



PRESS RELEASE

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Mana Whenua, Workers, and Ratepayers Unite in \$3 Billion Action Against New Zealand Local Councils

A national High Court Representative Proceeding is being prepared to seek the recovery of more than \$3 billion p/a in wasted local council rates - a minimum 30% rates recovery pathway across New Zealand.

Returned properly, that money can be converted from council waste into 37,500 new jobs at a minimum \$80,000 Job Guarantee.

This is the United Cost of Living Action.

By the People, For the People

Returning the money. Cutting the costs. Creating the jobs.

Full Press Release

Unite New Zealand confirms preparation of the United Cost of Living Action - a national High Court Representative Proceeding seeking recovery of excessive local council rates burden and wasted public money.

Mana Whenua Lee Taituha, Ngāti Maniapoto/Waikato, has announced the preparation of a Representative Proceeding under Rule 4.24 of the High Court Rules 2016 against New Zealand Local Councils, following the release of the Ae Public Forensic Disclosure (Ae PFD).

The Representative Proceeding will be advanced on behalf of affected ratepayers, workers, families, employers, and communities with the same interest in the recovery of excessive rates burden. The first applied local test case involved Waitomo District Council, where the Ae PFD identified an initial \$13.6 million recoverable rates burden.

“The work simply began in my own Rohe, my backyard. This is not Mana Whenua standing against ratepayers, because Mana Whenua are ratepayers too.”

Mr Taituha said the claim is deliberately public, practical, and inclusive.

“This Representative Proceeding is colour-blind because the claim is not about race or whakapapa. It is about bills, invoices, costs, arrears, penalties, and the rates burden imposed on households, farms, businesses, and landholders. Māori, non-Māori, farmers, homeowners, renters, workers, businesses, and Mana Whenua all know what it feels like when the bills keep going up and nobody can explain where the money went.”

“Mana Whenua are not only iwi boards, trust beneficiaries, or marae land exempt from ordinary rating pressure. Many Mana Whenua families, farmers, homeowners, businesses, and landholders pay rates like everyone else. This is not culture versus ratepayers. This is ratepayers, including Mana Whenua, standing together against the Local Council rates machine.”

The Ae PFD identifies systemic rates pressure across five core cost centres:

- Council Operating Inefficiency
- Procurement, Contractor, and Cultural Consultancy Leakage
- Cross-Entity Fragmentation
- Infrastructure and Maintenance Inefficiency
- Local Capability Failure and Rates Burden

Mr Taituha says the repeated findings show the issue is not isolated.

“New Zealand keeps blaming the cost of living crisis on international pressure, but the Ae PFD shows a major part of the crisis is sitting right underneath our noses, in our own backyards, inside the Local Council rates machine.”

“The further the Ae PFD is applied, the clearer it becomes that this is not a one-council problem. This is the systemic national rates crisis.”

National Rates Recovery and Retrospective Disclosure

The same methodology now identifies estimated potential exposure across New Zealand Local Councils of over \$3 billion per annum. The Representative Proceeding will also seek retrospective disclosure and recovery, with the Ae PFD to be applied to prior years of Local Council expenditure, procurement, contractor leakage, infrastructure drag, cultural consultancy expense, and rates burden.

Mr Taituha says the wider national position can now be tested live and online by ratepayers themselves.

"Ratepayers across New Zealand can now go to the www.aenewzealand.com website, take the same Ae PFD framework and command, apply it to their own Local Council, and see for themselves where the rates burden sits in their own district, city, or territorial authority."

"The \$3 billion per annum figure is only the beginning. The historical intergenerational burden on ratepayers has been far greater."

The Land / Whenua Question

Mr Taituha says the land and whenua question now sits at the centre of the claim.

"I know personally of Mana Whenua who have inherited land and inherited the rates arrears attached to it. They were then left with the threat of being disconnected from their own whenua - not because they failed their land, but because the Local Council rates machine failed them."

"That is what the Ae PFD now exposes. If the rates burden should never have been set that high in the first place, then the arrears, penalties, pressure, and land-loss threats that followed from that burden must also be examined."

"That is the question the Local Council machine must now answer."

Not Merely Political

Mr Taituha says the issue is no longer merely political.

"It is clear elections have not worked. Changing the faces around the council table has not changed the machine. Nothing is working, and the situation is getting worse and worse. Ratepayers keep being told to vote harder, wait longer, and pay more. That has failed."

"Ratepayers are now left with no choice but to force this issue into the courts, including the High Court, where Mayors, Local Councillors, and Local Government bureaucrats will be required to answer the evidence and facts under oath. Witnesses and whistleblowers will be able to provide sworn statements and affidavits."

"The days of hiding behind bureaucratic annual report language, soft wording, obfuscation, avoidance, and political spin are over."

"Governance is not theatre. The job is to find the money, return it to the people, and get out of the way."

Plaintiffs and Public Participation

The Representative Proceeding has now commenced preparation. Affected ratepayers from Waitomo and other New Zealand Local Council jurisdictions are being invited to formally register as plaintiffs in the Representative Proceeding seeking recovery of the identified rates burden and a minimum 30% rates reduction pathway, totalling over \$3 billion per annum.

Unite NZ says the United Cost of Living Action is designed to connect ratepayers, workers, unions, employers, families, and communities around one practical public objective: recovering waste, reducing costs, and creating jobs.

The proceeding seeks to convert excessive local government waste into a new public recovery pathway. A 30% recovery of wasted local council rates is estimated at more than \$3 billion per annum - equivalent to 37,500 new jobs at a minimum \$80,000 Job Guarantee.

“This is By the People, For the People. The money belongs to working families. The purpose is simple: return the money, cut the costs, and create the jobs.”

Further information will be available at:

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