



EVENT BRIEFING

Meeting with the Mayor of Invercargill, 19 July 2025

Date:	16 July 2025	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:	In Confidence	Tracking number:	BRIEFING-REQ-0016739

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon James Meager Minister for the South Island	Meet with the Mayor of Invercargill.	19 July 2025

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Karl Woodhead	General Manager Strategy, Planning and Performance, Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit (Kānoa)	Privacy of natural persons	
Cory Hagenars	South Island Lead Advisor, Kānoa	Privacy of natural persons	✓

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

Minister's office to complete:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noted | <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seen | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn |

Comments



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Purpose

To provide background and supporting information for your meeting with the Mayor of Invercargill, Nobby Clark, on Saturday, 19 July 2025.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) recommend you:

- a **Note** the information in this briefing to support your meeting with the Mayor of Invercargill, Nobby Clark.

Noted

Hon James Meager
Minister for the South Island

Karl Woodhead
General Manager Strategy, Planning and Performance
Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit, MBIE

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Summary

1. On Saturday, 19 July, from 10.45am to 11.30am, you will meet with the Mayor of Invercargill, Nobby Clark (Mayor Clark), at Ascot Park Hotel, corner of Tay Street and Racecourse Road, Invercargill. A summary itinerary is below:

Saturday, 19 July 2025	
Time	Activity
10.10am	Arrive at Invercargill Airport
10.20am-10.45am	Travel to Ascot Park Hotel for meeting
10.45am-11.30am	Meet with Mayor Clark Ascot Park Hotel, corner of Tay Street and Racecourse Road, Invercargill
11.45am-1.00pm	Attend an event organised by your office under your Hunting and Fishing portfolio

2. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss:
 - renal care challenges in Southland (Mayor Clark is also President of Southland Kidney Society)
 - the proposed merger of Southland councils
 - Free and frank opinions [REDACTED]
 - the Building and Construction (Small Stand-alone Dwellings) Amendment Bill.
3. You will be met on arrival by Mayor Clark.
4. This meeting replaces your visit to Christchurch's dialysis unit and transplant facilities, which may be scheduled at a later date depending on availability.
5. Further information on regional priorities in Southland was provided to you on 21 March 2025 (briefing REQ-0011013 refers).

Background

Renal care challenges in the Southland

Southland Kidney Society

6. The Southland Kidney Society (the Society) is a volunteer-led organisation supporting individuals living with renal failure and advocating for improved renal services across the region. It also offers financial assistance to new dialysis users to help with initial costs associated with treatment.
7. Mayor Clark's dual roles as Mayor of Invercargill and President of the Society enable him to advocate for improved renal care at both local and national levels.

Renal care in Southland

8. Renal failure¹, also known as kidney failure, is a growing public health concern in New Zealand, with 5,474 people receiving kidney replacement therapy² in 2022.
9. Health professionals have warned New Zealand's dialysis services are under increasing pressure due to rising demand and costs. Nationally, dialysis units are operating beyond recommended capacity, with a 25 per cent shortfall in staff and insufficient treatment spaces. These challenges are particularly acute in rural areas such as Southland.
10. Demand for dialysis is also projected to grow by 30 per cent over the next decade, with associated annual costs expected to increase by \$150.00 million, placing further pressure on already stretched services.
11. Southland communities face a distinct set of challenges in accessing and managing renal care, including:
 - Early detection: Renal failure is often identified late in rural areas like Southland due to limited screening and awareness.
 - Centralised nephrology services: Specialist renal care is urban based, making access harder for Southland patients due to travel demands, limited local capacity, and unequal service delivery.
 - Dialysis options: Patients require different types of dialysis, such as haemodialysis³ or peritoneal dialysis⁴. Access to these treatments varies regionally, with rural areas like Southland often lacking the infrastructure and choice needed to meet patients' needs.
 - Organ transplant shortages: A nationwide shortage of organ donors is further exacerbated in Southland due to its geographic isolation, longer travel distances, and lower donor match rates. These factors contribute to reduced access and prolonged wait times for transplant patients.

Expansion of local capacity for dialysis in Southland

12. In Southland, most patients utilise facility haemodialysis treatment as their primary option. As these patients are required to travel to Dunedin Hospital to receive this treatment, the Dunedin renal service have acknowledged the need for a local dialysis option in Southland for patients unable to dialyse at home.
13. Initially equipped with just two chairs, the small dialysis unit in Invercargill Hospital quickly reached capacity due to high demand. This prompted the approval of an expansion project, converting part of Invercargill Hospital into a dedicated treatment area with four dialysis chairs and one bed, offering a purpose-built clinical environment for patient care.
14. Over time, it is hoped Southland health services will offer local dialysis training, reducing the need for patients to travel to Dunedin and improve access to timely care.

¹ Occurs when the kidneys lose their ability to filter waste and excess fluids from the blood. It can be life-threatening and typically requires dialysis or a kidney transplant to manage.

² This represents a fourfold increase over the past 30 years, driven largely by an aging population and increasing rates of diabetes and hypertension.

³ Treatment for kidney failure where a machine filters waste, salt, and fluid from the blood. It typically requires regular visits to a dialysis centre, making access challenging for patients in remote areas.

⁴ Home based treatment using the lining of the abdomen to filter blood through a catheter. It offers more flexibility but requires patient training and a stable home environment.

Organ donation consent models

15. Australia operates a formal national organ donor register model, with 30 per cent of the population registered. While family consent is required at the time of death, approximately 80 per cent of donors proceed to donation.
16. In contrast, New Zealand does not operate a formal national organ donor register. Instead, individuals may indicate their intent to donate organs by ticking a box on their driver's licence, but this is not legally binding under the Human Tissue Act 2008⁵.
17. Australia's system provides clearer, legally recognised consent, while New Zealand's approach relies more heavily on family decision-making at the time of death.
18. Organ Donation New Zealand is considering a shift toward the Australian model, including embedding donation specialists in intensive care units to better support families and align with patients' wishes.

Proposed merging of Southland councils

19. Southland is currently represented by three local authorities and one regional council: Invercargill City Council, Southland District Council, Gore District Council, and Environment Southland (the Southland Regional Council).
20. In August 2024, Southland District Councillors received a preliminary report estimating the restructure could deliver annual savings of up to \$10.00 million for ratepayers.
21. Rob Scott, Mayor of Southland, has proposed merging Southland's three local authorities and one regional council into two-unitary authorities under this model:
 - The first authority would be urban-focused, centred on ICC and responsible for both territorial and regional functions within Invercargill city.
 - The second authority would be district-focused, combining Gore and Southland District Councils and assuming regional responsibilities for the wider rural area.
 - Environment Southland would be dissolved as a standalone regional council, and its functions absorbed by the two-unitary authorities.
22. Mayor Scott states the model would better reflect the distinct priorities of rural and urban communities and reduce governance complexity across Southland's population of approximately 100,000.
23. A key feature of the proposal is the retention of strong local representation through empowered community boards and river liaison committees, intended to decentralise decision-making while streamlining governance.

Councils are supportive of the merger, however there are concerns regarding the model and costs

24. Environment Southland has formally written to the Local Government Commission (LGC) opposing the two-unitary authority model but supporting reorganisation of the three local authorities and one regional council.
25. Environment Southland cited a commissioned report which found a single unitary authority would deliver the greatest efficiencies and better value for ratepayers. The report concluded that splitting functions between two-unitary authorities would increase costs and complicate management of water and environmental resources.

⁵ A driver's licence indication does not constitute informed consent and provides no detail on donor preferences and cannot be used without NZTA coordination. Consent must be provided by the individual prior to death or, in its absence, by immediate family at the time of death.

- 26. Gore District Council has expressed concerns about the financial viability of establishing two-unitary authorities, citing the high costs of other proposed council mergers⁶. Ben Bell, Mayor of Gore, argues a more comprehensive merger may be necessary to justify the expense and deliver benefits for Gore ratepayers.
- 27. ICC supports the initiation of an investigation by the LGC with a preference it includes consideration for a single unitary authority model for Southland. While there is some community support for reform, comprehensive public engagement on the options has not yet occurred.

[In-confidence] Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted]

28. Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

29. Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

30. Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

31. Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

32. Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted] [Redacted]
[Redacted]

33. Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted]

34. Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted]

The Building and Construction (Small Stand-alone Dwellings) Amendment Bill

- 35. Secondary dwellings or minor residential units, also known as granny flats, are self-contained living spaces located on the same property as a primary residence. They typically include a bedroom, bathroom, and kitchenette, and are designed to accommodate extended family members, tenants, or caregivers.

⁶ Estimated costs of other proposed mergers include: \$50.60 million to establish Otago and Southland water services; \$210.00 million to amalgamate the nine Wellington councils; between \$13.60 million and \$18.40 million to merge Hawke's Bay councils; and \$1.00 billion to establish Auckland Council, significantly higher than initial estimates of \$160.00 million.

⁷ Free and frank opinions [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

36. The Government recognises their potential to ease housing pressures and support diverse living arrangements. Granny flats have become a key focus in the broader efforts to improve housing supply and affordability.
37. In May 2025, the Government introduced the Building and Construction (Small Stand-alone Dwellings) Bill, to reduce the time and cost of building a granny flat by permitting small stand-alone dwellings up to 70 square metres to be built without resource consent. The Bill has passed its first reading.
38. Under the proposed Bill, homeowners will be required to notify their local council both before construction begins and once the dwelling is completed.
39. The Bill is expected to be passed by the end of 2025 and is projected to enable the delivery of 13,000 additional granny flats over the next decade.
40. The Bill is part of the Government's broader housing strategy and aligns with reforms under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)⁸ and the National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD)⁹.
41. Further information on legislative and planning reforms for enabling granny flats is attached at **Annex One**.

Granny flats in Invercargill

42. Demographic changes in Invercargill show a clear trend toward an aging population, which is putting pressure on future housing needs for older residents.
43. In response, ICC is exploring ways to meet these needs through adjustments to the district plan. This included a review of its district plan in 2024 to consider more flexible provisions that would allow an increase in housing density.
44. Following public consultations from late-2024 to June 2025, there is broad community support for flexible housing options, particularly for older people and extended families. ICC is using this feedback to inform the development of the formal change to the district plan, which is expected to be publicly released in October 2025.
45. These legislative changes will support the region to incorporate 'granny flats' into future district plans.

⁸ The RMA is being replaced by the Planning Act, and the Natural Environment Act, to streamline planning and support better housing and environmental outcomes.

⁹ Sets national direction for councils to enable housing density and diverse dwelling types, including granny flats, in well-functioning urban areas.

About the audience



Nobby Clark, Mayor of Invercargill

Nobby was elected Mayor of Invercargill in October 2022. He was elected councillor in 2019 and served as Deputy Mayor from 2020 to 2022. He confirmed he will retire at the end of his current term in 2025.

Prior to entering local government, Nobby held various roles in the health and social services sectors, including positions at Child, Youth and Family, Stopping Violence Southland, and IHC New Zealand.

He served as a medic during the Vietnam War and later worked in business and rural delivery before entering politics.

In a 2023 interview, he reflected on his personal experience as a kidney donor and his advocacy work, highlighting the need for better support and services for renal patients in the Southland.

Risks and mitigations

46. No risks have been identified.

Annexes

Annex One: Legislative and planning reforms for enabling granny flats

Annex One: Legislative and planning reforms for enabling granny flats

From 17 June 2024 to 12 August 2024, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) ran the ‘Making it Easier to Build Granny Flats’ consultation, exploring options to allow granny flats up to 60 square metres to be built without requiring building or resource consent, subject to specific criteria.

The consultation received nearly 2,000 submissions, demonstrating strong public interest. Most supported simplifying granny flat development, while also emphasising the need for safeguards to manage building risks, protect consumers, and address environmental concerns such as natural hazards.

Planning reforms of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)

In June 2025, MfE released an update on ongoing RMA reforms, including consultation on new and amended national direction instruments. These proposals aim to streamline planning for infrastructure, housing (including granny flats), natural hazards, and papakāinga.

On 18 June 2025, the “Going for Housing Growth” package opened consultation seeking to align national planning rules with the Government’s housing objectives and will help shape future district and regional plans.

These changes reflect a nationwide shift toward more responsive and flexible housing policy, aimed at addressing affordability and supporting aging populations.

By reducing regulatory barriers and streamlining development pathways, the Government is supporting homeowners to make more effective use of existing land, while contributing to a more diverse and resilient housing system.