



Hon. Nicola Wills  
Minister for the Public Service and Minister of Finance  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160

By email: [N.Willis@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:N.Willis@ministers.govt.nz)

13 May 2024

Dear Minister,

## **Maximising the benefits from New Zealand's Open Government Partnership membership**

We are writing to you about the co-creation of New Zealand's fifth National Action Plan (NAP5) as a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). We ask for a meeting with you to discuss the development and funding of NAP5, which is due at the end of this year.

### **Commitment to the Open Government Partnership**

Ahead of last year's general election we surveyed all the main political parties about their support for the country's membership of the OGP. All parties responded positively, including National's coalition partners, ACT and NZ First, and we are pleased that National provided a 'yes' to each of the three statements below:

1. Your party's support for continuing New Zealand's membership of the Open Government Partnership
2. That your cabinet would support strong ministerial leadership during the co-creation of Open Government Action Plan commitments
3. That your government would support the effective delivery of commitments, ensuring that they are appropriately resourced.

The National Party's response was accompanied by this comment:

*The National Party remains committed to New Zealand's participation in the Open Government Partnership, a membership we proudly entered back in 2014.*

### **Barriers to success**

We are leaders of civil society organisations united by our belief that open government is not only a cross-party issue, but also vital both to improved public services and to the health of our democracy. Many of us have participated in the development of the first four national action plans. However, the outcomes from these plans over the last decade have fallen short of the statements included in the Open Government Declaration that the John Key-led National government signed New Zealand up to.

While there have been difficulties with officials understanding what the OGP's co-creation methods require of them, the main barrier to success has been a broken funding model that undermines the efforts of both officials and civil society to produce and deliver on ambitious national action plan commitments.

Because no government has made new money available for departments to bid for, the commitments they have suggested have either been pre-existing programmes of work, or commitments that are so small and unambitious they will not 'move the needle' and so do not produce meaningful improvement. Where a commitment of substance is made, like the current Commitment 3 in the NAP4 (Establish an inclusive, multi-channel approach to the delivery of government information and services), the failure to resource the work programme to give effect to it, means it is no commitment at all. To co-design and deliver ambitious improvements, it is clear that departments need the incentive provided by dedicated funds.

An absence of strong and joined-up ministerial leadership has meant officials have not been empowered to tackle the problems with the funding model. We are pleased therefore by the commitment of all three governing parties to both strong ministerial leadership of the open government work, and to supporting appropriate resourcing of the commitments to enable their effective delivery.

For the first time in our OGP membership, we have a responsible minister who is also Minister of Finance. This creates a very welcome opportunity to overcome the funding roadblock that has hampered progress and effectiveness until now.

While we are keen for the Public Service Commission (PSC) to re-engage with us in the work to develop NAP5, and create the new multi-stakeholder forum required by the OGP, the essential catalyst for design and delivery of an ambitious and effective national action plan is to provide sufficient funding for new pieces of work.

## **Recommendation**

To make progress, we recommend a new appropriation in the 2025 budget for open government. The reason for making it a free-standing appropriation is to provide visibility and accountability for the funding.

We recommend that the appropriation be in the format of a contestable fund that departments can submit bids to. The appropriation and fund could be managed by the PSC as the department responsible for leading our membership of the OGP, or it could be jointly administered with the Treasury, given its expertise in scrutinising the quality of proposals.

To make successful bids for the new funding, departments would have to show how they have complied with OGP rules on co-creation of action plan commitments. They would also have to demonstrate the quality of their proposed projects and the alignment of the intended outcomes with the joint government and civil society priorities for NAP5.

There have been an average of eight commitments in the last four action plans. We therefore recommend that the contestable fund should be \$10 million for the two-year work programme of delivering the commitments.

## Conclusion

The last government failed to use the extra time available to develop NAP4 in order to resolve funding problems, in spite of our urging. Our OGP membership needs to be meaningful, and this depends on incentivising departments to co-create and implement ambitious commitments with civil society organisations and the public. After 10 years, it is clear the only effective incentive is the availability of dedicated funding.

We would like to meet with you to discuss how to translate the pre-election commitments to leadership and resourcing made by all the coalition government's parties into tangible improvements in open government through our membership of the Open Government Partnership.

Yours sincerely,

Shaun Greaves  
Executive Director  
**Amnesty International NZ**

Cath Wallace  
Open Government Portfolio Holder  
**Environment and Conservation  
Organisations of NZ**

Thomas Beagle  
Chairperson  
**New Zealand Council for Civil Liberties**

Julie Haggie,  
Chief Executive Officer  
**Transparency International NZ**

Sacha Green  
National Advisor  
**Citizens Advice Bureau**

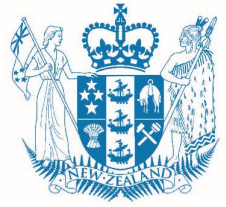
Katherine Peet  
Committee Member  
**Network Waitangi Ōtautahi**

Duane Leo  
National Secretary  
**Public Service Association**

Simon Wright  
Chair  
**Trust Democracy**

# Office of Hon Nicola Willis

Minister of Finance  
Minister for the Public Service  
Minister for Social Investment  
Associate Minister of Climate Change



Andrew Ecclestone  
Deputy Chair, New Zealand Council for Civil Liberties  
By email, cc civil society organisation co-signatories

[andrew@nzcccl.org.nz](mailto:andrew@nzcccl.org.nz)

Dear Mr Ecclestone,

Thank you for your letter of 13 May 2024, with suggestions for improving New Zealand's Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2025.

I am aware of the pre-election survey of political parties, which asked three questions in relation to: continuing OGP membership, stronger ministerial leadership and the resourcing of OGP. I have noted your concern that outcomes have fallen short and your suggestion that a \$10m contestable fund is needed in 2025 to better support commitments for a new National Action Plan.

As part of my briefing as incoming Minister, officials at the Public Service Commission signalled that enabling greater involvement of citizens in policy making and service design is an important driver of trust and confidence in government. This Government is committed to strengthening democracy and to the principles of open government.

I have also set clear expectations that agencies align their work programmes with this Government's priorities and focus on delivering better services for New Zealanders. As you may be aware, my current priority is delivering this Government's first Budget, including our commitment to improving the efficiency of public services and ensuring the value for money of expenditure. After the Budget has been delivered, I will be in a better position to consider the way forward for 2025.

Thank you again for writing to me with your suggestions.

Yours sincerely

**Hon Nicola Willis**  
**Minister for the Public Service**