



Friday 18 September 2026

9:00am-12:15pm, RSA Room, Te Puna Mahara

36 Melmore Terrace, Cromwell

Chair: Mayor Melanie Tavendale

Time	Item	Paper
9:00am [5']	1 Welcome Apologies – received from Michelle Morss Minutes of the previous meeting on 3 July 2026 Agenda confirmation	p. 3
9:05am [25']	2 Reform roundtable An opportunity for members to share updates on activity relevant to Local Government reform since the last meeting.	
9.30am [30']	3 Otago Regional Economic Narrative On behalf of the Otago Regional Economic Development (ORED) working group, Shelley Winsor (WDC) and Angela Davis will provide an update on the Otago Regional Economic Narrative project. The final narrative and priorities document is due for delivery in November 2026, ahead of the central government election.	p. 7
10:00am [15']	4 Otago Climate Story The Otago Climate Officer's Group (OCOG) is working to build climate resilience in Otago. The purpose of the new Otago Climate Story is to raise public awareness of the risks that climate change presents to Otago and to showcase some of the resilience projects happening across the region. ORC Principal Advisor and OCOG convenor Rebecca McLeod will join the Forum to introduce it.	p. 16
10.15am	- Morning tea break	

10.30am [30']	5	Transport advocacy Cr Kate Wilson will speak to this report commissioned by the South Island Regional Transport Committee Chairs Group to provide evidence of the South Island's contribution to the New Zealand economy and the importance of transport connectivity in enabling this contribution. Cr Wilson will outline what prompted the report and discuss opportunities to promote its findings.	
11.00am [30']	6	Forum advocacy to incoming Government The Forum is invited to agree its overall advocacy approach to the incoming Government, drawing together the threads discussed earlier in the meeting. This is likely to take the form of tailored letters to relevant Ministers and Members of Parliament.	p. 17
11.30am [15']	7	General business Regional focus area updates (not already covered) • Regional spatial planning • Waste and recycling	p. 19
11.45am [30']	8	Mayors/Chair only time	-
12:15pm	-	Close <i>Lunch provided</i>	

Minutes of a meeting of the Otago Mayoral Forum

held on Friday 3 July 2026 at 9.00am, at Network Waitaki Events Centre

2 Centennial Park Road, Ōamaru, and via Zoom

Present

Mayor Melanie Tavendale	Waitaki District Council (Chair)
Mayor John Glover	Queenstown Lakes District Council
Mayor Sophie Barker	Dunedin City Council
Mayor Tamah Alley	Central Otago District Council
Mayor Jock Martin	Clutha District Council
Chair Hilary Calvert	Otago Regional Council
Justin Tipa	Te Rūnanga ō Ngāi Tahu Kaiwhakahaere
Edward Ellison	Ōtākou Upoko
Matapura Ellison	Puketeraki Upoko
David Higgins	Moeraki Upoko
Rewi Davis	Ōraka-Aparima Upoko (online)
Katharina Ruckstuhl	Puketeraki
Emma Wyeth	Puketeraki Deputy Chair (joined at 10.15am, online)
Alex Parmley	Chief Executive, Waitaki District Council
Michelle Morss	Chief Executive, Queenstown Lakes District Council
Sandy Graham	Chief Executive, Dunedin City Council
Richard Saunders	Chief Executive, Otago Regional Council
Steve Hill	Chief Executive, Clutha District Council
Peter Kelly	Chief Executive, Central Otago District Council (online)
Trevor McGlinchey	Moeraki CEO and Aukaha Chair
Suzanne Ellison	Puketeraki CEO
Nadia Wesley-Smith	Ōtākou CEO
Cory Neale	Aukaha CEO
Dean Whaanga	Te Ao Marama CEO
Alice Grace	Morrison Low Advisory
Stu Cross	Morrison Low Advisory
Linda Falwasser	Kōhae Limited
Campbell Barry	Agite Consulting
Sarah Polaschek	MCERT
Marianna Brook	Mayoral Forum Secretariat
Amanda Vercoe	Otago Regional Council
Sarah Martin	Otago Regional Council
Caron Solomon	Dunedin City Council
Sam Broughton	Consultant to Ngāi Tahu

Hemi Smiler, General Manager, MCERT, joined online at 9.20am and left at 9.41am.

Alice Grace, Morrison Low, joined online at 9.36am and left at 11.47am.

1. Welcome

Chair Tavendale welcomed the Forum to the new Events Centre. The Forum was joined by members of Te Rōpū Taiao Otago for the full meeting.

The meeting opened at 9.12am with a karakia from Justin Tipa.

No apologies were received from Mayoral Forum members. Apologies were received from the following Te Rōpū Taiao Otago members: Robyn Hellier, Brett Ellison and Tracey Wright-Tawha.

Resolution

That the minutes of the meetings of 22 May and 19 June 2026 be confirmed as true and accurate.

Moved: Mayor Glover

Seconded: Mayor Alley

CARRIED

2. Whakaaro ā Mana Whenua

Ngai Tahu Kaiwhakahaere Justin Tipa spoke to a presentation on Kāi Tahu perspectives on local government reform. The presentation introduced four key principles: the takiwā boundary, a catchment approach, leveraging scale, and voice. Justin noted mana whenua's willingness to work with local government for the betterment of communities. Questions were taken from Mayors and Chief Executives.

Upoko Edward Ellison spoke about the importance and benefits of uniting communities, drawing on Kāi Tahu's experience since coming together for their Treaty settlement in 1998.

3. MCERT Update

Hemi Smiler, General Manager Reform and Deals, MCERT, joined the meeting online. He observed that regions are beginning to reach decisions on Head Start, while uncertainty remains about Backstop. The detail of each proposal sits in the design phase, after a proposal has been accepted into the Head Start. MCERT has received frequent questions on how to preserve local voice and the powers available at sub-unitary levels; the Auckland local board model is worth considering in this connection.

Questions were taken from the floor.

4. Otago Options Analysis – Presentation and Discussion

Alice Grace and Stuart Cross, Morrison Low, presented their analysis of local government reorganisation options for Otago, built around three core options: one region-wide Otago unitary authority; two unitary councils split inland and coastal (Queenstown Lakes and Central Otago; Dunedin, Clutha and Waitaki); and three unitary councils split urban and rural (Queenstown Lakes; Dunedin; and Central Otago, Clutha and Waitaki combined), with sub-options noted including a Waitaki/Canterbury boundary adjustment and extending the rural option to include Gore and wider Southland.

The presentation covered:

- Planning system alignment — assessing each option against catchment management, environmental limits, and settlement/infrastructure planning.
- Communities of interest — population, demographic and economic profiles across the five districts.
- Representation and governance structures — current representation across the six councils; high level representation models for each of the three options.
- Financial benchmarking — current debt, non-rates revenue and operating costs across councils, and modelled economies of scale by option.
- Assessment against the Government's Head Start criteria

Questions were taken throughout.

The Forum adjourned for morning tea from 10.42am to 11.03am.

Linda Falwasser and Campbell Barry facilitated a discussion testing the three reorganisation options against the Forum's combined evidence base to date: community engagement findings, the draft Otago Working Principles, the Morrison Low analysis, the Government's Head Start criteria, and perspectives shared by mana whenua.

Rather than seeking to determine a preferred option, the discussion evolved toward identifying areas of alignment and the principles that should underpin future governance arrangements, with participants increasingly focused on what future governance and service delivery for Otago should achieve, rather than which structural option was preferred.

Small-group breakout discussions were held on consensus, alignment and gaps across the three options and hybrid models, with groups reporting back on one key alignment or challenge and one key consideration each. Emerging areas of alignment included:

- Catchment integrity as a foundational principle for future governance design.
- A focus on improving long-term outcomes for communities, the environment and the economy, rather than pursuing structural change for organisational efficiency alone.
- The need for future arrangements to support economic growth and investment alongside environmental outcomes.
- The importance of retaining meaningful local voice and community connection within any regional model.
- Treaty partnership commitments and settlement outcomes being designed into governance arrangements from the outset, rather than added afterward.

The Forum adjourned for lunch at 12.40pm and reconvened at 1.09pm.

5. Head Start Timeline and Next Steps

The Forum noted the Government's key Head Start milestones: Head Start proposals due 9 August 2026; Cabinet consideration of proposals in late September 2026; and the local authority elections on 7 November 2026.

While recognising the importance of progressing within the Government's timeframe, the Forum acknowledged that individual councils need the opportunity to work through the collective analysis and determine their own positions during July. Waitaki District Council's discussion scheduled for 7 July was noted as an early and important milestone, with further council workshops and meetings planned through the month.

The Forum discussed the potential value of establishing an ongoing work programme to progress detailed design work, covering governance, operating arrangements, financial and bespoke legislative requirements, and implementation considerations, in continued partnership with Ngāi Tahu.

Subject to the outcome of council discussions in July, the Forum discussed preparing correspondence to the Minister ahead of Cabinet's consideration of Head Start proposals, outlining the work completed to date, emerging areas of alignment, and the proposed work programme.

6. Close of Meeting

There was no further business, and the Chair declared the Forum closed at 2.29pm.

Signed:



Date:

18 September 2026

Date: 18 September 2026

Drafted by: Shelley Winsor, Partnerships Manager – Economic and Community Development, Waitaki District Council

ORED Update: Otago Economic Opportunities Narrative

Purpose

1. To update the Mayoral Forum on progress towards a coordinated Otago economic narrative and advocacy platform, and to seek feedback and direction on the emerging regional ambition, opportunities and priorities outlined in the accompanying paper.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Otago Mayoral Forum:
 - a. **notes** progress since the May 2026 Mayoral Forum, including the extensive regional engagement undertaken and the emerging findings from that work;
 - b. **provides** direction on the proposed approach to mana whenua engagement as partners, including the proposed mana-to-mana engagement through Te Rōpū Taiao;
 - c. **considers and provides feedback** on the proposed overarching ambition for Otago and the emerging economic opportunities and projects identified through the consultation process; and
 - d. **agrees** that ORED continue to refine these opportunities and develop the full Otago economic narrative and advocacy proposition for consideration by the Mayoral Forum in November.

Context and purpose

3. This work began in late 2025 in response to a shared need for Otago to articulate a clearer and more coordinated regional economic proposition.
4. While Otago comprises distinct local economies, there is an opportunity to identify where collective regional action can add value – particularly where a shared voice can help unlock government investment, regulatory change and partnerships.
5. The purpose is not to create another broad economic development strategy or a long list of individual district projects. It is to develop a focused, evidence-led regional narrative and advocacy platform that identifies where Otago can collectively shift the dial and clearly articulates opportunities for government to partner with the region.
6. This work remains relevant regardless of the future shape of local government and provides a platform for continued regional collaboration and a coordinated voice with central government.

Journey to date

7. In November 2025, the CE Forum initiated work to identify shared regional economic development themes. In January 2026, ORED identified three themes – **Thriving Businesses, Thriving People and a Resilient Economy** – providing a common lens across Otago’s diverse economies.
8. In parallel, the Mayoral Forum agreed in December 2025 to a process for identifying regional focus areas for the triennium – matters that require, or would benefit from, a cross-council approach across Otago. This culminated in the March 2026 Mayoral Forum workshop, where five regional focus areas were confirmed. **Otago’s Economy** was identified as a second-equal priority alongside Regional Spatial Planning, behind Local Government Reform, with ORED identified as the key regional working group supporting this focus area.
9. At the May 2026 Mayoral Forum, ORED presented the proposed approach for moving from the agreed economic themes to a focused set of regional priorities and a clear Otago narrative. The Forum endorsed the proposed approach, framework and process, including the criteria for selecting regional priorities, and supported moving into a regional consultation phase.
10. Since May, ORED, supported by Angela Davis of Collective Strategy, has undertaken a substantial programme of engagement across the region. More than 60 organisations and individuals have been engaged, including more than 40 one-to-one conversations, spanning business and industry, technology and start-ups, primary industries, energy, tourism and aviation, tertiary education and central government agencies.
11. An interim progress update was provided to the CE Forum in August, including early consultation findings and consideration of the appropriate approach to engagement with mana whenua. The CE Forum supported continued regional engagement and provided direction to progress mana whenua engagement as a distinct partnership process rather than as part of broader stakeholder consultation.

This update

12. The accompanying paper represents the next stage of the work. It brings together the consultation undertaken to date, emerging mana whenua engagement, and the first iteration of the economic opportunities and projects that could form the basis of Otago’s collective narrative.
13. Importantly, the four criteria endorsed by the Mayoral Forum in May – strategic contribution, enabling potential, a clear role for councils and/or government, and implementation readiness – have been applied in developing the emerging opportunities.
14. This is not yet the final narrative. The purpose of bringing the work back to the Forum at this stage is to test the direction with Mayors, ensure the emerging opportunities reflect the level of regional ambition intended when this work was commissioned, and provide direction before the narrative and specific government asks are further developed.
15. Subject to feedback from this Forum, ORED will continue to refine the priorities, narrative and specific government asks, with the next iteration to be presented to the November Mayoral Forum for endorsement as the basis for coordinated regional engagement with the incoming Government.

Update: Otago Economic Opportunities Narrative

TO: Otago Mayoral Forum

FROM: ORED (prepared by Angela Davis, Collective Strategy Ltd)

DATE: 11 September 2026

Introduction

This update outlines progress since the discussion document presented to the Mayoral Forum in May. It outlines emerging mana whenua engagement, reports on the regional consultation, and begins to test the priority opportunities and projects with you.

This work aims to develop a collective economic narrative that regional leaders can use to drive economic growth across Otago and unlock additional funding, regulatory settings, and partnerships.

Economic development is an enduring priority for the region, and this work responds to requests from Ministers for aligned economic planning, priorities and an actionable proposition.

The three regional economic growth themes first presented to the CE Forum in January remain the framework for this work:

1. **Thriving Businesses** - *Lifting margins and exports*
2. **Thriving People** - *Where people build their future*
3. **Resilient Economy** - *Future-proofing our region*

Decisions requested

We invite the Otago Mayoral Forum to consider, provide feedback, and/or agree on the following:

1. The proposed approach to mana whenua engagement as partners, including a letter from Mayor Tavendale to Edward Ellison, Co-chair of Te Rōpū Taiao (or an alternative approach the Forum prefers).
2. The overarching ambition for the Otago region is to lift economic output (GDP) from \$75,121 per person to \$130,000 by 2035. This is the same goal adopted by the combined South Island Chambers of Commerce.
3. The draft opportunities and projects identified to date through consultation and confirm if ORED should continue to refine and validate these in preparation for

the Otago economic opportunities narrative planned for the November Mayoral Forum.

Mana whenua engagement

Engagement with mana whenua is a critical part of this work and is being approached differently from broader stakeholder engagement. Mana whenua are Treaty partners, investors, and significant contributors to Otago's economy. Each rūnaka has its own strategic priorities and commercial programmes. Recent discussions and a scan of iwi strategies and recent reports highlight shared priorities across local iwi, including:

- Warm, secure and affordable housing
- Marine and waterways protection
- Land-use planning
- Ecological restoration and regeneration
- Mahinga kai (food resilience)
- Energy resilience and electrification
- Economic resilience through business development, technology, and training and career pathways

Mana whenua consistently takes an intergenerational view of growth, prioritising long-term sustainability and collective wellbeing. This approach and the priorities listed above align with the regional opportunities identified by ORED and through consultation.

We have had constructive early conversations with Cory Neale (Aukaha) and Jeff Broughton (Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki).

Following direction from the CE Forum, we sought advice from iwi partnership managers across councils. Arne Burgess (QLDC), Caron Solomon (DCC), and Sarah Martin (ORC) advised that engagement should begin directly with rūnaka offices and have supported those initial connections. They also advised that Te Rōpū Taiao remains an appropriate mana-to-mana, regionally representative forum for coordinated engagement on shared or region-wide initiatives.

To progress this, we propose that Mayor Tavendale send a letter to Edward Ellison, Chair of Te Rōpū Taiao, signalling our intent and seeking guidance on the most appropriate pathway. We ask Mayors to agree to sending this letter, which we will draft for review.

Consultation progress

ORED has engaged with more than 60 organisations and individuals across Otago and completed just over 40 one-to-one conversations, with further meetings scheduled in September. Engagement spans business, industry bodies, technology and start-ups,

primary sector, energy, tourism and aviation, tertiary education, and central government agencies. A full list of organisations engaged is provided in Appendix One, and a summary of the feedback received is provided below.

1. Thriving Businesses – Lifting margins and exports

- Ambition is strong across the region, with business owners seeking stability and long-term, generational thinking and policy settings from central and local government. This enables business owners to make bold and confident investments in growth.
- The region has strong underlying assets, including the University of Otago, which has a growing focus on research with commercial impact.
- Technology and innovation are being adopted as drivers of productive growth across many sectors and are a focus for new business development and value-add. This includes the region's primary producers, manufacturers, travel and tourism companies and is a focus for new business start-ups.
- Otago is viewed as an effective testing ground for new businesses due to ease of connection and access to networks and resources.
- There may be an opportunity to increase access to business support tools, including R&D tax incentives, to lift productivity and performance.

2. Thriving People – Where people build their future

- People are passionate about the region, with many, both generational and recent arrivals, expressing a deep connection and love for this place.
- Remote workers are choosing Otago for lifestyle and affordability, bringing skills, higher incomes, and diversification, but partner employment is sometimes a barrier.
- Housing quality and availability in Clutha, Queenstown and Central Otago is a real constraint on attracting and retaining people.
- Transport infrastructure constraints in Queenstown remain a barrier to business growth.
- People commented that the arts contribute meaningfully to regional vibrancy and liveability, although this is outside the scope of this work.

3. Resilient Economy – Future-proofing our region

- Energy resilience and independence are front of mind across all sectors, with growing interest and adoption of solar and electrification.

- Water security is a critical issue for rural communities and long-term regional planning.
- Protecting what makes Otago's environment, identity, and lifestyle distinct is seen as essential to future economic resilience.
- Weightless exports require reliable digital infrastructure (fibre, satellite), with data-centre opportunities noted in neighbouring Southland.
- Rural feedback emphasises stable policy settings and infrastructure investment as critical for resilience.

Emerging Otago economic development opportunities

We propose an overarching economic development ambition for the Otago region to focus collective action:

Lift Otago's economic output from \$75,121 per person to \$130,000 by 2035.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is an economic indicator that measures the value added from producing goods and services. Using GDP per capita as a target directs policy toward higher-value activity, ensuring growth translates into stronger business performance, ongoing investment, higher local wages, and ultimately, improved community wellbeing.

This also aligns with the combined South Island Business Chambers' current ambition for the South Island outlined in their Growing New Zealand from the South policy platform report. Aligning our ambitions enables greater focus and a collective approach to growth.

The four criteria endorsed by the Mayoral Forum in May have been applied to the options outlined below.

1. **Strategic contribution:** Does the project significantly advance one or more of the three economic growth themes?
2. **Enabling potential:** Does it unlock progress across multiple other initiatives across the region or for a local economy?
3. **Clear role for councils and/or government:** Is collective action required for the project to succeed?
4. **Implementation readiness:** Is the project ready to move with a clear lead and partners?

The table below summarises emerging opportunities for consideration. Your feedback will help shape the next stage of work, which will include a more detailed narrative, specific government asks, and a snapshot of the Otago economy.

Theme 1: Thriving Businesses
Opportunities and Examples Otago has a strong and diverse economic base, with GDP growth of 1.9% in the year to March 2026 compared with 0.8% nationally¹. With many sectors performing consistently well, technology represents the key lever to unlock future gains and realise the region's full potential. Increase uptake of technology and innovation Across the region, businesses are increasing productivity and margins through innovative technology solutions. A regional technology sandpit could accelerate this by providing a safe, supported environment to test and scale new digital tools. <u>Examples:</u> Expanding the Digital Catalyst Pilot and supporting Otago University's commercialisation research, which together offer a sandpit-like environment for trialling emerging technologies. Grow the tech sector Travel, health, education, high-tech manufacturing, and gaming are areas of existing strength for the region. <u>Examples:</u> The Centre of Digital Excellence (CODE), Digital Interactive Health, Technology Queenstown, Otago University delivery of a technology-focused campus in Queenstown, and expanding Startup Ecosystems.
Theme 2: Thriving People
Opportunities and Example Otago's vibrancy, lifestyle, and strong sense of place are major drawcards for talent, visitors, and returning whānau and University alumni. Supporting people to live well, stay connected, and participate in a thriving regional economy will be central to Otago's long-term success. Enhance liveability and community wellbeing Improving the places where people live, work, and connect supports talent attraction and retention. <u>Examples:</u> Major events and tourism infrastructure such as the Southern Way and Great Rides cycle trails, targeted housing quality and supply initiatives, and digital infrastructure for remote workers, rural businesses and households. Strengthen essential services and regional access Reliable access to health, transport, and export infrastructure underpins wellbeing and economic participation. <u>Examples:</u> Dunedin Hospital and the Central Lakes Clinical Services Plan, transport improvements in Central Lakes, Port Otago expansion and inland port development. Support environmental and cultural resilience Food resilience and mahinga kai are central to community wellbeing. <u>Examples:</u> Mahinga kai restoration, local food networks, water-security initiatives such as Falls Dam.

¹ Infometrics Regional Economic Profile: Otago Region 2026

Theme 3: Resilient Economy

Opportunities and Example Investments

Energy is a significant regional advantage for Otago and a major future opportunity. Reliable, affordable, and secure energy underpins growth in manufacturing, technology, transport, tourism, and primary production, and will be essential to achieving our 2035 ambition. Likewise, reliable water is essential to the long-term success of many of Otago's productive industries.

Improve energy independence and resilience

Strengthening energy independence will support business growth and protect the region from external supply disruptions.

Examples: Electrify Otago Central Lakes and the Queenstown Electrification Accelerator, Ratepayer Assistance Scheme (RAS) for solar, on-farm renewable energy tax settings.

Long-term water security

Ensuring long-term availability of reliable clean water is essential to many of Otago's strongest industries.

Examples: Protecting waterways for future generations, long-term water storage solutions for agriculture (including on-farm and regional infrastructure), and planning for sustainable water use across sectors.

Proposed timeline

We propose the following updated process:

Timeline	Action	Responsible
Augst - September	Consultation Meet with key stakeholders.	ORED
September	Update provided to Mayors	Mayors / ORED
October	Update provided to CE Forum	ORED
November	Draft narrative provided to Mayoral Forum	ORED
Late 2026	Share with relevant Ministers post-election	Mayors

Appendix One: Consultation summary

Support for this work has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are grateful to everyone across the region who has shared their insights and experiences.

Organisation	Status
Business South	Met
MBIE (R&D tax incentive support)	Meeting scheduled
Queenstown Chamber of Commerce	Met
Wānaka Chamber of Commerce	Contacted
Otago Polytechnic	Contacted

University of Otago Dunedin Campus: Business School, External Engagement, Alumni, Research and Innovation	Met
University of Otago (Queenstown campus lead)	Met
Southern Institute of Technology (Telford)	Met
Startup Dunedin	Met
Startup Queenstown Lakes	Met
Technology Queenstown	Met
Ripple & Radley (scale-up tech founders)	Met
AVB (architecture)	Met
Advancing Manufacturing Aotearoa	Contacted
Dunedin Airport	Met
Queenstown Airport	Contacted
RealNZ	Met
Remote tech worker (Xero)	Met
Ziptrek Ecotours (Queenstown)	Meeting scheduled
Queenstown Resort College	Met
HortNZ (Otago – Central)	Met
Bodeaker Scientific (Central Otago)	Met
Federated Farmers Otago (Central Otago)	Met
Silver Fern Farms (Clutha)	Met
Fonterra (Clutha)	Contacted
Danone (Clutha)	Met
Calder Stewart (Clutha)	Met
Rosedale Farms and Topflight (Waitaki)	Met
AJ Wood Accountants and Business Advisors (Waitaki)	Contacted
Network Waitaki	Contacted
Clutha dairy farm (recently converted to solar)	Meeting scheduled
Clutha Development Board (agri-food sector)	Contacted
Clutha sheep and beef farming	Contacted
Rewiring Aotearoa	Meeting scheduled
Pioneer Energy	Contacted
White Board Energy	Meeting scheduled
MSD Labour Market and Regional Public Service Commissioner	Met
Zestt Wellness	Met
Digital Interactive Health (DCC)	Met
Tourism productivity Digital Catalyst pilot (QLDC)	Met

Date: 18 September 2026

Drafted by: Rebecca McLeod, Principal Advisor Strategy, ORC; convenor of the Otago Climate Officers Group

The Otago Climate Story

Purpose

1. To provide members with the opportunity to explore new climate resources prior to a presentation at the forum meeting.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Otago Mayoral Forum:
 - a. **explores** the Otago Climate Story website and the Otago Climate Projections Portal.

Background

3. The Otago Climate Story and the Otago Climate Projections Portal are online resources that have been co-developed with territorial authorities and mana whenua. They were designed to inform a range of non-technical audiences about expected climate changes, the risks and opportunities they present, and work happening around the region to build resilience to climate change.
4. This project was led by the Otago Regional Council which now hosts the Otago Climate Story on its website: orc.govt.nz/climatestory
5. The Otago Climate Story builds on the 2021 Otago Climate Change Risk Assessment, by translating the assessment into a non-technical, engaging resource that integrates Te Ao Māori and Kāi Tahu perspectives and tells the story of climate change at a meaningful scale.
6. The final product consists of a central ArcGIS StoryMap with a series of embedded, downloadable, standalone district-scale summaries of climate risks and opportunities.
7. The story is supported by a user-friendly platform to explore projected climate variables across Otago under a range of future scenarios: [Otago's future climate](#)
8. The Otago Climate Story was publicly released on 26 August.

Next steps

9. ORC is exploring ways to build on The Otago Climate Story, by supporting individuals and communities to understand climate risks and opportunities, increase resilience to climate change and progress adaptation planning.
10. The Otago Climate Officers' Group (OCOG) will continue to progress their work programme, which contributes to the Mayoral Forum's regional focus area of Climate Resilience.

Date: 18 September 2026

Drafted by: Marianna Brook, Principal Advisor, Mayoral Forum Secretariat

Forum advocacy to incoming Government

Purpose

1. This paper seeks the Forum's agreement on its approach to advocacy with the incoming Government, drawing together the economic and transport threads discussed earlier in this meeting (Items 3 and 5).

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Otago Mayoral Forum:
 - a. **agrees** that the Forum's advocacy to the incoming Government take the form of tailored letters, as outlined in this paper;
 - b. **agrees** the proposed list of recipients, set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 below, or amends this list; and
 - c. **provides feedback** on the priority messages for these letters, and identifies any issues not yet captured.

Background

3. A change of Government provides a natural opportunity to set the scene with incoming Ministers and MPs, and to start building the working relationships that will support the Forum's advocacy over the term ahead. Early, coordinated contact helps establish Otago's priorities before positions become fixed, and lays a foundation for ongoing engagement rather than one-off correspondence.
4. The Forum took this approach following the 2023 election, writing to incoming Otago-based and Otago-representative MPs and enclosing a high-level briefing on Otago and its local authorities.

Opportunity

5. The economic and transport work presented to the Forum today is more developed and evidence-based than the 2023 briefing, giving the Forum a stronger starting point for its advocacy. This work sits alongside extensive efforts to progress the Otago Central Lakes Regional Deal, which identifies shared infrastructure, housing, and transport priorities for the Otago Central Lakes sub-region.
6. Individually, this work reflects sustained effort by the Otago Regional Economic Development (ORED) working group, the South Island Regional Transport Committee Chairs Group, and the Otago Central Lakes councils. Writing to Government as a Forum allows these priorities to be presented together, as a single, coherent regional voice, rather than as separate representations from individual councils or working groups.
7. The following Ministers (or their equivalent in the incoming Government) are suggested as recipients:

- a. Minister of Transport
 - b. Minister for Infrastructure
 - c. Minister for Housing
 - d. Minister for Regional Development
 - e. Minister of Local Government
 - f. Minister of Finance
 - g. Minister for Economic Growth
8. The Forum may also wish to consider whether Otago-based and Otago-representative MPs should receive the same letters, a shorter version, or a separate covering approach. Proximity allows the Forum to engage more easily in person with local MPs – an invitation can be included in the letters if desired.

Next steps

9. Subject to today's discussion, the secretariat will draft the letters for Forum review, sequenced to align with the ORED narrative's expected delivery in November 2026 and the outcome of the general election.

Date: 18 September 2026

Drafted by: Marianna Brook, Principal Advisor, Mayoral Forum Secretariat; Anna Robinson, Regional Waste Officer.

Regional focus areas update

Purpose

1. This paper updates the Forum on regional focus areas not otherwise covered at today's meeting.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Otago Mayoral Forum:
 - a. notes the updates on *Regional spatial planning* and *Minimising waste*.

Regional spatial planning

3. The *Regional spatial planning* focus area delivers on the requirement in the Planning Bill for all local authorities in a region to jointly prepare a regional spatial plan covering at least a 30-year horizon, overseen by a statutory Spatial Plan Committee.
4. In July, Otago's Councils approved the establishment of an Interim Governance Group to lead preparation for Otago's regional spatial plan. The Group includes elected members from each of Otago's councils, mana whenua representatives, and an independent Chair, Bill Wasley. Its focus is developing a draft process agreement and draft terms of reference for the future Spatial Plan Committee.
5. The Interim Governance Group has now met twice. At its first meeting on 10 August, the Group confirmed its role and endorsed partnership and protocol principles. At its second meeting on 31 August, discussion turned to decision-making arrangements, including membership, delegations, consensus decision-making, quorum, and conflicts of interest.
6. A third meeting on 21 September will focus on consultation and engagement requirements under the Planning Bill, including how the future Committee will identify and work with infrastructure providers, the development sector, other sector groups, and the wider community. Consultation with iwi authorities has been held over to meeting 4, to be considered alongside the broader question of mana whenua involvement in officials' groups and the secretariat.
7. Supporting this work, an Executive Steering Group and a Technical Oversight Group have also been established, with the latter progressing "no regrets" work such as scoping and stocktaking existing information. A fixed-term Project Lead role did not attract suitable candidates through open recruitment, and a closed tender process is now underway to secure a consultant project manager. CEs have also approved a cost-sharing agreement to support programme resourcing through the interim period.

8. A complete process agreement and terms of reference for the Spatial Plan Committee will be endorsed at the final meeting of the Interim Governance Group in November. It will then be passed to Councils in December 2026 for formal approval and to establish the Committee.
9. Once the Committee is in place, it will have 21 months from the date the Planning Bill receives royal assent to notify the regional spatial plan and a further 9 months from notification to reach decisions.

Minimising waste

10. The *Minimising waste* region focus area is delivered through collaboration led by the Otago Regional Strategic Waste Group.
11. The Otago Regional Strategic Waste Group is a cross-council working group established in early 2026 with endorsement from the CE Forum. The Group is convened by the Otago Regional Waste Officer, who is supporting the group to consolidate analysis, develop and activate regionally relevant actions, and report to the CE and Mayoral Forum.
12. The group's current work programme includes:
 - **Otago Region Waste Management Strategy** - The Group is currently developing a regional strategy for waste management, which will be presented to the CE Forum later in 2026 and thereafter to the Mayoral Forum.
 - **Regional Work Programme** – This is a work programme to support the regional strategy, including options for successful delivery (both regionally and sub-regionally).
 - **Data Collection and Standardisation** - A consistent data collection methodology across Otago to align and aggregate existing waste data.
 - **Advocacy and Central Government Engagement** – Ongoing advocacy for secure policy settings and funding assurance from central government to continue to deliver on waste minimisation and management.
 - **Action areas** - This report highlights two topics of significance for our region: construction and demolition waste (C&D) and emergency waste

Construction and Demolition Waste (C&D)

13. Data indicates that at least 70%¹ of all waste to landfill comes from the C&D sector. SWAP (Solid Waste Analysis Protocol) data from Otago shows that up to 59 tonnes of waste goes to landfill each week from the C&D sector. In Otago, we have limited options for diverting, recycling and reprocessing C&D materials, and with the expense of transport, the drive to separate materials for recycling is relatively low. When considered alongside limited landfill airspace, increasing costs to dispose, and carbon emissions, a change is needed.
14. There are opportunities to improve C&D diversion for the entire region. DCC are upgrading the Green Island transfer station to include C&D diversion, and QLDC are working directly with the sector through their flagship group Better Building Working Group (BBWG) to explore and promote ways to design

¹ [WasteMINZ report](#): Soil the hidden Giant

waste out of building before construction begins. A Cook Bros recent report² highlights that up to 30% of waste from a site could be eliminated through an integrated design process.

15. Otago's five territorial authorities are finalising a diversion trial which will span 12 months, with an aim to divert up to 8.3 tonnes of plastic waste from the C&D sector. This trial, done in partnership with the Environmental Innovation Centre (Marley–Aliaxis) and co-funded through MfE's Plastic Innovation Fund, will allow a proof of concept to be tested. The trial will consider and analyse behaviour change, logistics, costs and carbon accounting. HDPE pipes and soft plastics were chosen as the focus because they represent a high-volume, relatively easily recyclable material stream that can be reprocessed in the South Island.
16. The final report should allow our region to understand the opportunities, the true costs and benefits for diverting materials through a joined-up approach. Future considerations include what role councils would take, should this trial prove viable. This could look like a shared services agreement, shared design for improved diversion at transfer stations, or regionally consistent bylaw which covers C&D. With numerous construction companies working across our region, a cohesive and consistent approach across the region will have the strongest impact on diversion rates from the sector.

Emergency Waste Preparedness

17. Otago's Emergency Waste Stocktake and Gap Analysis³ was completed June 2026. It includes an action list of steps to improve each council's ability to respond to the types of emergencies experienced across Otago.
18. Disaster waste commonly includes building debris from collapsed or demolished structures, but can also include large volumes of fine-grained sediment deposited by natural hazards — such as liquefaction ejecta, flood silt, landslide or mudflow debris, or volcanic ash fall. Left unmanaged, this waste carries long-term social, environmental and financial costs, which adequate preparation and planning can help mitigate.
19. Otago's territorial authorities have a high-level understanding of the types of waste the region may face following a disaster, but no indication yet of estimated volumes for likely scenarios. An emergency debris management plan was recommended as an action within the Otago Lifelines Vulnerability Study⁴ (2024) and was also raised in the Otago Catastrophic Event Plan – Alpine Fault (Catplan) (2024).
20. Otago CDEM and the regional waste officer are jointly scoping work on regional disaster waste. A guidance document⁵ recently completed for the Canterbury Joint Waste Committee and Canterbury CDEM provides a framework for this work. Otago requires strong, sustained commitment to continue collaborating in this space. Given that adequate preparation and risk reduction provides far better value⁶ than response and recovery⁷, Otago's councils should have confidence to continue this work.

² Cook Brothers – [What 40T of Construction Waste Taught Us](#)

³ **Otago Region Waste Stocktake and Gap Analysis (attached)**

⁴ [Otago Lifelines and Vulnerability Study](#) (2024)

⁵ Disaster Waste Management Guidance (**attached**)

⁶ [Building New Zealand's Long-term Resilience to Hazards: Long-term Insights Briefing 2025](#)

⁷ [Liquefaction Ejecta Clean-up in Christchurch](#) (2012)