

AOTEAROA REIMAGINED



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OUR VISION FOR AOTEAROA



Aotearoa New Zealand finds itself at a crossroads. Our current path keeps us stuck in a broken economy with low wages, insecure work and out-of-reach housing. Ordinary Kiwis work long hours, while the rich keep getting richer. A polluted environment and the impacts of climate change make us sick and rob our kids of what makes Aotearoa special. Workers struggle to access the basic services they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

We've spent the last year listening to workers who have told us loud and clear that they're tired of this path. They are angry at a system that doesn't meet their needs or aspirations. They fear their children are facing a future of increasing hardship.

But there is a different path open to us. We just need to make different choices.

Imagine an Aotearoa where good, well-paid jobs in growing industries enable a great work–life balance. Workers have enough not just to get by, but to thrive.

Imagine communities where Kiwis can put roots down in warm, dry and affordable homes. They have access to publicly delivered, world-leading health and education, modern infrastructure, clean energy, and low-cost transport.

Imagine a future where Te Tiriti o Waitangi brings us together, rather than divides us. This is a future where Tangata Whenua have realised tino rangatiratanga, and where everyone in Aotearoa can reach their potential, regardless of where they are from.

Imagine an Aotearoa where everyone has access to good food, fresh air and clean water. People can take their kids





to swim in the pristine local rivers. They can explore a great outdoors that is teeming with life. And they have the time and resources to enjoy life.

Together we can make this vision a reality and create an Aotearoa that works for the many, not just the few. It's time for a new approach.

This report sets out the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi's plan to achieve this. We've listened to thousands of workers across the country and have identified a set of policies that will put Aotearoa on this new path.

Achieving an Aotearoa that works for everyone will take time. But our belief is that delivering each of these policies will get us closer to that goal. They are the first steps in a longer journey.

Together we can choose to create a society that works for everyone both now and in the future.



STRENGTHENING WORKERS' RIGHTS

Creating a society that works for everyone starts with strong worker rights. Our industrial relations system is broken. It's time for bold change.

UNION
WELLINGTON

EVENT TEAM

REFORM EMPLOYMENT LAWS TO CREATE BETTER WORKPLACES

Aotearoa New Zealand's industrial relations framework is currently unfit for purpose. Many people are stuck in low-paid and insecure forms of employment, and we struggle, as a country, to sustainably improve living standards. We propose a transformative package of change that is focused on lifting union and worker rights. The first step here would be an omnibus Employment Relations bill. This Bill would reinstate Fair Pay Agreements, remove trial periods, protect contractors, including those working in the gig economy, strengthen workplace health and safety, and extend pay equity claims.

GIVE WORKERS A VOICE IN DEVELOPING POLICY THAT AFFECTS THEM

Workers' voices are sidelined in many workplaces and industries, and in national policymaking. Many of the reforms proposed in this report will help to strengthen worker voice. To improve worker voice in the policymaking process, we propose the establishment of a tripartite entity (where the Government, unions, and business work together) that oversees employment and economic policy development and implementation. This entity would work with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, or its successor, to ensure that the interests of both workers and employers are properly understood and reflected in employment relations policy.

ESTABLISH A WORKPLACE EDUCATION AUTHORITY

We propose re-establishing a publicly funded Workplace Education Authority that will support unions and employers to engage in social dialogue and industrial

democracy. It will work to improve understanding of workers' rights and health and safety and will enhance productivity in workplaces through the promotion of genuine worker–employer engagement.

CLOSE PAY GAPS AND ESTABLISH PAY TRANSPARENCY

Pay equity claims are the most effective mechanism for closing the gender and ethnic pay gaps that persist in many industries. The process for pay equity claims and the maintenance of equitable rates needs to be made easier and faster for claimants, and the Pay Equity Taskforce needs to be restored. Pay transparency is also essential to close these pay gaps. We propose the establishment of a publicly available register (and analysis) that provides information on the pay and conditions by sector, occupation, ethnicity, and gender. We also propose to mandate pay gap reporting and end pay secrecy.

ENSURE THAT NEW TECHNOLOGY BENEFITS EVERYONE

New digital technologies such as artificial intelligence are driving rapid transformation in the workplace and wider society. Although these technologies can bring opportunities for workers, such as improved health and safety and higher wages, they also bring risks, such as increased workplace surveillance and job loss. We need to investigate whether the regulatory system is currently fit to ensure workers benefit from and are not harmed by new digital technologies.

A large crowd of people is gathered for a protest or rally. In the foreground, a long banner with a prominent Maori design in black, white, and red is being held by several individuals. The banner features a stylized, flowing pattern. The crowd behind the banner is diverse, with people of various ages and ethnicities. Some are wearing white shirts with red and black patterns. The overall atmosphere is one of collective action and cultural expression.

HONOURING TE TIRITI O WAITANGI

Our vision is for a future where Tangata Whenua have realised tino rangatiratanga. We must honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi by implementing it in law and in our constitutional frameworks.

IMPLEMENT TE TIRITI O WAITANGI

Despite work to provide redress for historical and contemporary breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Crown continues to breach its obligations to Māori and fails to protect Māori rights and interests, including tino rangatiratanga. The Crown should support Māori-led efforts to set out a roadmap for the full implementation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the realisation of tino rangatiratanga. This should include a process of potential constitutional transformation and political reform, such as that proposed in the Matike Mai report. This must also include the restoration of Te Tiriti clauses in legislation and continuing the work to insert new Te Tiriti clauses into relevant legislation.

ENTRENCH THE MĀORI ELECTORATES IN LAW

Te Tiriti guarantees Māori the right to participate in Crown decision-making processes fairly. However, politicians often threaten to remove guaranteed Māori representation in Parliament. We propose that the provisions relating to Māori electorates be entrenched in law, just as the provisions relating to general electorates are.

REMOVE BARRIERS TO MĀORI REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Recent progress toward improving Māori representation in local government is under threat due to the Government's reintroduction of an outdated double standard in the Local Government Act. We propose once again removing the discriminatory provision that enables referendums on the establishment of Māori wards, but not other wards.

MEET OUR INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

In 2010 Aotearoa made the decision to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, since then the Government has not adopted a plan to give effect to UNDRIP. We propose that the Government, in partnership with Māori, develops an implementation plan for UNDRIP, to ensure we are meeting our international obligations.

RESTORE THE CROWN'S COMMITMENT TO TE REO MĀORI

The current Government has put a handbrake on the progress that had been made towards normalising Te Reo Māori through the public service. We propose restoring the Crown's commitment to Te Reo Māori within the public service. We also propose significant new investment in Te Mātāwai in support of Māori-led revitalisation of Te Reo Māori within whānau, hapū, iwi and communities.

ELEVATE TE REO MĀORI AS A CORE CURRICULUM SUBJECT

Aotearoa is largely a monolingual country, which limits our opportunities and fails to recognise Te Reo Māori as our indigenous language. We propose that the learning of Te Reo Māori be treated in a similar manner to English, with the Te Reo Māori syllabus made part of the core curriculum in primary and intermediate education. In support of this there must be a significant increase in resources to support teachers to upgrade their Te Reo Māori skills and for more Te Reo Māori speakers to train as teachers.

ENDING INEQUALITY

Everyone deserves security, dignity,
and to have enough to thrive. Ending
inequality in Aotearoa is possible—we
just need to make different choices.

GIVE WORKERS INCOME SECURITY

Aotearoa lacks comprehensive income support protections for workers, which contributes to high levels of wage scarring and poor skills matching across the economy. We propose the establishment of an income insurance programme that protects workers in the event of job loss. This programme should cover workers who are made redundant, who cannot work due to health and disability conditions, and who are taking parental leave. This programme would provide workers with income security when they need it most.

TRANSFORM THE WELFARE SYSTEM

As a necessary partner to income insurance, the welfare system and Working for Families need to be reformed. They no longer provide the financial and social support required for a dignified standard of living. The system needs to be transformed to ensure all New Zealanders can live with dignity and enjoy their rights to housing, health, and education.

LIFT THE MINIMUM WAGE TO THE LIVING WAGE

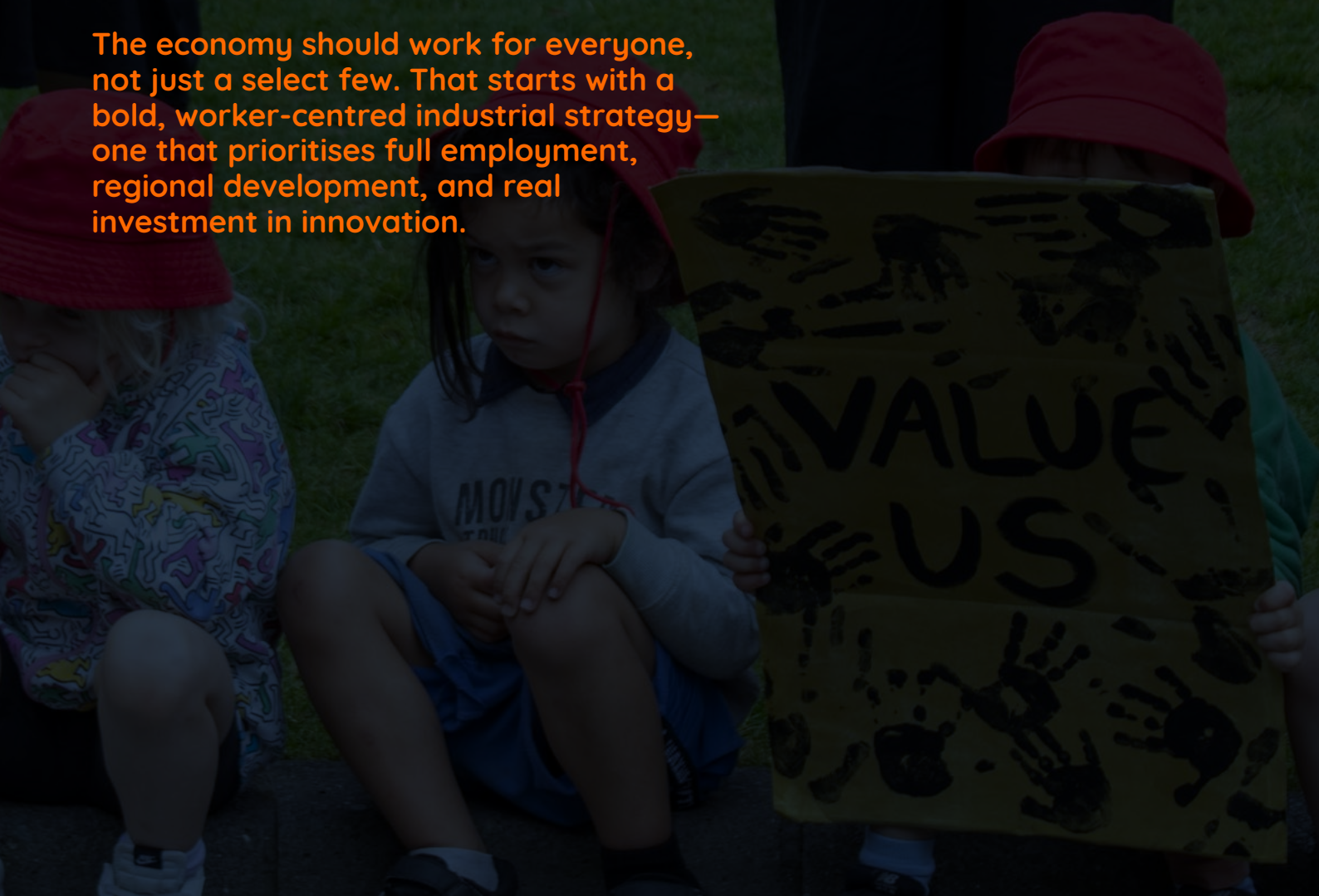
Low wages undermine people's ability to fully participate in society. Our long-standing policy is that the minimum wage should be set at the living wage. The minimum wage should be set by an independent tripartite body, to ensure it consistently meets the true cost of living. We also propose abolishing the youth, training, and disabled worker minimum wage exemptions, because all work should be paid properly.

SUPPORT FAMILIES DURING THE EARLY YEARS

Many young families struggle to get by, due to low wages, high living costs, expensive early childhood education (ECE), and inadequate paid parental leave. Responsibility for childcare falls overwhelmingly on women, which can have significant negative impacts on their employment and income. An overhaul of family support is needed to ensure comprehensive support is available for young parents. This should begin with progressively extending public ECE services – which includes kaupapa Māori services and Pacific language nest services – until they are free to all children. We also propose reforming the paid parental leave system to extend the length and value of entitlements and support both parents to take paid leave.

CREATING A PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

The economy should work for everyone, not just a select few. That starts with a bold, worker-centred industrial strategy—one that prioritises full employment, regional development, and real investment in innovation.



DELIVER FULL EMPLOYMENT

For too long we have accepted structural unemployment in our economy. The Government should take a more deliberate and active approach to economic and industrial policy development. We propose the development of a tripartite economic strategy, with the overarching goal of delivering full employment. A National Investment Bank should be established to help deliver this strategy.

SUPPORT GROWTH AND INVESTMENT IN EVERY REGION OF AOTEAROA

Some of Aotearoa's regions risk being left further behind, facing a future of minimal growth and few good jobs. Regional economic development and investment plans should be developed, setting out how regions can deliver employment growth and address critical infrastructure needs. These plans would help to operationalise the national economic development strategy set out by the above policy.

LIFT INVESTMENT IN SCIENCE AND RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Compared to our OECD peers, New Zealand underinvests in both science and R&D. This has contributed to our poor productivity growth in recent decades. Our export-oriented markets require constant innovation if they are to retain their competitive edge. We propose progressively lifting government and private sector R&D investment to a combined 2% of GDP to support science, innovation, and productivity. This would bring us in line with our OECD peers.

REVIEW AND REFINANCE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government doesn't have the financial resources or clarity of contribution from central government to deliver the services they are expected to. We propose the development of a central–local government accord that clearly delineates the responsibilities of both local government and central government, and how funding will be found to deliver those responsibilities.

GUARANTEEING WORKER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Every worker deserves access to training, fair pay, and real opportunities. A fairer future means helping people learn the skills they need to thrive in a changing world.



DEVELOP OUR FUTURE WORKFORCE

We do not have good visibility or analysis of New Zealand’s current and future workforce needs. This undermines our social and economic development, and our ability to deliver a just transition for working people in industries undergoing change. We propose establishing an enduring architecture for workforce development and employment action plans.

ENSURE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL WORKERS

Access to ongoing training is patchy across different industries. In addition, for many workers geography or work routines create significant barriers to accessing the training they require to develop their careers. As a first step towards improving training accessibility and ensuring all workers have work-relevant skills, we propose the establishment of a lifelong digital learning entitlement. This entitlement would provide workers with free access to digital technology training to enhance their skills.

SUPPORT PAID IN-WORK TRAINING

Increasingly, some workforces are expected to learn on the job without adequate remuneration. This causes financial stress for working households and recruitment problems in some sectors. We propose amending the Minimum Wage Act to ensure that all apprentices, interns and those training on the job are paid at least the minimum wage.

REFORM THE STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEM

The current student support system is leaving students in poverty, reducing access to skills and development, and creating burdensome debts that workers spend years paying off. Its coverage also leaves out postgraduate students and others from being eligible for financial support. The system should be reformed to ensure students aren’t forced to live in poverty.

IMPLEMENT THE MĀORI EMPLOYMENT ACTION PLAN

Māori unemployment stands at nearly double the Pākehā rate, and Māori are paid less than other groups. Action is needed to tackle both the discrimination that kaimahi Māori encounter at work, and the lack of opportunities holding some back. The Government should commit to delivering the recommendations of the Māori Employment Action Plan, and to properly resourcing Māori employment activities in collaboration with kaimahi Māori.

ENSURE THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF TAMARIKI MĀORI ARE MET

The Waitangi Tribunal has recently found that the policy and regulatory framework for Kura Kaupapa Māori is not fit for purpose and breaches Te Tiriti. They recommended the establishment of an independent Kaupapa Māori education authority. The Government should commit to developing an independent authority with a structure and scope agreed to by Te Rūnanga Nui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori.

An aerial photograph of a residential neighborhood, showing a grid of streets, houses with various roof colors, and lush green trees. The image is dimmed to serve as a background for the text.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE

Everyone deserves a safe, affordable place to live that has access to modern infrastructure and low-cost public transport. We need to build communities that enable people to prosper.

BUILD AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Housing is unaffordable for many New Zealanders, both as renters and prospective homeowners. Successive governments have kicked the can down the road on this issue, by either failing to set or failing to deliver a plan to improve affordability. To improve accountability in this area, the Government should set new housing affordability targets for both rent and homeownership and publicly demonstrate how it is going to work to achieve those targets over the next decade at each Budget.

RAPIDLY DELIVER MORE PUBLIC HOUSING

Our poor quality and unaffordable housing stock creates many social and economic problems and places additional burdens on the health and welfare systems. Through Kāinga Ora, the Government should seek to rapidly expand the supply of quality and affordable public housing.

RESOURCE PAPA KĀINGA DEVELOPMENT

Māori communities are at the sharp end of our housing problems. Whānau, hapū, and iwi often find that capital or resourcing constraints hold them back from building new housing. The Government should partner with iwi to remove these barriers and scale up papakāinga developments. This would rapidly deliver new healthy and affordable housing, together with skills development and sustainable employment.

UNDERSTANDING OUR INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

We currently know how much new infrastructure costs to build, but not the future liabilities we create for failing to invest today. The Government should produce a national infrastructure needs assessment at every Budget, which sets out the infrastructure bill facing the country over the next 30 years and how these infrastructure needs will be met.

BUILD NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

Inadequate planning, a lack of access to skilled workers and capital, and the use of public–private partnerships have undermined Aotearoa’s ability to build infrastructure at reasonable costs. A central government agency – along the lines of a Ministry of Green Works – should be tasked with delivering the pipeline of infrastructure work, its implementation, and the delivery of the necessary skills. This would include specific protections against forcible acquisition of Māori land.

A FULLY ELECTRIFIED AND AFFORDABLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Many workers are forced to use private cars for transport due to a lack of affordable public transport options. The Government should kick-start a just transition to a fully electrified and affordable public transport system, together with a more equitable public transport funding mechanism. As a first step, the Government should invest in a fully electrified passenger bus fleet.

INVESTING IN SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Care work is vital in our society, yet it remains undervalued and underfunded. We need a cradle-to-grave support system that ensures good work, gender equality, and social justice.

DELIVER A STRONG CARE ECONOMY

Care, both paid and unpaid and at all life stages, is a core part of our economy and society. We have an ageing population with growing care and support needs, but currently no plan to fund and deliver these services. We propose the long-term development of a cradle-to-grave care and support system. This requires adequately resourcing the sector. Supporting the care economy will also support gender equality, decent work, sustainable development and social justice.

REBUILD OUR PUBLIC SERVICES

Aotearoa needs public and community service organisations with the capability to deliver the services a healthy and functioning modern society requires. This Government's cuts are undermining our ability to deliver these services. We propose rebuilding the public sector's capacity to deliver the outcomes we need by stopping wasteful restructures, restoring funding to appropriate levels, and building up agencies' capability and expertise.

MAKE OUR LONG-TERM FUNDING NEEDS TRANSPARENT

Successive governments have undervalued and underinvested in health, education and housing. The long-term funding needs in these areas should be set out at each Budget to ensure that New Zealanders fully understand the trade-offs involved in decisions about cutting or increasing public investment. This will improve public understanding of these challenges and help voters hold governments to account on this crucial issue.

RE-ESTABLISH TE AKA WHAI ORA

Te Aka Whai Ora (the Māori Health Authority) was created to address longstanding and persistent inequities that Māori experience in the health system but was disestablished before it had a chance to get off the ground. We propose reestablishing Te Aka Whai Ora and significantly increasing its funding so that it is resourced to achieve equity for Māori in the health system.

KEEP WORKERS SAFE AND HEALTHY

We must improve our health and safety performance and capability across the board. This requires a strong regulator, capable employers, and informed, empowered workers. To support this, we need to ensure that the primary health and safety regulator WorkSafe is well-resourced and mandated to be a world-class regulator and to lead system change.

TAKING STRONG CLIMATE ACTION

Aotearoa must take real action to meet its climate obligations and deliver a just transition for the workers and communities who will bear the brunt of the climate crisis.

RIKINGI TAHI
IS CLIMATE JUSTICE

TACKLE THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

On the current track, Aotearoa New Zealand is unlikely to meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement on climate change. This lack of ambition is unacceptable. Given our relative wealth and our potential to generate renewable electricity, we should aim to be a world-leader in decarbonisation. We want to establish a tripartite consensus on the actions needed to rapidly decarbonise our economy, while ensuring good long-term employment.

SUPPORT LOCAL CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Climate change and the need for managed retreat is increasingly real for many communities. We propose that the Government establish and sufficiently resource a climate adaptation fund that supports hapū, iwi, and communities with adaptation, including flood protection and relocation.

SUPPORT CLIMATE ACTION IN THE PACIFIC

Pacific Island countries are particularly threatened by climate change. Urgent action is needed if Pacific communities are to thrive in the future. We propose that Aotearoa significantly increases its support for green economic development and climate adaptation across the Pacific.

EFFECTIVELY MANAGE JUST TRANSITIONS

Delivering a just transition for workers experiencing economic change is a complex process that requires coordination across government. To support coordination and improve accountability, the Government should establish a Just Transitions Minister. This Minister would have responsibility for delivering just transitions for workers and industry in response to economic change and ensuring that worker voice is central to the process.

RESTORE AND IMPROVE PUBLICLY OWNED ENERGY

The structure of the energy sector causes high energy bills for households, undermines our economic resilience and slows our transition to a fully renewable system. The market for electricity is not working for workers nor the companies that rely on reasonably priced electricity. Government should commit to take energy ownership back into public hands and take measures to enable the rapid adoption of household renewable energy infrastructure such as solar panels.

DECARBONISE FREIGHT AND SUPPORT RAIL AND COASTAL SHIPPING

Aotearoa relies heavily on trucking to move freight around the country and for export. Other, more carbon-efficient, methods of haulage have been overlooked and underinvested in. We propose levying a fee on road haulage to better reflect the costs they impose on road maintenance and to support the development of new rail and coastal shipping infrastructure. This would feed into a redevelopment of an industry plan for transport, and the wider workforce.



ENSURING THE WEALTHY PAY THEIR FAIR SHARE

For too long, our tax system has exacerbated wealth and income inequality. It's time to rebalance the tax system and ensure that the wealthy pay their fair share.

STRUCTURALLY INCREASE GOVERNMENT REVENUE

Structurally, the state does not collect sufficient revenue to deliver the change that Aotearoa requires. The Government should commit to increasing core Crown revenue from the historical average of 30% of GDP to around 35% of GDP over the next five years, including through stronger taxation of business, capital, carbon, and waste. This will enable the Government to meet the needs of a modern society.

INTRODUCE A CAPITAL GAINS TAX

Aotearoa's tax system is out of balance, and this has been an important driver of rising wealth inequality. We propose the implementation of a comprehensive capital gains tax (excluding the family home) as a necessary step in bringing our tax system into line with international best practice. Māori customary and Māori freehold land should be excluded from this scheme. The revenue raised by the capital gains tax will be ringfenced for investment in preventative healthcare and public infrastructure.

INTRODUCE A WINDFALL TAX AND A BANKING SECTOR LEVY

Some industries (such as grocery, banking, energy, and building materials) in Aotearoa can abuse their market power, contributing to our high cost of living. The Government should act to improve competition in industries such as supermarkets and banking by introducing a windfall tax mechanism on excess profits. In the banking sector it should introduce an annual levy on the large banks to ensure profits made in Aotearoa contribute to its development.

IMPROVING PUBLIC DEBATE

Good decision making relies on rational, informed and constructive public debate. We need to look at ways to ensure that people have access to reliable information and that their voices are heard.

SUPPORT JOURNALISM AND INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

Social cohesion is being eroded by increasing inequality and political polarisation. Economic policy is needed to tackle these issues, but so too are policies to improve the conditions for public debate. We propose the creation of a fund to support journalism and investigative reporting so that New Zealanders have better access to quality information.

MAKE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS SAFER

It is widely recognised that social media platforms play a major role in spreading mis- and dis-information. We propose investigating how harmful mis- and dis-information can be better managed in Aotearoa. Building on work done elsewhere, this could involve making sure that platform owners are required to remove content that is verifiably false or be held to account for it. This would build on the work of the Advertising Standards Authority and the Broadcasting Standards Authority in New Zealand.

OUR NEXT STEPS



This document does not mark the end of the journey for Reimagining Aotearoa Together. It's important that we advance the kaupapa by demonstrating the widespread public support for this plan. That's why we are asking you to pledge your support for the plan and share it with your friends, whānau and networks.

Over the next year, we will be working with allies and community groups to build more detailed policy positions for the next election in targeted areas, releasing new discussion documents that demonstrate why we desperately need change.

We will also be working to secure policy commitments from political parties to ensure that future governments listen to the voices of working people and implement the ideas in this plan.

Together, we can build a future that works for everyone – and so we ask that you continue to engage with us as we take that journey together.

reimagining
aotearoa
together



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