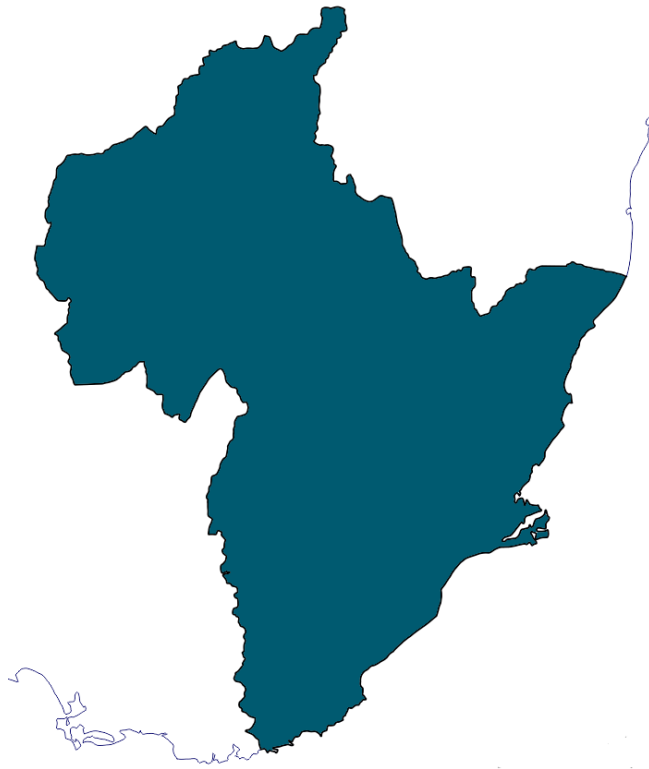




Briefing to Incoming Members

November 2025



Introduction

1. This briefing to incoming members of the Otago Mayoral Forum is an introduction to the Forum and its role, with a focus on the first meetings for the triennium.
2. The value of the Otago Mayoral Forum – whether it delivers for members, councils and Otago’s communities and environments – depends on genuine participation, open communication and a good faith approach to working together across councils.
3. This briefing sets out several options for the Forum in 2025-28. There are few rules for how the Forum operates, and plenty of scope to determine arrangements that work for all involved.

The Forum’s role

4. The Mayoral Forum enables collective leadership, communication, co-ordination and collaboration across Otago’s six councils and five districts. Through the Mayoral Forum, the region’s leaders can support one another, champion shared approaches and stand together for Otago.
5. The Local Government Act 2002 (s15) requires all local authorities within a region to enter into a regional triennial agreement setting out how councils within a region will coordinate and communicate. The Otago Mayoral Forum is a key component of Otago’s cross-council framework, which encompasses various regional groups connecting elected members and council officers on a wide range of issues.
6. Within the Framework, the Mayoral Forum provides leadership and oversight for cross-council activity. Forum meetings are an opportunity to identify and discuss matters of shared interest and to ensure that – collectively – Otago’s Councils are responding appropriately. The Forum’s March 2026 meeting will include a process to identify a set of outcomes and focus areas for the year to come.
7. Communication is key. The Mayoral Forum can only fulfil its role through regular contact across members and ongoing engagement with Councillors. The Otago Chief Executive Forum has a complementary role to the Forum, overseeing and enabling various staff working groups, collaborations and projects.

Mandate and delegations

8. Each Mayor, through election and under the Local Government Act 2002, has a mandate to provide leadership on the things that matter to their communities and areas. The Chair of the Otago Regional Council has a mandate to lead the Council’s work for Otago’s environment and natural resources. The Otago Mayoral Forum connects these mandates to provide collective leadership on issues and opportunities for the Otago region.
9. Such collective leadership can be a powerful influence that benefits Otago and all its districts. The Otago Mayoral Forum can provide this leadership without impinging on the

right for each of Otago's local authorities to decide policy, agree resourcing and govern its own area as appropriate.

10. In its iterations to date, the Otago Mayoral Forum has not been delegated to make decisions on behalf of councils, and decisions of the Forum have not been binding on councils. Nevertheless, as one component of the Otago cross-council framework, the Forum can oversee and endorse various cross-council activities. Members can refer regional initiatives and decisions to Otago's councils for consideration.
11. Previous iterations of the Otago Mayoral Forum have also has been authorised to formalise shared positions through letters of support, submissions and/or public statements as appropriate. Any such public positions have been in the name and capacity of the Forum membership, and not Otago's councils.

Membership and meetings

12. The Mayoral Forum comprises the mayors of the five territorial authorities in Otago and the Chair of the Otago Regional Council. Chief Executives attend meetings to support their Mayor/Chair and align the work programmes of the Otago Chief Executive Forum and other regional groups.
13. In 2026, the Forum is tentatively scheduled to meet in March, May, July, September and November. A calendar of meeting dates will be provided at the December 2025 meeting. The Otago Mayoral Forum calendar is built around members' council meetings, the Local Government New Zealand calendar, and Canterbury Mayoral Forum meetings (so Waitaki participants can attend both). Given the infrequency of meetings and to uphold their commitment, previous Mayoral Forums have been attended by the Mayors and ORC Chair and substitutions have not been accepted.
14. The Mayoral Forum has typically met at the Otago Regional Council offices in Dunedin. The previous Forum considered that meetings in Dunedin would increase the likelihood of guests being able to attend meetings in person. The venue is not fixed, and meetings in other parts of Otago can be arranged on a regular or ad hoc basis.
15. Meetings of the Mayoral Forum are not public meetings as defined by the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, so are not publicised, nor open to the public. Recent practice has been to make decisions through consensus.
16. The Thursday evening before each Mayoral Forum is an opportunity for an informal dinner to strengthen relationships and provide for discussion. Chief executives and the Forum secretariat attend on occasion. Attendees or their organisations pay for their own meals at these events.
17. Events outside the regular schedule take place occasionally, including relationship building, political advocacy, and connecting with other Mayoral Forums.
18. Detailed arrangements for the Forum's meetings and operations will be agreed and recorded in the Forum's terms of reference.

Decisions for the first meeting

19. The Forum will hold its first formal meeting for the triennium on Friday 5 December 2025. At the first meeting, members will be invited to:
- a. elect a Forum Chair,
 - b. consider and approve the Otago Local Authorities Triennial Agreement 2026-29,
 - c. approve meeting dates and arrangements for 2026,
 - d. consider a draft Otago Mayoral Forum terms of reference, and
 - e. consider a proposed approach to determining strategic outcomes and focus areas at the March 2026 meeting.
20. Following the meeting, the secretariat will record changes to the terms of reference for confirmation via email.
21. The triennial agreement must be approved by all Councils in the region by 1 March 2026. Forum members are encouraged to engage with their Councillors on the content of the agreement, in advance of the formal approval process.

Role of the Chair

22. As noted above, Forum members are invited to elect a Chair at the Forum's first formal meeting on 5 December. The role of the Otago Mayoral Forum Chair includes:
- a. presiding over of meetings, ensuring that they run in an orderly fashion,
 - b. acting as spokesperson, both in the media and through correspondence with Ministers and stakeholders,
 - c. championing and facilitating the Mayoral Forum's work programme,
 - d. liaising with the Chair of the CE Forum where appropriate,
 - e. liaising with external invitees such as Ministers, and
 - f. working closely with the Mayoral Forum secretariat.
23. The 2022-25 triennial agreement allows for the chair appointment to be reviewed after 18 months. In practice, the Otago Mayoral Forum Chair has been a three-year role in each of the last two trienniums: Mayor Tim Cadogan from 2019-22 and Mayor Gary Kircher from 2022-25.
24. Details on the role, responsibilities, term and other matters relating to the Otago Mayoral Forum Chair can be agreed and recorded in the Forum's terms of reference.

Te Rōpū Taiao Otago

25. Te Rōpū Taiao Otago is a regional forum to facilitate better mutual understandings between Kāi Tahu ki Otago and Otago's local authorities. Participants are all Otago Mayoral Forum members and attendees, Ūpoko Edward Ellison, rūnaka chairs, and sometimes rūnaka deputy chairs and members.

26. The Rōpū co-Chairs are Ūpoko Edward Ellison and the Otago Mayoral Forum Chair. Hui are arranged to coincide with Mayoral Forum meetings, usually in the afternoon of the same day. In recent years Te Rōpū Taiao Otago has met 2-3 times per year, once jointly with Te Rōpū Taiao Southland and 1-2 times as an Otago-only rōpū.
27. Agenda preparation and meeting logistics for Te Rōpū Taiao Otago are managed by the Mayoral Forum secretariat, working with the co-Chairs. Recent agendas have focused on the various local government reform initiatives underway. Where possible, hui have also included a verbal report from the chief executive of Aukaha on the organisation's key activities with local government, pressures and relationships.
28. Te Rōpū Taiao Otago operates under a Charter, last updated in 2020 and last signed in 2017. There have been recent efforts to update the Charter. The new triennium is an opportunity to progress this.

Communications and reporting

29. The Otago Mayoral Forum maintains a stand-alone website to publish meeting papers, minutes, summaries and media releases. The website can be found at:
www.otagomayors.org.nz
30. Members are invited to consider how they wish to communicate about cross-council and regional activities with their respective councils. In prior years, the Forum secretariat has prepared short overviews of matters discussed during meetings. Each Mayor/Chair then determined how best to share this information with their councillors, whether by including it on a council meeting agenda, circulating it via email, or providing a verbal update.

Secretariat

31. At Forum members' request, Otago's chief executives established a permanent secretariat to support both the Otago Mayoral Forum and Otago Chief Executive Forum in September 2019. Both forums had been meeting quarterly for many years, but members saw potential for them to achieve more for Otago with a dedicated secretariat.
32. The Otago Mayoral Forum secretariat is Marianna Brook, who is Principal Advisor Mayoral Forum and Local Government Reform at Otago Regional Council. Marianna provides policy and strategic advice, supports relationships with central government and other regional leaders, and manages meeting planning and logistics.
33. In addition to the forums, Marianna supports regional collaboration across Otago's local authorities, including through advice and for Te Rōpū Taiao, working groups and joint committees.
34. Though hosted by Otago Regional Council, the secretariat is a shared resource for Otago's six local authorities. Members are welcome – and encouraged – to approach Marianna directly, at Marianna.brook@orc.govt.nz or 0273323164.

Appendix A: Mayoral Forum across New Zealand

Eleven of New Zealand's sixteen regions have a Mayoral Forum as a primary vehicle for communication, collaboration, and regional leadership between councils. The remainder operate as unitary councils and are therefore not required to prepare a triennial agreement.

The following is an overview of Mayoral Forums in New Zealand and how they operated in the 2022-25 triennium:

Region	Meeting frequency	Membership	Chairing
Northland	Quarterly	Mayors & Chair.	Chair elected at inaugural meeting. May be reviewed after 18 months.
Waikato	At least quarterly	Mayors & Chair. Supported by CEs.	Chair & Deputy elected at inaugural meeting.
Bay of Plenty	Not less than six-monthly	Mayors & Chair. Supported by CEs.	Chair & Deputy elected at inaugural meeting.
Hawkes Bay	Monthly	Mayors & Chair. Supported by CEs	Chair elected at inaugural meeting.
Taranaki	At least quarterly	Mayors & Chair. Supported by CEs.	Chair appointed on rotation each triennium.
Manawatū-Whanganui	Quarterly	Mayors & Chair. Supported by CEs.	Chair elected at inaugural meeting. May be reviewed after 18 months.
Wellington	At least one every six months	Mayors & Chair. Supported by CEs	Chair elected at inaugural meeting.
West Coast	Quarterly plus called as needed	Mayors & Chair. Supported by CEs. Chair of EDA. Chairs of Rūnanga.	Chair appointed on rotation each meeting.
Canterbury	Quarterly	Mayors & Chair. Supported by CEs.	Chair & Deputy elected at inaugural meeting. May be reviewed after 18 months.
Southland	Six-weekly	Mayors, Chair and deputies. Supported by CEs.	Chair appointed on rotation each meeting.

Appendix B: Summary of Otago Mayoral Forum activity 2022-25

<p>Key achievements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On <u>waters services reform</u>, the Forum initiated a far-reaching analysis of collaboration options for Otago and Southland. The analysis was conducted by Morrison Low and underpinned recent decision-making by Councils across the two regions. Multiple joint sessions with the Southland Mayoral Forum took place throughout 2023 and 2024 to provide oversight and direction for this work. - On <u>solid waste and recycling</u>, the Forum welcomed an appointment to the role of Otago Regional Waste Officer. The new role is a direct result of cross-council collaboration on waste initiated by the Forum. - On <u>healthcare</u>, the Forum advocated for Otago's needs in a range of settings, including with Ministers and Te Whatu Ora, Te Aka Whai Ora and WellSouth officials. Topics over the triennium included localities, mental health services, and the new Dunedin hospital. - On <u>regional priorities</u>, the Forum shared its 'top five' issues with all Otago-based and Otago-representative MPs following the 2023 election. - On <u>workforce issues</u>, in Otago, the Forum engaged with the Regional Skills Leadership Group. - On <u>resource management reform</u>, the Forum heard from sector groups working with councils to navigate the reforms, with a focus on region-wide implications. 	<p>Guests and speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hon Simeon Brown, Minister for Local Government - Hon Mark Patterson, Minister for Rural Communities and Associate Minister for Agriculture - Hon Penny Simmonds, Minister for the Environment and MP for Invercargill - Hon James Meager, Minister for the South Island - Hon Rachel Brooking, MP for Dunedin. - Hon Kieran McAnulty MP - Joseph Mooney, MP for Southland - Scott Willis MP - Steph Voight and Ginny Howden, Regional Public Service Commissioner for Otago - Kerrie Young, Kainga Ora. - Julie Anderson, Ministry of Education. - Warren Ulusele, Dept. of Internal Affairs. - Blake Lepper, Bridget Dickson, Stuart Barson, Nancy Todd, Endine Dixon-Harris, Sharlaine Chee, Teei Kaiaruna and Whaitiri Poutawa, Te Whatu Ora, WellSouth and Te Aka Whai Ora. - Michael Brewster, Teresa Wooding, Marlon Bridge and Bex Sullivan, Department of Internal Affairs (on water reform). - Laura Black and Andy Kilsby, Regional Skills Leadership Group. - Phil Marsh, FENZ - Mike Collins, Business South. - Al Cross and Clare Wooding, Te Uru Kahika and Taituarā (on RM reform)
<p>Correspondence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To all incoming Otago-based and Otago-representative MPs, a letter of congratulations and invitation to meet the Forum. - To the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, a letter in support of QLDC's application for funding from the Commemorating Waitangi Day Fund. - To the Chief Executive of the Department of Internal Affairs, a letter relaying concerns about the disestablishment of the Local Government Branch within the department. - To the Prime Minister, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Infrastructure and Minister of Finance, a letter seeking engagement on the Waste Minimisation Act and waste levy matters. 	