MĀORI WARDS EXPLAINER

Māori wards and constituencies are vital to local decision-making. Government changes mean we have to act to keep them. Here's what's happening and what you can do.

Most New Zealanders want our voices represented when decisions are being made about our communities and country. Decisions made by local government have a huge impact on all our lives, so it's important that council decision-makers reflect the communities they serve.

Councils regularly review their representation arrangements to ensure that they are fair and meet the needs of their communities. These reviews look at how many councillors there are, how they are elected and whether to have wards (called 'constituencies' in regional councils). Councils seek community input on what representation should look like, including for different communities of interest.

Through this process, some councils have established rural wards to ensure the interests of rural communities are heard. Councils have also established Māori wards so that Māori interests are represented in council decision-making.

"This is an important role. We rate people and spend that money collectively for the good of the community. As a team we need a diverse range of talents and life experiences to be able to effectively consider how our decisions impact this community."
Councillor Lyn Neeson, Ruapehu District Council

WHY WE HAVE MĀORI WARDS AND HOW THEY WORK

Māori have been significantly under-represented in local government for a long time. Māori wards are an important way of supporting greater Māori voice in decision-making.

People enrolled on the Māori electoral roll vote for candidates standing for Māori wards. Similarly, people enrolled on the general electoral roll vote for candidates standing for general wards. People can only be on one electoral roll. The number of wards is proportional to the number of people on each roll.

Māori ward councillors have a responsibility to represent the interests of Māori communities. Along with their fellow councillors, they contribute to collective decisions for the whole community.

"Mana whenua across the motu have multi-generational insights, knowledge, perspectives and aspirations about the places they come from and the resources and environments in those places. They only want the best outcomes for our whenua, for our wai, for our moana, and for all future generations of people who will call Aotearoa home."
Councillor Bonita Bigham, Taranaki Regional Council

THE KEY ISSUES NOW

There are strong processes already in place for local government to consult with their communities on representation, including Māori wards. Despite this, the government has passed legislation which requires a **binding public poll** to be held on Māori wards. The requirement for a poll applies only to Māori wards; not to any other wards, such as rural wards.

Most councils oppose this legislation and see it as an overreach by central government into local decision-making. Communities are deeply concerned about the negative impacts of this divisive and discriminatory legislation.

Different treatment of Māori wards is unfair and harmful to local relationships.

We need to vote to keep Māori wards.

HOW OUR COMMUNITIES BENEFIT FROM MĀORI WARDS

The law change required 44 councils to vote on whether they wanted to keep their Māori ward. 42 decided to retain their Māori wards and are now required to hold a public poll. To keep Māori wards voters in these areas now have to vote in the upcoming local body elections. In deciding to keep Māori wards, councillors reflected on the ways in which hearing the voices of all our communities supports better decision making:

"Since the introduction of Māori wards, I've seen the positive change in making a healthier, stronger and more unified community."
Mayor of Heretaunga Hastings, Sandra Hazlehurst

"Māori wards enhance the diversity and quality of the council's governance and leadership. They foster a culture of collaboration and innovation."
Katarina Kawana, Co-Chair Hawkes' Bay Regional Council Māori Committee

Communities say Māori wards **deepen relationships and trust** between councils, iwi, hapū and Māori generally, **improve voter turnout**, and have **positive practical impacts –** like better community responses to emergencies because of the stronger relationships with marae.

"Our commitment is to a representative system that values Māori voices and enriches our community ... By keeping the ward, we ensure that Māori perspectives continue to play a crucial role in our governance...for the benefit of all our residents."
Mayor Max Baxter, Ōtorohanga District Council

3 ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO UPHOLD MĀORI WARDS

To keep Māori wards we have to vote in the upcoming local body elections .

By 1 August, ensure that you are **registered to vote** in the upcoming local government elections. By 11 October, make sure you **vote to keep the Māori ward.**

Talk to others about the importance of voting to keep Māori wards. Respond to any misinformation that you hear by sharing information from trusted sources like Action Station or Local Government New Zealand.

Follow Decide Together, Thrive Together or local campaigns to find out other ways you can get involved.