/Local\\_Authority\\_Election\\_Statistics\\_2007.pdf](https://www.dia.govt.nz/Pubforms.nsf/URL/Local_Authority_Election_Statistics_2007.pdf/$file/Local_Authority_Election_Statistics_2007.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Royal Commission on the Electoral System, 1986, *Towards a Better Democracy*, pp. 11-12

<sup>iii</sup> Royal Commission, pp. 20.

<sup>iv</sup> The Local Government Commission, *Determination of the Representation Arrangements to apply for the election of the Canterbury Regional Council to be held on 13 October 2007*, p. 15.