

November 2015

Submission on the Environment Canterbury (Transitional Governance Arrangements) Bill

To the Local Government and Environment Select Committee

This submission has been collated on behalf of Canterbury young people by Youth Voice Canterbury

Representatives of Youth Voice Canterbury (YVC) wish to appear before the committee to speak to the submission.

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We wish that the following appear in support of the submission:

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*“Democracy is where people's views matter,
especially young peoples.”*

1. Executive Summary

Youth Voice Canterbury (YVC) is a network of young people from Youth Councils and youth participation groups from around Canterbury. YVC aims to support these groups and young people to get their voices heard by decisions makers.

62 young people provided their perspectives for this submission that was online for 48 hours, who were from Christchurch City, Waimakariri District, Hurunui District, and Selwyn District. The majority of the participants were from Christchurch City and in the age group 19-21, with a significant number of participants also in the 16-18 age group. Nearly 80% of all participants were New Zealand European, and Pacific Peoples were the second largest ethnic group to complete the survey.

Young people strongly support a democratically elected ECan. In terms of the government proposal for a mixed governance body, the majority were in favour of the proposal with many agreeing that there should be a majority of Councillors that are elected by the public. There was however a third of the participants that did not agree with the proposal, stating that all Councillors should be democratically elected now.

Please read further to understand these perspectives more fully.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1. Introductions

YVC are making a submission on the Environment Canterbury (Transitional Governance Arrangements) Bill on behalf of the young people of Canterbury to ensure that their voices are heard in this decision making. 62 young people participated in a survey that was online for 48 hours, who were from Christchurch City, Waimakariri District, Hurunui District, and Selwyn District. YVC gathered opinions through a survey and asked two key questions. The first question asked whether the Environment Canterbury Councillors should be elected by the public; the main debate surrounding this Bill. The second question asked young people what they thought of the government's proposal to have a mixed governance model.

2.2. About Youth Voice Canterbury

Youth Voice Canterbury (YVC) is a network of young people from Youth Councils and youth participation groups from around Canterbury. YVC aims to support these groups and young people to get their voices heard by decisions makers. This is achieved through bringing the network together for quarterly Youth Connect events, training youth guides to assist young people voice issues in their communities, providing support and opportunities to get involved such as submissions, and advise groups and organisations on how to best engage with young people.



3. Reviewing ECan structure

3.1 Young people's perspectives on whether ECan should be elected by the public

Participants strongly supported ECan Councillors being elected by the public. The key reason behind this was that young people value, believe and trust in the principles of democracy that “New Zealand was founded on,” and do not feel that the government or anyone should have the ability to overrule these. There was significant dissatisfaction that the views of the local community were being neglected. Many felt that the government was “not representing the interests of the people of Canterbury,” rather that they “directly contrast with them...” Others were sceptical if the government even had the information or ability to represent Canterbury’s interests. One participant said “Canterbury is full of small towns where everyone knows everyone! The public have a better understanding of who from their area would be best suited... rather than some person sitting in an office in Wellington...” One person said that “people don’t

care enough for minority elections,” and so this was adding to this and putting more people off. Freedom of speech also featured strongly as something that is currently being denied, “NZ pride ourselves on having freedom of speech...” and yet even when perspectives are articulated it does not seem that the government is listening and acting on this.

A couple of young people strongly thought that “the government’s concerns are for farmers or other big regional developers. So government appointed ECan members [who] would be bias toward farmers.” Young people also contrasted ECan with other regional councils looking at Otago and Greater Wellington who both have elected Councillors, saying “all other councils are elected that way.” The concept no taxation without representation featured strongly, with concerns that accountability to the general people was lacking, and there was too much accountability to lobby groups like farmers; “The point of Councillors and representatives is to represent the people best...” not just the interests of one group. Many also were concerned that environmental protection was being balanced up against commercial ventures, and losing out.

Some young people were concerned more widely about the environment, “Farmers...produce a lot of poisons” others stated that environmental protection was a “...national not a local issue” and that the government had more to answer for in this area across the board.

In terms of the makeup of the currently appointed membership. There were concerns as to why some people were appointed, “often popular people who do not actually deserve a role receive it instead of people better suited to the position.” Others thought this also reflected a wider regional leadership problem and there needs to be more leadership across Christchurch post-rebuild.

A small minority of participants supported the current makeup of the board, the main reason was specialisation. They thought appointment meant bringing in of specialist knowledge and was practical. “The public as a whole cannot consider all relevant considerations... [and doesn’t have all the] experience, knowledge”...professional [expertise]...” Other perspectives that came through were that the current appointments were “imbalanced” and a “mixed board” would be more preferable.

3.2. Effect on young people participating in decision making

Young people often have limited ability to give their feedback and contribute to decision making. Participants affirmed this through statements like it would "... negatively affect... them from being involved in important decisions..." and that making the change to a fully democratically elected Council would "give equal opportunity for anyone to be included..." The National Youth Advisory Group Submission Team to the Ministry of Youth Development and other academic bodies have looked at the correlation between the first action of participation in voting and long lasting participation; And, that not having the opportunity to participate may mean some young people miss out on this exposure and do not participate at all.

4. Perspectives on the proposed mixed Council make up

The majority of participants supported the government's proposal to have seven of the ECan Councillors elected and up to 6 appointed by the government in the short term. Many of those supporting the change stated it would be a good way to involve the public in decision-making, counter any bias, and have different perspectives and "fair representation of both public and government interests and wants". There were points about this being a "good balance" and "happy" there could be a "democratic element". One young person gave their support, saying that on one hand there is a "platform for Canterbury citizen's voices to be heard", while on the other hand "government has a high level of knowledge regarding the best fit for our region and it shows the mutual trust we should have as citizens and a government". There were also some young people supportive of the proposal as long as there was diversity among those appointed by the government, suggesting a good compromise would be to have majority of the councillors elected by the public.

Although supporting it, some participants were behind it as it was "middle ground", a "compromise", and "better than having no choice at all". One person had an alternative suggestion was to only have one government representative, as people elected by the public will have "more honest, reasonable, and logical ideas to bring to the [Council] as they might see the issues daily compared to the government".

Just under a third of the young people who completed the survey were adamant that the government proposal for governance of ECan is in not a good suggestion, a common theme

being because it infringes on the principles of democracy. Young people questioned whether those appointed by the government would actually have Canterbury's best interests at heart or just their own agenda. This group of young people strongly believe that "democracy needs to be given back to the people... who should have the deciding vote". Some specific comments against this proposal included that it is, "Arrogant and likely dangerous. An absolute mockery of appropriate decision-making," and "sly... undermining the public's opinion". Full democratic governance of the Canterbury Regional Council is important, and Canterbury do not need government "condescendingly telling us how we should do things... we can make decisions for our region based on what we prefer."

Overall, the opinions of young people on the Environment Canterbury (Transitional Governance Arrangements) Bill 2015 are diverse, and it is important to hear the voices of our Canterbury young people and take their thoughts and ideas into consideration.

5. Recommendations

Although not usually part of a select committee submission we have chosen to include the recommendations we are going to make to all peoples and groups we wish to engage with, for this Bill. These areas are separated by who they are written for and to.

5.1. Local Government and Environment Select Committee

That the committee consider these young people's perspectives and find ways to alleviate and mitigate any issues, and incorporate any new ideas that fill knowledge gaps.

5.2. Parliamentary

That Select Committees of Parliament look at new and innovative ways to support young people being able to submit on Bills. One suggested way would be to use online surveying (please see our example of how we did this one).

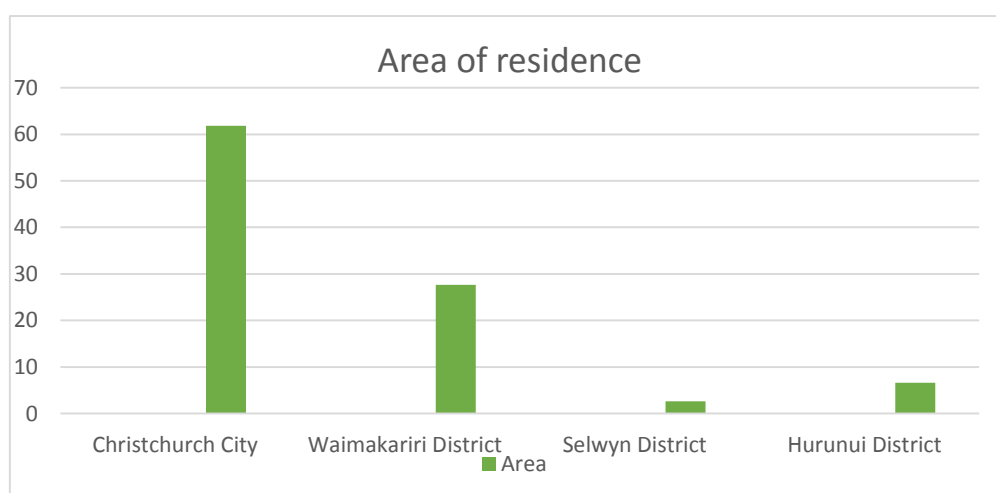
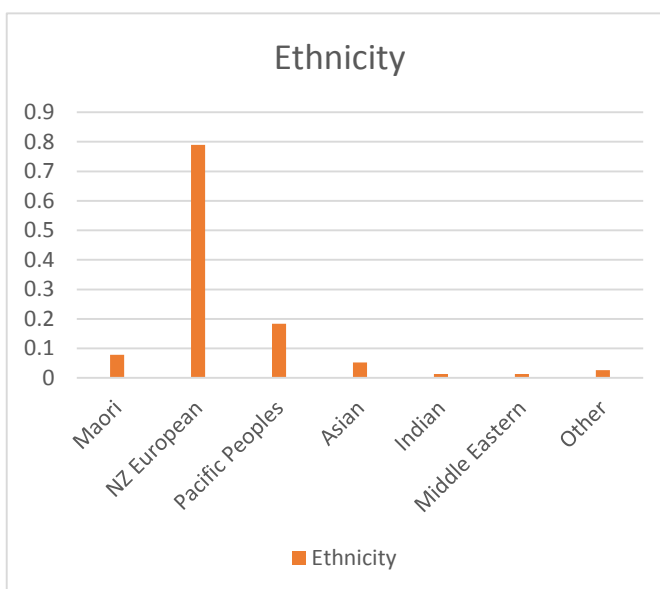
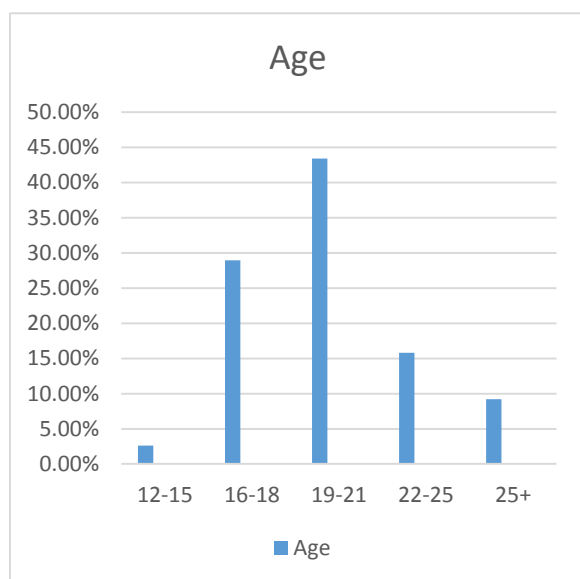
5.2. Ministerial

That the Minister of the Environment and Minister of Local Government answer and respond to the questions and concerns of young people from Canterbury in this submission.

That the Minister of Youth take note of these young people’s perspectives and advocate for these at cabinet and in other relevant spaces, particularly on Select Committees doing online surveying.

6. Young people’s perspectives in full

6.1. Who the participants are



6.2.

Should the ECan Councillors be elected by the public? Why/why not?

- Democracy is what our society is founded upon and this should not be neglected
- Because people's views matter especially those directly affected
- Yes I think they need to be elected by the public so that they will have a bit of a pressure to handle their responsibilities well since the public are keeping their eyes focused on what is happening around the environment that they lived in, therefore if EC Councillors don't perform well they will be accountable to multitudes of people like the public and government and not only to a certain area of their job specialization.
- Having ECan Councillors elected by the government would negatively affect the public's ability to be involved in important decisions by selecting the people who make said decision, which would be at odds with the basic principles of democracy.
- The public as a whole cannot consider all relevant considerations (experience, knowledge, etc.) so should be appointed by someone who can appropriately look at them all
- I believe as part of the community we have rights to vote who we want in
- Because this is a democratic country
- So we can vote for who we like
- All people, especially those directly affected by this bill, should have a chance to choose who will represent them
- Because the public should get to choose everything, the point of Councillors and representatives is to represent the people best.
- I believe as citizens living in this district, we have a right to elect Councillors that best represent our views and values.
- Elections are an integral part of democracy -as the popular slogan goes, "no taxation without representation"
- Democracy and all other regional councils are elected that way
- The decisions that the ECan Councillors make are decisions that will effect the public - therefore the public should choose who makes these decision. Democracy.
- Because people elected by members of the public may have a better idea on what the needs of farmers are
- It's time that they be democratically elected.

- Because we all have a voice that should be heard as we are apart of the environment
- Because Canterbury's environment is a public interest
- The public should have a say in who is elected.
- Because it's our democratic right. Otago Regional Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council have elected members, and so should Canterbury. We should be able to elect the ECan Councillors to that represent us, not have them appointed for us.
- People don't care enough to vote for minor elections. And to be honest no one really cares about this
- Shouldn't the people it effects be the ones who choose who's elected
- It is important for the people of Canterbury to make their own decisions about their environment rather than have the government tell them what the best thing for the environment is. Especially if the governments wants directly contrast with the views of the elected representatives and therefore the views of the people in Canterbury.
- So the public have a choose
- Because otherwise people who don't actually care about the environment or understand the
- the officials in charge need to understand the science. they must also understand the requirements of both the farmers which provide our food and the necessity of protecting the environment around us. We need people from a diverse range of backgrounds. Ether appointed or elected officials could meet these requirements but it is more likely if they are elected. Also elected officials can be voted out by the people if they mess up.
- It's all about democracy. And Christchurch needs even stronger leadership.
- Because sometimes people who are directly affected by currents issues; ie.g farmers experiencing droughts and water restrictions in the South Island, have far more knowledge and understanding than someone who lives in the city in the North Island who isnt affected.
- They should be accountable to the people
- The government needs to address the bigger picture. It is a national and not a local issue.
- It's a simple matter of democracy. ECan is an organisation designed to protect the environment for our residents and future generations, therefore it should be elected by the people it works for. "for the people by the people". It should be simple democratic practice.
- Better for the community rather than the government

- Because Canterbury is full of small towns where everyone knows everyone! The public have a better understanding of who from their area they think would be best suited rather than some person sitting in an office in Wellington deciding of a price of paper
- Gives equal opportunity for anyone to be included in the council, involves the community and those who may not be formally trained but still have excellent knowledge of environmental practices and their role in Canterbury.
- So that councillors are not installed representing groups that do not have the same interests as the wider population
- To have a say
- Democracy dumb arse (at the government)
- Not entirely no, as you risk having an imbalanced council. Would be more in favour of a mixed board.
- Because their role is to please the public as well as do their job, so I think with the mix of public and professional input, both will be happy.
- Democracy obv
- Its transparent and reflects what the the public want.
- Yes it is a democractic principle that we have taxation with representation, & yet we dont get that here in Canterbury despite it being everywhere else in NZ. It is also a democractic principle that there should be limited government discretion & that communities can help decide with themselves what they need. Im not comfortable for the government overrule locally elected decision makers & then when the pressure comes on they give a half arsed response. We need full democractic goverance for ECan. If things dont work out and the dairy lobby doesnt get what it wants because of regional priorities cuz the people have voted for that, thats what should happen! If a change was going to happen there shouldve been a referendum not a dictatorial proclamation from on high.
- To give the general public more of a say
- democracy
- Here in New Zealand I believe we pride ourselves on having the freedom of speech. I believe it is very important that this continues, from New Zealand being the first country to give woman suffrage, to being the public being able to choice who represents them on the government including ECan Councillors.
- We live in the environment, people know the environment around them so should choose.
- I think they should. My reasoning is based around the idea that the public should be able to have their say in any important matters which may affect themselves or the environment in which they reside.

- To get the community more involved and to let them have a say in who is representing them
- Because the public has to live with the decisions and choices made.
- I think if they are going to be making our decisions for us they should atleast have some of the qualities and/or beliefs we do to get a better outcome.
- Because the public deserves to have a voice and a say in the matter in regards to Environment Canterbury
- Yes, as stated below.
- It's for the people they should be elected by the people
- As a closer representation of the voice of the people.
- Because democracy is based off representation.
- The governments concerns are for farmers. So government appointed ecan members would be bias towards farmers, which produce a lot of poisons in the environment
- I feel that they should be elected by the public that way the public know who is representing them and making decisions. It's nice knowing someone is on the board who has a passion for what Ecan does rather than someone being elected that is just their for the pay etc
- The public can make their own decision.
- Because there decisions effect us the public
- so we all have an opinion
- Often popular people who do not actually deserve a role recieve it instead of the people better suited for the position.

6.3

What do you think of the government's proposal to have a mixed governance model?

