



Te Rōpū Kaitohutohu Take ā-Taiwhenua

Rural Advisory Panel

End of Term Report 2022-2025.

11 September, 2025



Key messages

The Rural Advisory Panel (panel) has been productive through its eleven meetings held throughout the 2022-25 electoral term. The panel received a wide range of updates on council group activities, including opportunities to discuss important considerations for the rural sector.

The panel were able to offer their insights to council staff and other panel members such that several initiatives were better informed. Panel members and council staff are supportive of a desire to workshop and further discuss out of cycle meeting opportunities to address topical issues as they arise. This outcome is consistent with the direction provided in reviewing how all panels should operate as articulated in a governing body report of 15 December 2022.

Some engagement between sector representatives and staff from council departments already occurs outside of the panel environment, but not specifically with the panel as often as desired. The desire to enable more collaborative panel discussions or workshops is pertinent given the nature and extent of central government reforms affecting the rural sector and council activities more generally.

Purpose

This report summarises the panel's activities over the 2022-25 electoral term and provide some reflections for future strategic focus and ways of working, should the Panel be re-constituted for the 2025-28 electoral term.

Members of the panel

The membership of the Panel during the 2022-25 electoral term included a mix of sector representatives (~14) and some elected members (5) representing the Rodney and Franklin wards and three local boards (Rodney, Waitakere Ranges, Franklin), as follows:

Chairs:

- Chair, Councillor Andy Baker Auckland Council
- Deputy Chair, Alan Cole Franklin Local Board, Auckland Council

Panel Members:

- Andrew McKenzie Beef and Lamb New Zealand
- Annaliese Morgan Young Farmers
- Brian Mason Landowners and Contractors Association (Wellsford)
- Councillor Greg Sayers Auckland Council
- Cushla Smith Fonterra Shareholders Council (from November 2023)
- Geoff Smith Equine Industry
- Glenn Wilcox Māori representative
- Greg McCracken Fonterra Shareholders Council (until September 2023)
- Jesse Brennan Federated Farmers of NZ
- Keith Vallabh Pukekohe Vegetable Growers Association
- Leanne Roberts Horticulture NZ
- Linda Potauaine Waitakere Ranges Local Board, Auckland Council
- Mike Bramley Dairy New Zealand
- Philip Elworthy NZ Forest Owners Association
- Steve Levet Rural Contractors New Zealand
- Tim Holdgate Rodney Local Board
- Trish Fordyce National Forest Growers Levy Trust
- Wayne Scott Aggregate and Quarry Association

Support Staff:

The Panel was served by the following staff, with a smooth transition between support staff in the latter part of the electoral term:

- Lead Officers – Warren McLennan (until February 2025) and Dave Allen (from July 2025)
- Deputy Lead Officer (new role) – Andrew Bird (from July 2025)
- Governance Advisors – Phoebe Chiquet-Kaan and Lexy Turner
- Principal Advisor Panels – Victoria Wicks-Brown

Chief Liaison Councillor – Councillor Julie Fairey.

Background and context

The panel provides a mechanism for engagement with the rural sector across the Auckland region. Approximately 80% of the region has rural qualities, and about 6% of the region's population live and work in the rural area. The Panel can provide advice to the council within the remit of the following topics:

- council policies, plans and strategies relevant to rural issues
- regional and strategic matters relevant to rural interests
- any matter of particular interest or concern to rural communities.

The intent is that the Panel's advice will contribute to improving the outcomes of the rural sector as set out in the Auckland Plan and subsidiary plans, strategies and policies. The panel will provide advice through its agreed work programme, as set out at the start of the electoral term. In April 2023, the Panel met for the first time in the electoral term to consider and agree to the work programme, based on member responses during March 2023 to the Lead Officer's request to help form the work programme. Key elements of the work programme included:

- Central government's Essential Freshwater reform – updates on reform and implementation including compliance monitoring approach for new provisions
- National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management – council implementation updates from planning perspective
- Rural flooding and drainage, and waterway clearing or planning
- Highly Productive Land and food security, in light of climate change
- Quarries – planning, overlays and offsets, and transport routes
- Rural Road Maintenance and improvement programme
- Engagement between rural interest groups and senior council staff.

Discussion

Work programme priorities and achievements

A summary table of the presentations and topics provided to the panel is set out in [Appendix 1](#). This table was socialised with the panel members on 1 August 2025. The work programme and associated presentations were quite extensive and covered a wide range of council activities with a bearing on the rural sector. The panel appreciated the information provided as a basis for discussing their activities over the electoral term.

Based on observations made by panel members during the term, or at their 1 August 2025 meeting, the following items were of particular interest:

- Unsealed Road Improvement Programme (Auckland Transport), and enhancements to methodology for assessing environmental benefits to adjacent receiving environments (an initiative through Auckland Council's Strategic Approach to Sediment).
- 'Essential Freshwater' updates – overviewing central government reform programme for changes to key regulatory instruments (National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM), National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-F), Stock Exclusion regulations, Farm planning regulations, Water take measurement regulations).
- Auckland Council's compliance monitoring activities in response to new Essential Freshwater regulatory instruments (e.g. NES-F, Stock Exclusion).
- Input into the Southern Rural Strategy following the council's adoption of the refreshed Future Development Strategy (being a component of the Auckland Plan 2050).
- NPS-FM implementation programme – preparatory work undertaken by Auckland Council for a plan change, including overviewing issues and potential options to address identified freshwater issues.
- Council group operational work programmes to:
 - improve resilience and community access to services and property following adverse weather events (e.g. Cyclone Gabrielle, February 2023)
 - highlight drainage issues alongside roading networks or areas of inundation and erosion following flood events

- facilitate improved land management outcomes through planting and erosion control initiatives.

Experience or areas for consideration to improve

At the 1 August 2025 panel meeting, members were asked to contribute any observations on how the panel had fulfilled its role, and what recommendations they would make for the future, should the panel be reconstituted in the next electoral term. Written observations were provided from some members, in addition to verbal observations made at the panel meeting by other members.

Panel members made the following observations about the value of the panel:

- Appreciate the work undertaken by the staff and councillors to update, upskill and educate our key stakeholders on council workstreams, challenges and opportunities.
- Provides a knowledgeable and useful forum for discussion and information sharing, where the current diversity of panel members and representatives from different rural activities is one of the panel's significant strengths.
- Support the continuation of the panel for the next electoral term, particularly given the significant policy changes anticipated over the coming years (e.g. freshwater, resource management reform, and review of the Auckland Unitary Plan).
- Articulating matters of importance to the rural sector helps with balancing perspectives associated with the urban environment, given the large geographic extent of the rural area across the Auckland region.
- That the current diversity of panel members and represented rural industries is one of the panel's significant strengths and ensuring that membership retains a mix of industry representatives (i.e., policy staff) and on the ground experts (farmers, growers) is supported.

Areas where the panel could be improved were identified as follows:

- Continued information sharing, but more space created for more workshop style discussion on matters of relevance, as that enhances greater discussion, transparency and collaboration.
- Using the panel for discussion within scheduled meetings, but also for out of meeting cycle matters.

- Look at the opportunity where members could bring along other representatives to support discussions (e.g. farmers, growers, science or legal experts etc.).
- The overarching theme in the above observations is the desire to ensure that the expertise and experience of panel members is drawn on as much as possible to help inform council considerations when developing positions, while acknowledging that the panel acts in an advisory capacity.

Community involvement or engagement

Panel members have links to their representative bodies and informal networks through their respective sectors. Several panel members encourage their wider networks to participate in ambassador programmes and environmental award initiatives, and regional award recipients are provided the opportunity to share their success with the panel.

Other areas to highlight

The Lead Officer (Warren McLennan) retired from council in March 2025. A new Lead Officer (Dave Allen) for the panel was selected from early June 2025, alongside the creation of a Deputy Lead Officer role (Andrew Bird), consistent with most other panels. The new Lead and Deputy Lead Officers were introduced to the panel in their new capacity at the last panel meeting of the term, on 1 August 2025.

Reflections or recommendations

Drawing on the feedback provided by panel members and support council representatives, there is a mutual desire to move the panel's work programme to a more strategic approach to identifying and progressing issues of common interest, and to better facilitate collaborative opportunities and interaction between panel members and council representatives. This will build on the good foundation of the regular meeting frequency that is currently in place while looking at the opportunity to engage informally as required, including at venues other than the council premises.

From a membership perspective, opportunities have been identified to enhance the membership base. There is only one Māori representative, when the current Terms of Reference requires two, consistent with a desire to increase Māori participation in panels generally for the 2022-25 electoral term. Additionally, the inclusion of representative bodies for aquaculture, marine industries, or other marine activities with reliance on well managed catchments more generally might be interested in participation on the panel.

Appendix 1: Rural Advisory Panel activities during the 2022-2025 electoral term.

Topic category and number of council staff reports received over the eleven Rural Advisory Panel meetings (2022-2025 electoral term).

Category	Legislative reform / policy initiatives	Council business processes	Storm Recovery	Operational and Implementation programmes	Awards, panel field trips
Rural Advisory Panel Chair's update		11			
Panel's Terms of Reference – overview / members priorities for 2022-2025 term, meeting date confirmation in 2024, 2025		3			
Freshwater Instrument reform (NPSFM, NES-F, Stock exclusion, farm planning, water measurement), and related legislative reform and guidance (every meeting)	11				
Future Development Strategy – Rural chapter (April, June 2023)	2				
Southern Rural Strategy (Feb 2024, Nov 2024, May 2025)	3				
Biosecurity Act Amendment Bill submission (Nov 2024)	1				

Rural Advisory Panel 2022-2025 End of Term Report.

Category	Legislative reform / policy initiatives	Council business processes	Storm Recovery	Operational and Implementation programmes	Awards, panel field trips
Biodiversity Credit System submission (Sept 2023)	1				
Refreshing the Regional Pest Management Plan preparation (Aug 2024, May 2025)	2				
Joint review of Auckland Transport and Auckland Council related bylaws (Aug 2024)	1				
National Policy Statement on Highly Productive Land update (June 2023)	1				
Dangerous Dams Policy (Feb 2024)	1				
Resilient Auckland – coastal and flood hazard planning (April 2023)	1				
Enhancing environmental criteria to prioritise Regional Unsealed Road Improvements (Policy department) (May 2024)	1				
Regulatory Compliance monitoring activities for dairy farms and charging / invoicing system (Nov 2023, Feb 2024)		2			

Advisory Panels 2022-2025 End of Term Reports.

Category	Legislative reform / policy initiatives	Council business processes	Storm Recovery	Operational and Implementation programmes	Awards, panel field trips
Dairy nitrogen cap reporting update (2024)				1	
Civil Defence Emergency Management Group Plan (Sept 2023)		1			
Auckland Council representation arrangements for the 2025 local body elections (Feb 2024); Initial Proposal (Aug 2024)		2			
Annual Budget review 2023-2024 (April 2023), Long-term Plan process overview (Feb 2024), Long-term Plan 2024-2034 input to Budget Committee (May 2024)		3			
Election year policies 2025 – information memoranda (May 2025)		1			
Natural Environment and Water Quality Targeted Rate annual report to council (2023-24)		1			
National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management Implementation Programme (Nov 2024, Feb 2025, Aug 2025)				3	

Rural Advisory Panel 2022-2025 End of Term Report.

Category	Legislative reform / policy initiatives	Council business processes	Storm Recovery	Operational and Implementation programmes	Awards, panel field trips
Onsite Wastewater System plan change (May 2025)				1	
Rural Road Drainage asset management (Nov 2023)				1	
Auckland Transport Rural Road Maintenance Programme (2023-2024) (Sept 2023); Unsealed Road Improvement Programme 2024/25-2026/27				2	
Flood Response Work (Recovery Office (June 2023), Healthy Waters & Flood Resilience department (April 2023, Sept 2023, Feb 2024)			4		
Rural operational activities update (Healthy Waters and Flood Resilience department) (June 2023, May, Aug, Nov 2024, Feb, May, Aug 2025)				7	
Balance Farm Environment Award (Sept 2023, May 2025)					2
Royal Agricultural Society – Royal Ambassador (Sept 2023)					1
TOTAL BY TOPIC CATEGORY	25	24	4	15	3