

Section 6: Options for Workstream 3: Governance and Resourcing

...will order its life in response to God's call to enter more fully into mission.

Paragraph 13, Basis of Union

In considering Workstream 3: Governance and Resourcing, the Act2 Project has listened to the various context, imperatives and ideas from across the life of the Church. In the Collective Discernment Phase this workstream outlines various options arising from that work, and the consideration of other models and approaches from other Churches.

Our goal is healthy, sustainable and effective councils able to fulfill the responsibilities entrusted to them.

This includes the fundamental imperative articulated by the 16th Assembly decision to:

“identify ways to strengthen and develop the local expressions of worship, witness, service, and the making and forming of disciples, in the various forms of communities of faith.”¹⁵

Various options were considered. Those that have been chosen for further consideration by the Church met the following criteria:

- Consistent with the feedback from across the Church from diverse contexts.
- Consistent with the scope and mandate of the 16th Assembly.
- Consistent with our foundational principles about governance in the Uniting Church.
- Represented a credible option for addressing the challenges identified.

Each option proposes changes to the conciliar arrangement of our Church's life within the continuing inter-conciliar model described in the Basis of Union. It does not assume changes to the agencies and institutions within those councils. Changes to the conciliar structure may bring opportunities for changes to those institutions and agencies but it is not assumed.

We also affirm that Congress is free to develop their own structures which may not mirror those of the Uniting Church. As an expression of the Covenant we will need to work together with Congress on how it will relate to each council of the Church.

It is also clear that councils have been an important means of creating shared identity, culture and mutual support and encouragement. The important role the wider Church plays in those aspects of our shared life can continue. However, it may be that these are achieved, for example, through networks of common interest or shared context which are not linked to a specific council.

Each of the models assumes some key changes are required within the councils of the Church:

1. Council responsibilities

- (a) respective responsibilities of the councils need to be sharpened and clarified. Although the description of our inter-conciliar structure found in the Basis assumes each council has a set of responsibilities allocated to its oversight, the regulations assume significant collaboration in some core areas (e.g., property, placements).

While we need to encourage a more connected Church where we communicate, listen, consult and share this should not lead to confusion and ambiguity about where responsibilities lie.

- (b) Councils are encouraged to take greater accountability for the exercise of the responsibilities allocated to them. Many councils and officers within councils are currently reluctant to exercise responsibilities or unsure about the scope of their responsibilities. This includes cases of conflict, ministry transition, property or when a community or council was struggling to fulfill its responsibilities. Hard conversations are avoided due to concern about conflict or confusion. This has tended to delay the inevitable.
- (c) Councils need the resources, capacity and capability to fulfill their responsibilities. There are considerable differences in the resources and capacity of councils with the same set of responsibilities. Paradoxically this is leading to more work for those councils as the struggle to fulfill their responsibilities and find themselves only responding to the most urgent issues. There is currently not sufficient resources for many Presbyteries and some Synods to fulfill their responsibilities. Any change in the governance model must address this mismatch.
- (d) Councils should be given the freedom to establish structures (e.g., committees) and processes within their council which enable them to fulfill their responsibilities. Many councils have exercised a degree of discretion in how they organise the life of their councils. This should be encouraged and the prescription currently laid down in the regulations should be removed (e.g., Pastoral Relations Committee, Presbytery Property Committee, Assembly Finance, Audit and Risk Committee).
- (e) Councils should utilise the delegation of responsibilities to groups or individuals to exercise those responsibilities on behalf of the council with appropriate safeguards and accountabilities. Conciliar decision making does not remove the need for personal decision-making authority, rather the authority is exercised within the parameters laid down by the council. There is reluctance from individuals to exercise authority leading to both frustration by individual office bearers and personnel and councils feeling like they are spending too much time endorsing decisions made by individuals. Every council needs to ensure they are providing clear scope for officer bearers and personnel to exercise their responsibilities.

2. Council arrangements

- (a) Councils need not be organised on a geographical basis. ‘The Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering’, when describing the shape of the councils, says clearly: “the present geographical basis must not be considered sacrosanct.”¹⁶ Non-geographical council arrangements may be a life-giving way of ordering the life of the Church that can maintain the inter-connectedness of the councils.
- (b) Personnel (Ministers and staff) for councils need not be centralised and when covering vast and diverse contexts should be strategically dispersed to support those contexts. One common concern about any change to the existing council arrangements is the loss of local personnel through geographic consolidation. This should be discouraged. Fewer councils need not mean centralization of personnel resources.

3. Resourcing

Resource sharing (both personnel and finances) across councils should be considered necessary and desirable.

Shared services across the Church should be encouraged to achieve efficiencies. Personnel should be able to easily work across multiple councils using flexible approaches to placement and appointment. There is a greater need for sharing financial resources to enable ministry and mission where there is need, responsibility and opportunity. In this we will need to consider as careful stewards how we deal with the proceeds of property sales as one significant source of resources for our Church. It is essential to fulfilling our current and historical obligations, maintaining a truly national Church, addressing the economic inequities within Australia and fulfilling our calling to a common life together.

4. Subject to review and change

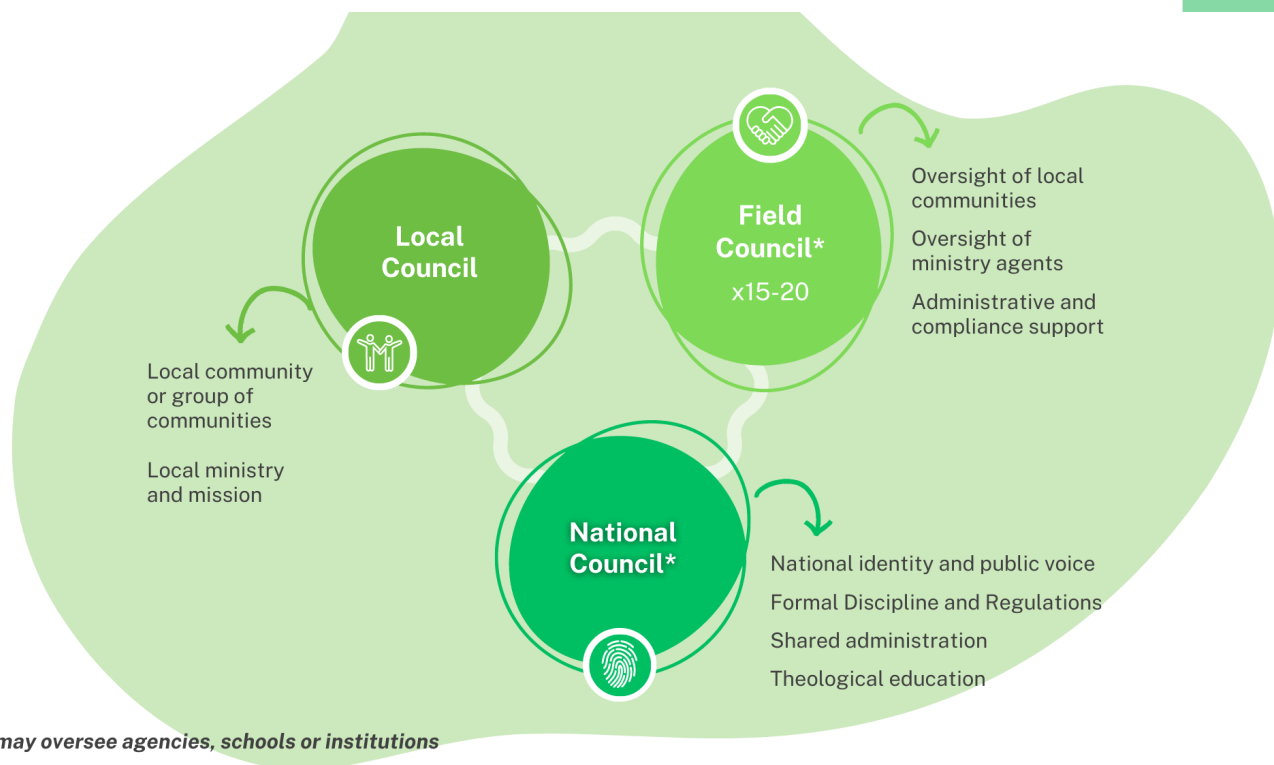
Structures should be thought of as for a time only, and open to regular review and change to respond to changing circumstances. The Basis of Union is very clear that the ‘law’ of the Church is not fixed and unchangeable but open to constant review. This is both our written law, and the way law is expressed through our structures and practices. Any model we adopt needs to be the best model we can currently identify for responding to God’s call and entering into mission in this particular time and place. But whatever the Church determines, it needs to be flexible to better enable healthy ministry and mission.

Implementation considerations

All four options include significant implementation considerations for existing councils’ responsibilities, resourcing and ways of working. We know this can cause concern for those already working within existing councils, fulfilling important roles on behalf of the Church. Disruption and change are also likely even within our current governance and resourcing arrangements. We have not sought to map every responsibility or function of every council within the options, rather we provide overall descriptions of role and responsibilities.

We have undertaken some initial analysis and exploration of the implications of the various options, including consultation with some other churches and institutions that have pursued similar changes. It is likely that implementation will involve tradeoffs between the effort required (including the investment of financial resources) and the impact that can be achieved. Further detailed work will be required in *Phase 3: Recommendations for Action*.

These options are offered to encourage the whole Church to imagine how our life could be different. Each in their own way seeks to address the various challenges and opportunities identified throughout the Act2 Project. No option is perfect, each one involves choices and trade-offs. We are seeking to discern the way forward to which God is calling us.



Option 1

This model envisages three councils¹⁷. A Local Council with oversight of one or a group of local communities of faith. This is the assumed Local Council model for all four options. The Field Council is a council focused on both ministry and mission and supporting Local Councils to fulfill their obligations. The National Council would have responsibilities for both matters of identity and administration.

Local Council

This council will be responsible for the day-to-day governance and oversight of a community of faith or a group of communities of faith. It would be responsible for:

“building up the Congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ’s mission in the world.”

Basis of Union, paragraph 15b

It would be responsible for the day-to-day life of communities of faith including worship, the sacraments, pastoral care, local mission and administration. It would also be responsible for areas of property, finance and compliance depending on the capacity and capability of the Local Council.

It is anticipated most Local Councils would align with a ministry position or team of ministry positions. It is also anticipated that each Local Council would have resourcing for at least one administration position. Creating a Local Council for multiple communities of faith would be encouraged.

Field Council

This council would be responsible for:

- Oversight of local communities of faith.
- Oversight of those called to the specified ministries.
- Support Local Councils to fulfill administration, such as property, finance and compliance which is directly related to their local ministry and mission.
- This council would also be responsible for matters which were beyond the capacity and capability of Local Councils¹⁸.

- Oversight of some schools, colleges, agencies and other institutions depending on the scale and scope of their operations. (*see also: National Council*)

It is anticipated there would be about 15-20 Field Councils.

National Council

This council would be responsible for:

- Matters of core identity.
- Public voice and advocacy.
- Amending regulations subject to the Constitution.
- Oversight of national agencies.
- Shared administration where context is less relevant and efficiencies could be achieved.
- Standards and oversight of theological education including the governance of theological colleges.
- Formal discipline procedures.
- Oversight of some schools, colleges, agencies and other institutions and other institutions based on the scale and scope of their operations. (*see also: Field Council*)

Rationale

This is the most ambitious option proposed. It seeks to address most fundamentally the overlapping layers within our current governance structure. This option replaces both the Synod and the Presbytery with a new Field Council with an integrated set of responsibilities. It also seeks to consolidate to the National Council many of those administrative and compliance functions which are currently fulfilled by most Synods. It seeks to honour the Basis of Union's description that we are governed locally, regionally and nationally.

Opportunities

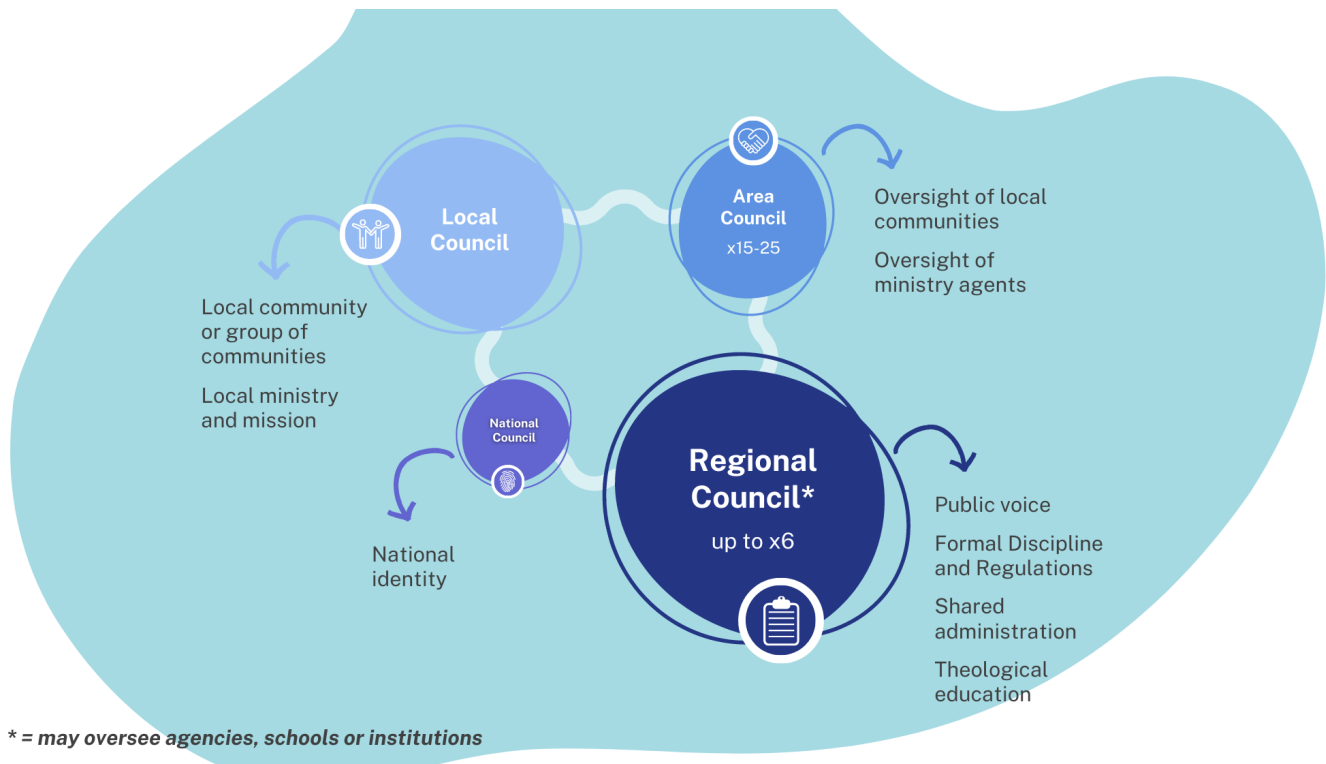
This option seeks to provide a significantly simpler and lighter model. It anticipates resourcing through Field Councils which would be both closer to the ground than most Synods and greater than most Presbyteries. It also presents the potential for significant efficiencies through the creation of a national administrative function, reducing duplication. It would also strengthen our national identity and the relationships we hold nationally with Congress and our international partners. It would represent a decisive break from the existing governance structure and invite a complete reimagining of the shape of all our councils in response to our significantly changed context.

Risks

This presents the most significant change management task. It would involve significant work to establish the new legal and operational arrangements of this model. While an approximation of this model may be able to be achieved under the existing Constitution, full implementation would likely involve constitutional change and significant legal work to manage the Property Trusts or move to a new legal structure. Alongside this the change management required to integrate people, processes and systems would also be significant. While there are potentially significant benefits in the final state, the transition costs would likely be substantial.

Implementation Considerations

- This option is likely to take the longest in terms of implementation with a period of transition over at least six years.
- The size and shape of Field Councils needs to ensure they are close enough to have effective oversight while also having the resources to fulfill their responsibilities.
- It would require a collective commitment across the councils of the Church to work through complexity and find workable solutions.
- Achieving efficiencies in administration is a goal of this option however it requires effort to align systems and processes well.
- This option would involve the greatest impact on personnel. To manage the transition functions and responsibilities would be consolidated over time.
- This option would have the greatest implications for the oversight of agencies and schools which currently relate to the existing Synod structures.



Option 2

This model envisages a very small National Council with strong Regional Councils focused on administration, with Area Councils focused on the oversight of local ministry and mission.

Local Council - as described in Option 1 (see page 49).

Area Council

This council would be responsible for:

- Oversight of local communities of faith.
- Oversight of those called to the specified ministries.

It would not be responsible for any matters of administration such as property, finance and compliance. This would be handled by the Regional Council directly with Local Councils. It is anticipated there would be about 15-25 Area Councils.

Regional Council

This council would be responsible for the administration of the Church, including:

- All matters of property, finance and compliance.
- Amending regulations subject to the Constitution.
- Public voice and advocacy.
- Standards and oversight of theological education including the governance of theological colleges.
- Formal discipline procedures.
- This council would also be responsible for matters which were beyond the capacity and capability of Local Councils¹⁹.
- Oversight of schools, colleges, agencies and other institutions.

Regional Councils would be responsible for their own financial sustainability and for collaboration with other Regions in areas such as theological education and formal discipline procedures.

It is anticipated there would be up to six Regional Councils, however there could be a reduction in those councils through bilateral arrangements between Regional Councils, endorsed by the National Council.

National Council

This council would be very small with a small staff secretariat. The National Council would only respond to requests from other councils to address matters of core identity or constitutional in nature. It would delegate its responsibilities under the regulations to Regional Councils. All existing national agencies would shift their oversight to one of the Regional Councils or become self-funding national collaborations.

Rationale

This option seeks to leverage the most significant existing source of institutional strength in the Church, particularly the Synods. Aligning regulatory and administrative responsibility within Regional Councils and relieving the Area Council of administrative functions reduces overlap and creates efficiencies. The most significant role the National Council plays is in its three-yearly meetings in session and therefore little resourcing is required nationally outside of those meetings.

Opportunities

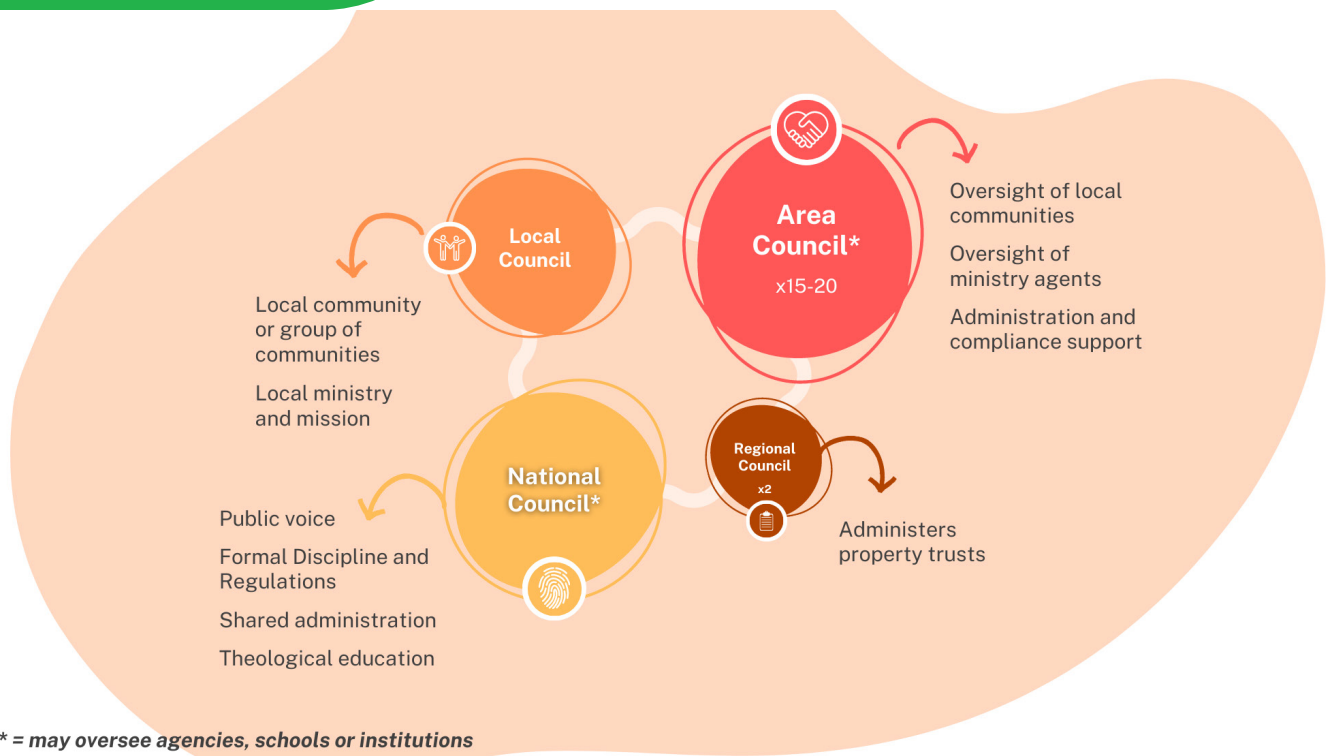
Area Councils are relieved of many of their administrative functions allowing them to focus on supporting local communities of faith and ministry agents. Regional Councils developing contextually relevant regulations provides flexibility and innovation without seeking national consensus. Voice on national issues could occur on behalf of any part of the Church in response to local issues, led by the Regional Council. The savings from a smaller National Council could be invested in local ministry and mission or in strengthening the administrative support to local communities of faith.

Risks

The national voice of the Church may be diminished. The National Council is already relatively small and so the savings may be relatively limited allowing for limited re-investment. Duplication across the councils of the Church continues. State-based culture becomes more entrenched making collaboration more difficult, and our Church more fragmented. Regional Councils which cannot find a sustainable funding model may struggle to find alternative arrangements. Divergence in regulation creates confusion and limits coherence across the Church. Relationships held by the National Council such as with Congress and international partners become harder to maintain.

Implementation Considerations

- This would likely take the shortest time to implement and could be achieved within three years.
- Determining how many Regional Councils could be sustained under this model is a foundational consideration.
- While not needing constitutional change, it would need significant negotiation between councils.
- The process of delegating regulatory and other responsibilities from the National to Regional Councils would need to occur through a phased transition.
- Negotiation would be required about which administrative responsibilities currently undertaken by Area Councils would be assumed by Regional Councils.
- Transfer of oversight of national agencies would involve finding willing Regional Councils which also maintained the national scope of the agencies.
- Depending on the appetite for national collaboration, there would be negotiation about establishing and resourcing national collaboration mechanisms.



Option 3

This model envisages four councils, a strong Area Council with a combination of ministry and mission responsibilities and some administrative and compliance responsibilities. It envisages two relatively small Regional Councils covering significant geographical areas. The focus of these of the Regional Council would be on the core functions associated with administering State and Territory Property Trusts. The National Council with responsibilities for both matters of identity and administration.

Local Council - as described in Option 1 (*see page 49*).

Area Council

This council would be responsible for:

- Oversight of local communities of faith.
- Oversight of those called to the specified ministries.
- Support Local Councils to fulfill administration, such as property, finance and compliance (directly related to their local ministry and mission).
- This council would also be responsible for matters which were beyond the capacity and capability of Local Councils²⁰.
- Oversight of some schools, colleges, agencies and other institutions depending on the scale and scope of their operations (*see also: National Council*)
- It is anticipated there would be about 15-20 Area Councils.

Regional Council

This council would be responsible primarily for:

- Administering the Property Trusts.
- Distribution of resources across the Area and National Councils so they can fulfill responsibilities.

It is anticipated there would be two Regional councils with boundaries determined in a way that ensured there was equality in the distribution of resources between the two.

National Council

This council would be responsible for:

- Matters of core identity
- Public voice and advocacy
- Amending regulations subject to the Constitution.
- Oversight of national agencies.
- Shared administration where context is less relevant and efficiencies could be achieved.
- Standards and oversight of theological education including the governance of colleges.
- Formal discipline procedures.
- Oversight of some schools, colleges, agencies and other institutions and other institutions based on the scale and scope of their operations. (*see also: Area Council*)

Rationale

While retaining the four councils, this option seeks to achieve the benefits of a strong Area Council with direct oversight of local communities of faith and the benefits of consolidating national functions. This seeks to achieve many the benefits envisaged by Option 1, without the disruption of shifting to a three-council model. The two Regional Councils could each include a significant economic hub on the Australian eastern seaboard to allow for redistribution across the Region. Through limiting the scope of the responsibilities of a Regional Council, the vastness of the geography and context covered by the Regional Council can be managed.

Opportunities

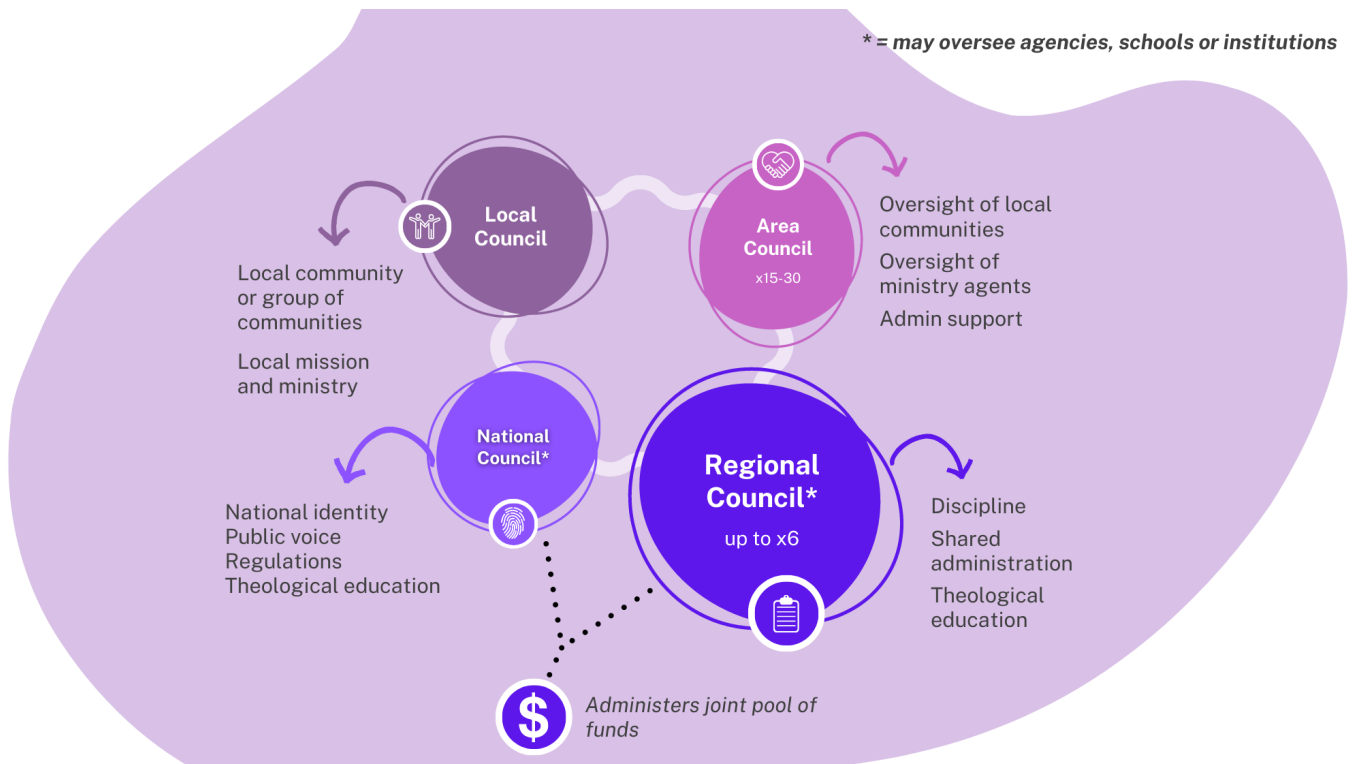
It anticipates resourcing through Area Councils both closer to the ground than most Synods and greater than most Presbyteries. This presents the potential for significant efficiencies through the creation of a national administrative function, reducing duplication. It would also strengthen our national identity and the relationships we hold nationally with Congress and international partners. It could likely be implemented within the existing Constitution.

Risks

Without careful management there is a risk of Regional Councils exercising cultural influence across vast and diverse parts of the country remote from the local context. There is also the possibility of entrenching the cultural distinction between the two regions. It may also not resolve the overlap of responsibilities between existing councils, particularly in areas of property.

Implementation Considerations

- This option is likely to take between three to six years to fully implement.
- This option would involve significant negotiation between the councils.
- The size and shape of Area Councils needs to ensure they are close enough to have effective oversight while also having the resources to fulfill their responsibilities.
- Establishing the right shape of Regional Councils would be important for economic equality.
- Negotiation would be required about which responsibilities remain with Regional Councils to fulfill obligations to the Property Trusts and which could move to Area/National Councils.
- Achieving efficiencies in administration is a goal of this option however this requires effort to align systems and process to not replicate current duplication.
- This option would have implications for the oversight of agencies and schools which currently relate to the existing Synod structures.



Option 4

This model envisages four councils in fundamentally the same form as they are now. Its key feature is the creation of an effective national resource redistribution mechanism. All Regional Councils would contribute to a national pool of funds. Potentially other councils and institutions of the Church may also be asked to contribute. This would be administered by a joint National-Regional Forum. This Forum would be responsible for agreeing the contribution of resources from various parts the Church and the distribution resources to Councils to the fulfill their responsibilities.

Local Council - This council would be as described in Option 1 (see page 49).

Area Council

- Oversight of local communities of faith.
- Oversight of those called to the specified ministries.
- Support Local Councils (shared with the Regional Council) to fulfill administration, such as property, finance and compliance directly relate to their local ministry and mission.
- This council would also be responsible for matters which were beyond the capacity and capability of Local Councils²¹.
- It is anticipated there would be about 15-30 Area Councils.

Regional Council

This council would be responsible for the administration of the Church including:

- Matters of property, finance and compliance (shared with Area Councils).
- Governance of theological colleges.
- Formal discipline procedures.
- Oversight of schools, colleges, agencies and other institutions.

Regional Councils would collaborate with other Regions in areas such as theological education, formal discipline procedures. It is anticipated there would be six Regional councils.

National Council

This council would be responsible for:

- Matters of core identity.
 - Public voice and advocacy.
 - Amending regulations subject to the Constitution.
 - Oversight of national agencies.
 - Standards for theological education.
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Rationale

This option seeks to sustain the current structural arrangements based on the vast and diverse geographical context of the Australian continent. It seeks to address the inequitable distribution of resources without the disruption of significant structural change. The pooling of resources is to enable redistribution to support those parts of the Church ministry and mission needs more resources than can be generated locally. The new joint National-Regional decision-making forum is designed to be a new institution within the Church to cultivate a more whole of Church approach to resourcing. There would still be scope for some consolidation of functions via shared services arrangements, through greater collaboration across the existing conciliar structure.

Opportunities

This model would minimise disruption to the existing structures of the Church by focusing on the redistribution of resources to sustain the various councils. It would harness the existing working relationships and retain the councils and leaders which have developed a deep understanding of their contexts. It will minimise the disruption of significant structural change on an already stretched Church.

Risks

This model is unlikely to achieve a significant resource (financial and personnel) dividend for ministry and mission. There may not be sufficient funds to provide adequate funds for all councils. It also does not address the current overlap of responsibilities between the councils. While all models assume some clarification of responsibilities, the lack of structural changes limits the levers to enable those conversations. This model also would continue to entrench existing cultural divisions across our diverse geography.

Implementation Considerations

- This option could be implemented within the three years.
- The most significant issue with this option is the creation of the joint National-Regional Forum and pool of funds for resource redistribution.
- It would include deciding who from across the Church is expected to contribute to the mechanism and how contributions are to be determined.
- It would also include the basis for determining distributions from the national pool of funds.
- It is designed to be a cooperative mechanism however, there may need to be consideration if disputes arise.
- While this assumes six Regional Councils it is possible the pool of financial resources may not be able to support this number. This may also impact on the number of Area Councils with this model.