

NRC 'likely base' for sole North body

If local government in Northland is re-organised to create a single authority it is likely to be based on the Northland Regional Council, says consultant Peter McKinlay.

"It's hard to see how it wouldn't be based on the NRC — it's the only body which already covers the whole of Northland," he said. "The Local Government Commission would almost certainly decide a single authority be based on the regional council."

Mr McKinlay's consultancy company, McKinlay Douglas Ltd, wrote a report on local body options for Northland that is being discussed at public meetings organised by the Whangarei and Far North District Councils.

Mr McKinlay said the process had started at a workshop with the three Northland district councils, interviews and a draft report prepared to get council feedback. The draft report, produced last November, had recommended a unitary authority for the region. "We took the view this recommendation would get this best kind of discussion going to get the best outcome," he said.

The councils had come back saying the single authority should not be recommended in the final report — that it should be up to the community to decide.

Mr McKinlay said he had been comfortable with that and the final report had put two options:

■ A single unitary authority combining the functions of the three district councils and the regional council.

■ Two unitary authorities, one based on the Far North district and the other based on an amalgamation of the Kaipara and Whangarei districts, each taking over NRC functions.

The process had been complicated by Whangarei Mayor Stan Semenoff and Far North Mayor Wayne Brown saying from the beginning there should be two unitary authorities.

"I told them we don't do that kind of report," Mr McKinlay said.

It would have been better if the NRC had participated in the preparation of the report, he said.

"We got their view off their website and from other sources. We put comparatively little weight on the arguments between the district councils and the NRC."

Mr McKinlay said local government structures were the main thing examined by the consultants, "not whether the regional council slipped up on any particular case".

Once the Whangarei and Far North public consultation had been completed, the local government re-organisation issue would be examined by a retired judge.

"They [retired judges] usually have crap detectors so there should be no suggestion of political persuasion which would destroy the credibility of the process for the judge or the commission," Mr McKinlay said.

There was no certainty anything would happen, he said. "The judge may decide the best option is to leave things as they are."