



## Selwyn urges caution around building consent reforms

*Please find an updated version of the release issued earlier today with updated information to be used when referencing the Selwyn District Council for stories on this subject.*

The Selwyn District Council welcomes proposed Government reforms to speed up building consents but questions the benefit of merging local Building Consent Authorities (BCA) for fast-growing councils.

“As the fastest growing district in New Zealand, building consents are a major focus for the Selwyn District Council, and we welcome any legislative changes that could speed up our process,” says Chief Executive Sharon Mason.

Building and Construction Minister Chris Penk this week announced proposals to enable plumbers and drain layers to self-certify low-risk work and consolidate the Building Consent Authorities at different councils into larger agencies.

Mason, who was previously the chief executive at Buller District Council, says smaller councils face various challenges regarding resourcing and in-house expertise to process consents, so joining forces with neighbours might be helpful.

“In the case of Selwyn, our team has the right size to have the required expertise, and we are still of a size to be flexible and adaptive to the changing needs of our local builders and developers,” says Mason, who highlights how the team recently adapted the consent process for multiple related housing designs in a new development to speed up applications. It is essential that fast-growing councils can retain strong personal relationships and local knowledge to respond to local needs and that we do not get lost in a consolidated regional BCA or held back from managing our growth.

According to Statistics New Zealand data for the year up to June, Selwyn was again the fastest growing region in the country, up 4%, compared to 1.2% growth in Christchurch and 1.5% in the Waimakiriri District, and now has an estimated population of 85,600.

“With that rapid growth, our consenting team has been processing record numbers of resource consents for subdivisions, so we welcome the proposals to enable plumbers and drain layers to self-certify their work to free up our building inspectors,” says Mason, adding that the success of the reform would rely on organisations like Master Plumbers and the Registration Board.

“They would need to step up and create reliable quality control and disciplinary processes to assure homeowners that their work is done properly.”

Mason hopes the government will consider changes in the Building Act to enable engineering bodies to self-regulate engineering work.

“Engineers produce detailed documentation for each design along with issuing a statement confirming compliance, and it may be more efficient for a strong professional body like Engineering New Zealand to set standards for the sector that local councils can rely on.”

Mason hopes the self-certification process will also remove part of the council's significant liabilities for new housing.

“In the current system, councils are always the last man standing and carry an unfair burden for sub-standard work. We always get the blame when things go wrong, and subconsciously, that puts pressure on inspectors to be cautious.

“In that context, it would be helpful to see more tradespeople becoming responsible and liable for the quality of their work, which would reduce inspections and liability for councils.”