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TAKING PART

## Taking PART



Your guide to having a say in the decisions that affect you, your community, and your country.



**ELECTIONS**  
ELECTORAL COMMISSION  
Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri

### WHAT'S A DEMOCRACY?

This is where people select representatives to decide how their country – and their community – is run. These representatives make their decisions on behalf of the people who selected them, which is why it's so important that everyone expresses their views on election day and in between times.



**Well, you can change things.** Yes, you! Living in New Zealand you have the right to express your views on the decisions that affect **you**. You have the right to express your views on the decisions that affect **your community**. And you have the right to express your views on the decisions that affect **the country**. Your views are welcome. In fact, you've got a responsibility to share them. That's because New Zealand is a democracy.

**Taking part** explains how decisions are made in New Zealand and how you can help shape them by having your say.

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### WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS AROUND HERE?

**Someone** has to decide how much money to collect from the public of New Zealand in taxes or rates – and then decide how to spend it. **Someone** has to decide what is acceptable for how each of us behaves and what happens when we don't. **Someone** has to decide how to develop this country's land and how it's protected for the enjoyment of New Zealanders today and tomorrow.

**So, who makes those decisions around here?**



**+ DECISIONS AND LAWS OF THE COUNTRY**

While the New Zealand **government** makes the day to day decisions, the really big decisions and new laws need to be made by **parliament**. There, in the House of Representatives, Members of Parliament from around the country meet to make decisions on many things that affect New Zealanders' lives. Their job is to represent the views of all New Zealanders. Their decisions affect things like how much you pay when you see a doctor, when and where highways get built, where schools are and what they teach, what support you might get if you're out of work or are seriously ill, and what taxes you pay to cover the cost of the services government provides.

All MPs get to vote on the making of the country's laws. But because the government has the most MPs it usually wins the vote for things it proposes. Often what's put to parliament has already been shaped by discussion between parties.

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**YOUR REPRESENTATIVES: MPS**

Representatives are called Members of Parliament (MPs), each has a 'seat' in parliament. Generally there are 120 MPs. Most MPs belong to a political party which, simply, is an organised group of people who share the same political ideas.

You get to choose who represents you. Under New Zealand's voting system you have two votes. Your party vote helps decide each party's overall share of seats in parliament, while your electorate vote chooses a representative – an MP – for your area. Each party's share of seats is filled first by any electorate MPs elected and then by taking candidates from a list it puts together before the election.

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**Having your say**

Lawmaking in New Zealand is wide open to your input. You can influence what decision makers think as they look at issues and develop solutions. You can also comment on draft laws before parliament.

Any MP can put forward proposals for new laws or changes to existing laws, though this is mostly done by the government. These proposals are called bills. Bills have to go through a number of steps before parliament decides whether they become law. You get to have a say in that process.

When select committees are considering bills they call for submissions with public notices in newspapers. You can also find details on what select committees are considering from parliament's website: [www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/SC/](http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/SC/)

The government also makes decisions about what kind of services and support it provides through government departments and agencies and how public funds are to be gathered and spent. The government is answerable to parliament for these decisions and actions. And ministers are answerable to parliament for the decisions and actions of the departments and agencies in their portfolios.

You can contact your MP or even cabinet ministers at any time you want to express your views on government services and support. (The *Express Yourself* pamphlet tells you how.)

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**HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW**

+ **Step 1.** A bill is first introduced to parliament. This is the formal start to the process.

+ **Step 2.** The bill goes through a *first reading* in parliament, where MPs decide if the bill goes to the next stage. If they vote against it, the bill goes no further. If they vote for it...

+ **Step 3.** The bill goes to a *select committee*, a group of six to 10 MPs from different political parties who study it and report back to parliament on any needed changes. There are about 17 of these committees. Each one looks after a particular subject such as health, transport or education.

This step is where you have a major opportunity to have your say on a bill. Whether you agree or disagree with a bill, the committee wants to know what you think. You do this through making a submission – where you write to the committee with your views. See [www.parliament.nz](http://www.parliament.nz) (under 'Have Your Say') for steps on how to make a submission.

+ **Step 4.** The bill comes back to parliament for a *second reading* after the select committee reports back with any changes it recommends. Your views can still make a difference at this step but you'll need the support of an MP. MPs can propose changes when they debate the bill in the House after the second reading.

+ **Step 5.** The bill goes through a *third reading* as the final stage of becoming law. This is the last time MPs vote either for or against the bill. If more MPs vote for it than against it, the bill is said to have 'passed'. The bill is then presented to the Governor-General, New Zealand's head of state, who signs it. Once signed, the bill becomes an act of parliament and part of the laws of this country.

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**Government departments and agencies**

Government departments and agencies carry out the work of government. They advise the government on programmes and activities that will achieve the results it wants. While they don't make the laws they have a strong say in what the laws will be. They also have to report to cabinet ministers and to parliament on their activities and progress in seeing laws carried out.

You have a right to question and discuss the activities of government departments and agencies with them. You can do this by directly contacting the organisation or by contacting the cabinet minister responsible for the organisation. You'll find a lot of information about government departments and agencies on their websites, including publications like statements of intent and annual reports, which set out their responsibilities. Often, they will be looking for public input on an issue through a consultation process, or inviting reaction to a discussion paper.



**SHAPING DECISIONS**

Many government departments use advisory panels to help them make decisions about policies, programmes and services. These panels are groups of people from particular interests such as Māori, Pacific peoples and other ethnic groups, disabled people, young people and older New Zealanders.

Departments and agencies are interested in hearing from people from these groups.



Under the Official Information Act you can request official information from government ministers and central government agencies. Unless there is a reason not to tell you, government organisations and ministers must provide the information within 20 working days. If they can't, they must explain the reasons for the delay or refusal.

If you're unhappy with the response you receive to an official information request (or you don't get a response), you can complain to an ombudsman. See [www.ombudsmen.govt.nz](http://www.ombudsmen.govt.nz)

Don't know which government department or agency to contact? The New Zealand Government website lists the different organisations providing government services: [newzealand.govt.nz/agencies](http://newzealand.govt.nz/agencies) Or your local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) can help you identify the right department or agency. You can find government agencies in the blue pages at the front of your telephone directory. CABs are in the white pages.



**+ DECISIONS AND RULES FOR WHERE YOU LIVE**

Parliament is not the only form of government that makes decisions affecting your daily life. Local government decides things like how much you pay in rates, where and how big you can build, what types of businesses can operate in certain areas, the cost of rubbish collection and street parking, what library services you receive, when your street or pavement needs repairing.

There are two types of local government:

- + **Regional councils** manage a region's natural environment providing services such as flood protection and river management, pest control, coastal planning, public transport planning and funding, and response to natural disasters.
- + **Territorial authorities** (district and city councils) provide local services such as footpaths and roads, water, wastewater and sewerage, rubbish collection, pools, parks and other leisure facilities, building inspection and noise control services, as well as services contributing to community wellbeing and public health.

See the information sheets 'What is Local Government?' and 'How Does Local Government Work?' at [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz)



**YOUR REPRESENTATIVES: COUNCILLORS**

Just as for MPs, you get to choose local government councillors to represent you. These will be local people who generally have an interest in serving your local community. The leader of a city or district council is the mayor, who is also elected by voters.

Many district and city councils use a 'ward' system of representation. This means that one or more councillors will represent a ward – a particular geographic area. Regional councils cover a bigger area than district and city councils. In some cases there may be more than one regional councillor representing a particular area of the region. These areas are called constituencies.



**Having your say**

You have a right and a responsibility to have a say on the plans and decisions made by local government.

In making their decisions local councils want to know what you think. In fact, in some cases councils are required by law to consult you. They also want to know your views on how your district, city or region will or should grow and develop in future.

Councils use formal planning processes that include opportunities for you to tell them what you think of their plans. Keep a watch for notices in your local newspapers, council newsletters and your local library. Many also use their own websites to invite you to share your views generally or on particular decisions.

There are also regular council meetings held throughout the year where councillors make major decisions. You are free to attend these public meetings and there will be a set time in which you can have your say on the issues being discussed. However, some council decisions are not made in public. Check your local newspapers, council newsletters and local library for meeting notices.

See the information sheet 'How Can I Influence Council Decisions?' at [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz)





In between these meetings councillors carry out work in committees. These committees cover areas such as transport, urban development, culture and arts. You are also welcome to attend these meetings, which often let the public have a say.

At any time councils will listen to what you have to tell them over the phone, by email, through a website, or by letter – even if they haven't asked for formal submissions.

Don't know which local council to contact? The 'local councils' website provides links to all the councils in New Zealand: [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz) (see the map on the home page).

**WHAT YOU CAN HAVE A SAY ON**

Councils need to know what you think of their plans, rules and bylaws:

- + **Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCP)** set out a local council's priorities for the medium to long term. Prepared every three years, they explain how the area will develop and how money will be raised and spent by council over 10 years.
- + Every three years councils have to ask their communities what they think is important. These **community outcomes** are included in the LTCCP.
- + An **annual plan** must be prepared setting out a council's year to year activity and plans.
- + City councils and district councils must also have **district plans**. These plans specifically aim to protect the environment from any

negative effects of people using natural and physical resources, including land, air and water.

- + District plans contain **rules** that set out what you can and can't do, which may affect you if you are planning building work or opening a business, for example.
- + Councils also make **bylaws**. These are local laws applying only to the council's area. Bylaws can cover anything from dog ownership, building requirements, to the selling of food. These often differ from council to council.

**MAKE SURE YOU SHARE!**

At any time you can contact your representative about any issue that is of concern to you. Lots of people contact their local councils about broken street lights and missed rubbish collections, but few express their views on bigger issues like building a stadium or controlling housing development. If you've got a view on these things don't just talk to your friends – share it with the decision makers. That's how you can change things! See also the information sheet 'How Can I Influence Council Decisions?' at [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz)

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**Community boards, district health boards and licensing trusts**

Other local representatives need to know what you think:

- + **Community boards** are set up by councils to provide a stronger link with their communities at the flax roots level. Sometimes they're set up at the request of the community. These boards provide more opportunities for people to have their say on council issues that affect them.
- + **District health boards** decide how government money is to be spent on delivering health and disability services within an area. These boards are made up of a mix of seven elected people from the community, and health and other specialists appointed by the government. See the Ministry of Health website: [www.moh.govt.nz](http://www.moh.govt.nz) for more information (look for the link on the home page).
- + **Licensing trusts** are community-elected 'boards' that manage the selling of liquor within some areas of the country. The profits from liquor sales are invested back into the community.

**FINDING LOCAL GROUPS**

Check with your local Citizens Advice Bureau or library for information on the local groups and organisations operating in your area. Look them up in the white pages or see [www.cab.org.nz](http://www.cab.org.nz) Many organisations are listed on the Community/Net Aotearoa web link directory at [www.community.net.nz](http://www.community.net.nz)

**Other community decision makers**

Standing for a school's board of trustees is a great way to try a community leadership position while getting involved in your child's education. Every state school and state-integrated school has a board of trustees to set the school's direction and oversee how it is run.

There are many other community organisations, boards, councils and groups that need local people to take part. These range from local interest groups, eg, residents' associations; cultural interest groups, eg, iwi organisations; organisations supporting specific groups like older people or the disabled; to those that build a sense of community like sports, arts and culture clubs.

These organisations depend on people giving their time and effort freely both to provide services and to keep the organisations running. You can take part in a number of ways:

- + Attend meetings and events.
- + Help decide the representatives through voting.
- + Put yourself forward to be a part of an advisory group or sub committee.
- + Stand for election as a representative yourself.
- + Make submissions to these groups about issues you're concerned with. See the *Express Yourself* pamphlet for ideas on how to do this.

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**IMPORTANT DECISIONS YOU CAN MAKE**

One of the most important ways you can take part in the decisions that shape New Zealand is to choose the people who make those decisions – your representatives. In most cases this involves making your choice by casting a vote. **This is an election.** Usually people vote for a representative who shares their views on the things they think are important. There is no one right way to decide how to vote. What's most important is that you have your say.



**WHAT'S AN ELECTORATE?**

For each parliamentary election, New Zealand is divided into geographical areas called electorates. Where you live decides what electorate you're in and where you vote. The size of each electorate is drawn so that roughly the same number of people are in each electorate.



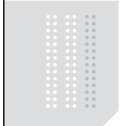
**+ PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

In New Zealand you get to choose who will govern the country at least every three years or so. You do this by voting in the parliamentary or general election.

**You get two votes**

New Zealand's voting system is known as MMP, which stands for Mixed Member Proportional. In this system you get two votes in a parliamentary election: an **electorate vote** and a **party vote**. This is because parliament's 120 Members of Parliament (MPs) are either electorate MPs or list MPs. Electorate MPs are voted for by people in a particular electorate, while the nationwide party vote decides how many seats each party gets in total. List MPs fill up each party's share of seats on top of any electorate seats won.

There are 70 electorate seats and 50 list seats available in the 2008 parliamentary election.



Both your electorate vote and your party vote are important in deciding who runs the country:

- + Your **party vote** helps to decide each party's share of all the seats in parliament. In general the more party votes a party gets the more MPs it has in parliament.
- + Your **electorate vote** chooses who represents your electorate in parliament. The person who gets the most votes becomes your MP.

To get seats in parliament a party must win either at least 5% of all the party votes or at least one electorate seat.

A party's share of seats is filled first by electorate MPs and then with candidates taken off a party list chosen before the election.

The government will be formed by one or more parties with the support of enough MPs to win important votes in parliament.



**MĀORI ELECTORATES**

New Zealand currently has 63 general electorate seats. It also has seven Māori seats. These seven seats also cover the entire country. People of Māori descent can choose whether they vote for MPs in the general electorate seats or MPs in these seven Māori seats.

Māori have this choice when they first enrol or during Māori Electoral Options held after each five-yearly census. Census figures and the results of the Māori Electoral Option are used to divide the country into electorates containing roughly the same number of people.



**But you can't vote unless you're enrolled**

To vote in the general election you must first be enrolled. In fact, while you don't have to vote in the election, by law, **you must enrol**, if:

- + you are aged 18 or over and,
- + are a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident, and
- + have lived in New Zealand for more than one year continuously at some time in your life.

When you enrol your name and details are added to the country's electoral rolls for parliamentary, local council and district health board elections.





**WHAT ARE ELECTORAL ROLLS?**

Electoral rolls are lists of the names, addresses and occupations of all the people who are able to vote in a general election. When you enrol your details are recorded on a roll for the electorate you live in permanently. The rolls are an important part of the voting process as they help voting officials check that each person makes their two votes – their party and electorate votes – only once in an election.

There are two rolls:

- + The **general roll** – a list of all the people who can vote in the 63 general electorates.
- + The **Māori roll** – a list of all the people of Māori descent who have chosen to vote in the seven Māori seats. This choice only affects the electorate vote. Voters on the Māori roll get to make their party vote from the same parties as general roll voters.

There's even an unpublished roll which you can apply to be on if the publication of your details – or your family's – may lead to your personal safety being threatened. Then you can't be found through the details that would be included on a printed roll.

You can check your own enrolment online at [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz) (look under 'enrolment') or you can inspect printed rolls at PostShops, court houses, libraries, and Registrars of Electors offices listed in the blue pages or under NZ Post in the white pages.

**MOVING HOUSE**

As the electorate you vote in depends on where you live, any time you move house could affect which electorate you're in. Even if it doesn't, the rolls need to be updated with your new address. An easy way to take care of this is to fill out an Application to Redirect Mail at any PostShop. You'll need some form of identification, like a driver licence or Community Services Card. Another way is to wait one month after you've moved and fill out a new enrolment form.



**How do you enrol?**

Enrolling is easy. Call free on **0800 ENROL NOW** (0800 36 76 56) and ask for an enrolment pack or freetext your name and address to 3676. You can also get a pack from any PostShop, or download an enrolment form from the elections website.

You then simply need to complete the form and send it back. Soon after you'll get a letter telling you that you're enrolled and in which electorate.

You can check whether you're enrolled or that your personal details are up to date at any time by going online at [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz) (look under 'enrolment').

You can find out more about enrolling on: [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz), or by phoning 0800 36 76 56, emailing [enrol@elections.org.nz](mailto:enrol@elections.org.nz), or writing to the Electoral Enrolment Centre, PO Box 190, Wellington 6140.



**Voting**

In New Zealand parliamentary elections are held on Saturdays, for one day only, between 9am and 7pm.

There'll be plenty of warning of a parliamentary election. As well as the date being advertised everywhere, politicians will be out in force and newspaper, radio and television news will be full of election stories.

About a week before election day, you'll receive an EasyVote pack. This pack will include information on:

- + where you can go to cast your vote – the polling places
- + how you can vote in advance if it's going to be difficult for you on the day
- + who's standing for election
- + how MMP works.

The pack will also include an EasyVote voting card or a letter showing your name, address and the electorate for which you're enrolled.



**HEADING OVERSEAS**

You are still entitled to vote in elections when you are overseas. You keep your registration against the last New Zealand address where you lived for a month or more. However, you can update your mailing address to a permanent contact address overseas or in New Zealand, such as a relative's address.

You just need to re-enter New Zealand once every three years if you are a kiwi or every 12 months if you are a permanent resident. Go to [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz) to find out more, including how you can download and fax back your voting papers for parliamentary elections.



On election day you need to choose which polling place you'll use. When you go to vote, take your EasyVote voting card or letter with you – it'll make it faster and easier to vote (but you can still vote without them).

When you arrive at the polling place, hand over your card or letter to one of the officials and give your name and address, if asked.

If you're on the printed electoral roll, the official will mark your name off the roll and give you a voting form, called a ballot paper.

If your name isn't on the printed roll you'll be given a form to fill in confirming your details along with a ballot paper. This is called a Special Declaration Vote.

You'll then be directed to a polling booth where you can make your vote in private.





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To make your party vote you simply put a tick in the circle next to the name of the party you choose.

To make your electorate vote you put a tick in the circle next to the name of the person you choose.

You then fold your ballot paper and slip it into the ballot box positioned near the officials on your way out.

You can find out more about voting at an election on: [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz)  
 or by phoning 0800 36 76 56  
 emailing [chief.electoral.office@justice.govt.nz](mailto:chief.electoral.office@justice.govt.nz)  
 or writing to the Chief Electoral Office, PO Box 3220 Wellington 6140.

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**NOT IN YOUR ELECTORATE ON ELECTION DAY?**

If you know you're going to be away from your electorate on election day, you can cast an advance vote beforehand. Advance voting opens three weeks before election day. Another option is to go to a polling place wherever you are on election day and ask to make a Special Declaration Vote.

This option will take a little more time than if you voted in your electorate on the day or cast an advance vote beforehand – but it's still easy to do!

You can find out more about advance voting from [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz) or by calling 0800 36 76 56.

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**Local elections**

Local elections are held in October every three years.

Your enrolment on the local authority roll is automatic if you are already enrolled on the parliamentary roll at the address where you live.

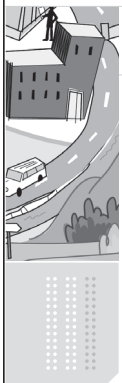
If you live in one council area and pay rates on a property in another you may qualify to vote in both areas. You need to apply for enrolment onto the non resident ratepayer roll to the council where your other property is located. It is not automatic.

Check the local councils website [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz), which provides access to the voting information for each council.

See the information sheets 'How Do I Vote and Stand for my Council?' and 'How Māori Can Participate in Local Government Elections'.



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**Voting by post**

Voting in local council elections is by post. Using the information from the electoral rolls, councils will mail you a voting pack that has the voting papers and information on people standing for election. This pack will include voting papers for choosing people for your:

- + city or district council
- + regional council
- + district health board.

You may also have voting papers for community board and licensing trust members. To help you decide who to vote for the pack will include a booklet with a profile of each candidate.

Councillors can be elected in different ways – by voters from the whole city or district, from wards (parts of a city or district) or from a combination of the two. Voters from the whole city or district get to vote for the mayor. Only voters in some areas vote for community boards.

See the information sheet 'How Do I Vote and Stand for my Local Council?' at [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz)

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**WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF VOTING?**

How you vote in council elections is different to parliamentary elections. Councils can choose between two ways of voting:

- + **First Past the Post (FPP)** – where you tick the names of the people you wish to vote for. You can vote for as many people as there are positions to be filled. The people gaining the most votes are elected to council.
- + **Single Transferable Vote (STV)** – where you use numbers to rank people in order. So you would write '1' next to the person you most like, '2' next to your second favourite and so on. You can rank as many of the candidates as you wish.

See [www.stv.govt.nz](http://www.stv.govt.nz) for more information on how this system works.

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You have three weeks to fill out the voting papers and post them back in the freepost envelope included in the voting pack. Your voting document must be received by the council by 12 noon on election day to be included in the count.

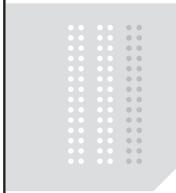
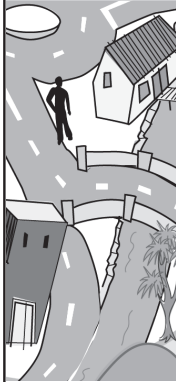
**Take care when voting**

You need to read council voting papers very carefully because you will have to use different ways of voting. In most cases local councils use the First Past the Post voting system on their papers, while all district health boards use the Single Transferable Vote voting system. These are quite different and if you mark your choices in the wrong way, your vote might not count.

You can find out more about local elections from the 'local councils' website: [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz). The website also has links to all the country's local councils where you can find more local information on elections.



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**Taking Part** is produced by:

Electoral Commission – Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri  
Level 5, Featherston House  
Corner Waring Taylor and Featherston Streets  
PO Box 3050  
Wellington 6140  
New Zealand

Telephone: 04 474 0670  
Facsimile: 04 474 0674  
Email: [info@elections.org.nz](mailto:info@elections.org.nz)  
Website: [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz)

Help us improve the next edition of *Taking Part* by sending us your feedback and suggestions.

June 2007



- + Got a burning issue?
- + Concerned about something happening in your community?
- + Want to see things change?

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