

IPP Director speaks out over Government's approach to Auckland's governance

The wrong report is going to the select committee. Could the government be getting it horribly wrong for Auckland? Shortly the Select Committee will be considering the Government's "Making Auckland Greater" proposal rather than the Royal Commission's Report into Auckland's governance.

The director of the Institute of Public Policy at AUT, David Wilson, is calling for the government to put the Royal commission report before select committee rather than the Government's proposal.

Modern metropolitan governance is about being proactive, enabling cooperation and collaboration, civic participation and inclusion, vertical and horizontal partnership and integration. It is recognition that the public sector cannot do it alone and that many of the current jurisdictions in modern city-regions are ill equipped, or have the wrong mandate to enable better governance mechanisms to address many of the knotty and complex issues that Cities face. In short it needs to be a team effort, but one that can be public sector lead.

"The Royal Commission's proposal is the result of 18 months of research, over 3500 submissions, and discussions with leading international advisors on metropolitan governance. It is a solid piece of evidence-based work". The Government's proposal has taken one of the headlines of the Royal Commission's report but removed many of the mechanisms that would have achieved better regional governance, and in the process undermined the positive role local councils can play in sub-regional development and local governance.

One of the most significant achievements of the Royal Commission's report is the way in which it presents an integrated system for the governance and management of Auckland. The major problem I see with the government's alternative is that it accepts the "Super-city" tier on the one hand but undermines local government on the other. It loses the 'integrated package' put forward by the royal commission.

Therefore the current government proposal does not provide the basis for any ongoing reasoned debate, or the basis for a select committee process, as it is starting from a position that is but a shadow of the Royal Commission's report, leaving too much to chance, and misinterpreting the issue at hand. Why after having come this far would we want to re-litigate many, if not all, of the issues canvassed in the Royal Commission process? Yet if there are too many variables to be sorted out, and there is widespread dissatisfaction with the process, then that is what we will get.

Let us instead continue the process towards better regional governance by considering the most informed piece of work before us, the Royal Commission's 'Auckland Governance Report'. Then we can have a reasoned debate about the role of the second tier of government and how we can maintain and strengthen local democracy at the same time as strengthening regional governance and leadership.

About David Wilson:

In 2006 David Wilson was part of an international team of experts given the task of reviewing Auckland and its ability to implement the Auckland Regional Economic Development Strategy. Their report formed the basis of "The Metropolitan Auckland Project" and recommended stronger regional leadership. In 2007 and 2008 he was involved in supporting a number of submissions to the Royal Commission in favour of stronger regional governance, in 2009 he peer reviewed the section on economic development in the Royal Commission report, and in late April the Institute's Local Government Centre hosted the "Governance for Auckland" Conference at AUT (www.ipp.org.nz).