

The Destruction of Local Government

By *Tony Holman QSO*

Local government is being removed from the people at an increasing rate. For decades the *Local Government Commission* has had a general instruction to reduce the number of local authorities nationwide, especially since the first major amalgamation in 1989.

Just 20 years after that amalgamation, Auckland became the target for another significant amalgamation – the amalgamation to set up a new, experimental species, the “Super City”. What was established was a corporate, and bureaucratic model, with a democratic veneer to confuse the public.

Further constraints on the captive citizens of Auckland were overlays by central government through the requirements of the *Unitary Plan*, which, among other things, ensures that there is little chance of objection from the majority of Aucklanders, and that the rights of developers and intensification anywhere and everywhere are paramount.

In addition, the key public assets and services have been excised from any real democratic input or control and are run by unelected appointees from the business world. These euphemistically named “*Council Controlled Organisations*” include:



- ☉ **Watercare Services** – controls water and sewerage services and reticulation, together with sewerage plants, water storage and treatment plants.
- ☉ **Auckland Council Investments Limited** – 100% shareholding in *Ports of Auckland Limited*; shares held in *Auckland International Airport*; *Auckland Film Industries*.

- ☉ **Auckland Transport** – public transport network including *Britomart*; roading network. This asset is owned by the council and managed by *Auckland Transport*
- ☉ **Development Auckland Ltd (Panuku)** – freehold interests in Waterfront Land; sale or redevelopment of various council-owned land and facilities.
- ☉ **Regional Facilities Auckland** – *Auckland Art Gallery* (including the arts collections owned by Regional Facilities Auckland); *Auckland Zoo*; *Aotea Centre*; *Civic Theatre*; *Viaduct Events Centre*; *Mt. Smart Stadium*.

The “local” level of governance in this mish mash *Auckland Council*, are the local boards which have far less say and fewer functions than the former Community Boards.

In brief, then, the democratic rights and avenues of Aucklanders have been largely removed or overridden by government.

Not satisfied with this, the government has altered the *Resource Management Act*, and now introduced the *Urban Development Authorities* (UDA) proposal. The powers potentially available for an urban development project relate to:

- Land: powers to assemble parcels of land, including existing **compulsory acquisition** powers under the *Public Works Act 1981*. This means private property, which should alarm every citizen. Also alarming is that it means public property such as parks, so this would override the *Reserves Act* intended to protect public open space for public uses.
- Planning and Resource Consenting: **powers to override existing and proposed district plans and regional plans**, and streamlined consenting processes.



- Infrastructure: powers to plan and build infrastructure such as roads, water pipes and reserves.
- Funding: powers to buy, sell and lease land and buildings; powers to borrow to fund infrastructure; and powers to levy charges to cover infrastructure costs.

The Government would decide which enabling powers could be used for particular projects.

The government is keen to impose its Auckland model of 'local government' on the rest of New Zealand to ensure direct control from Wellington.

So far that has failed, because it allowed two regions to actually have a referendum on the proposals, something denied to Aucklanders. The two regions were Wellington and Hawke's Bay, both of which sensibly rejected the proposal.

I doubt that the government has given up this quest, and I believe that those plans will resurface soon after the forthcoming elections. If so, the Auckland born and bred 'refugees' now streaming out of this beleaguered place will not escape for long. The reason is that if the government resumes this pursuit, I believe it will **impose** this model throughout the country.

The logical consequence of all of this is that local government, local democracy and local determination as we have known it, will be dead. Full control will have been removed to Wellington and Parliament, and probably will be administered by a new Ministry – of 'Local Government!'

Don't count on Labour opposing this government policy. Labour began the move to a "Super City" and amalgamation, as well as being responsible for the 1989 one.

We seem to be moving towards a totalitarian form of centralised government, devoid of local needs and aspirations.

