

Date; 22.7.22

Committee Secretariat  
Finance and Expenditure Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission on the Water Services Entities Bill.

This submission is made by the South Canterbury Chamber of Commerce. We are the respected business leaders and voice of South Canterbury representing 512 businesses across three districts and literally thousands of employees.

We oppose the four-entity model of reform proposed by this Bill and ask the Select Committee to visit the regions impacted by these decisions to hear in person why this proposal is opposed. We are deeply concerned about the drive for centralisation from this government and the lack of genuine consultation. We believe the bill should be withdrawn and significantly revised, we understand the need to improve water standards, but this should be achieved by a regulatory national authority and supporting those Councils where necessary with advice and funding. This bill is contrary to the basic property rights and the rights of local communities to have say over their local services, and is likely to lead to higher costs, increasing centralised bureaucracy and poorer outcomes for communities.

The South Canterbury Chamber of Commerce's concerns with the proposed model are:

1. Lack of community consultation regarding the proposed confiscation of ratepayer funded infrastructure and services.
2. Concern that in fact there will be poorer outcomes on a range of measures including accountability to customers, iwi-Māori partnerships, management and operational performance and flexibility for the future.
3. The assumptions under the four-entity model appear to be flawed, and the cost savings required to meet financial targets are unrealistic. (A comparison with the Te Pukenga model for tertiary education should raise the red warning flag as this national restructure plunges behind budgeted outcomes).
4. Local influence over services will be effectively lost, once again limiting the economic growth and strength of the regions.
5. This bill does not have cross party support and will not offer the level of certainty needed for long term infrastructure investments.
6. Protections against privatisation are weak and easily undermined.

As a Chamber of Commerce we support the work of our three local Councils -Timaru, Mackenzie and Waimate and the work completed by Communities 4 Local Democracy. We ask the Select Committee to give proper consideration of their alternative model for reform that protects these rights, while delivering all of the stated outcomes of government.

We wish to speak to this submission and ask Government to work with local government to co-design a more effective model of reform with better outcomes for the whole community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Smith', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Wendy Smith

Chief Executive  
South Canterbury Chamber of Commerce