

MetroNet

Metropolitan Public Libraries Network (MetroNet) Incorporated

SUBMISSION ON THE REVIEW OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1974

MetroNet is the society of New Zealand Public Libraries serving urban populations of 50,000 or more. The following public libraries are members: Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin, Hamilton, Hastings, Hutt City, Invercargill, Manukau, Napier, New Plymouth, North Shore, Palmerston North, Rodney, Rotorua, Tauranga, Waitakere, Wellington, and Whangarei.

MetroNet welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the consultation document, "Reviewing the Local Government Act 1974".

Public library services are among the most heavily used and highly valued of services provided by local government in New Zealand.

They have two increasingly important roles to play in their communities:

- helping to bridge the digital divide by making available access to computers, electronic information sources, and assistance in their use for the whole community;
- making access to e-government and e-local government a reality for all.

The present Local Government Act No. 3, especially the clauses relating to public and private good funding, has in many cases created a serious financial barrier by forcing public libraries to charge for access to such information, through chargeable Internet services, borrowing and membership charges etc. This perpetuates inequities of access to information for those in the community least able to obtain this information from other sources. These concerns apply to public libraries of all sizes.

MetroNet submits that Local Government legislation should:

- facilitate social and economic inclusiveness,
- strengthen the identity of communities, and
- remove barriers of inequity such as the digital divide.

Public Libraries have an important role to play in achieving these outcomes, however this cannot be achieved within current public/private good funding constraints which allow local authorities to place more emphasis on revenue generation than community well-being.

In addition to the above, MetroNet endorses the submission of the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA), in particular the following key points:

- LIANZA believes the review of the Local Government Act should aim at delivering consistent standards of library service for all communities.
- LIANZA supports the inclusion of social and cultural criteria as well as economic ones when making funding decisions, as investment in social, cultural and technology infrastructure and the development of knowledge assets is essential to community wellbeing.
- The ad hoc introduction of user charges in the form of “borrowing fees” based on purely economic grounds has led to severe usage decline and the threat of a consequent funding decrease, resulting in segments of the community being excluded from the library service and literacy levels threatened in vulnerable parts of the community.
- Central government needs to provide strong leadership to local authorities to recognise the value of public libraries in the community, especially in closing the digital divide and providing lifelong learning and literacy opportunities.
- The contribution of public libraries to lifelong learning requires a much stronger alignment with central government and requires statutory recognition and support from a library or educational arm of central government through partnerships.
- A stronger coordinated national approach would lead to increased resource-sharing, infrastructure development and a national buying consortium. The current work on the provision of a National Information Strategy is a driving force in this area.
- Establishing guidelines and best practice for library service charges are vital for small and rural communities.
- LIANZA endorses the requirement for public and community interests to be properly reflected in funding decisions, for funding to be sustainable for future stewardship and for citizens to be given choices over the ways their different needs are met and promoted.
- LIANZA recommends that public libraries be regarded as compulsory and core services for all local authorities, with national policy statements, guidelines, service levels and funding. This could be under the Local Government Act, National Library Act, under a separate public libraries act, or under the aegis of the proposed new Libraries and Information Commission.
- LIANZA supports the development of best practice in identifying community outcomes, priorities, values and preferences, and in providing community consultation, participation and access to decision-making.
- LIANZA also supports the introduction of the monitoring, evaluation and reporting of libraries and their customers for the effective evaluation of effectiveness of not just outputs but also outcomes, and the systematic and reliable reporting to the community on performance.

- Local councils need to be more proactive about having meaningful dialogue with Tangata Whenua and having meaningful Maori representation on decision-making groups. Public libraries have often been in the forefront of local government endeavours in developing a partnership with the Tangata Whenua as a key stakeholder in the community.
- Funding of public libraries should be from general rates or as a uniform annual charge in rural areas with a contribution from central government partnerships for education, lifelong learning, upskilling and literacy programmes to support the knowledge society.

Thank you for this opportunity to add our thoughts to the Review.

MetroNet does not wish to speak to this submission.

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On behalf of **MetroNet**

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