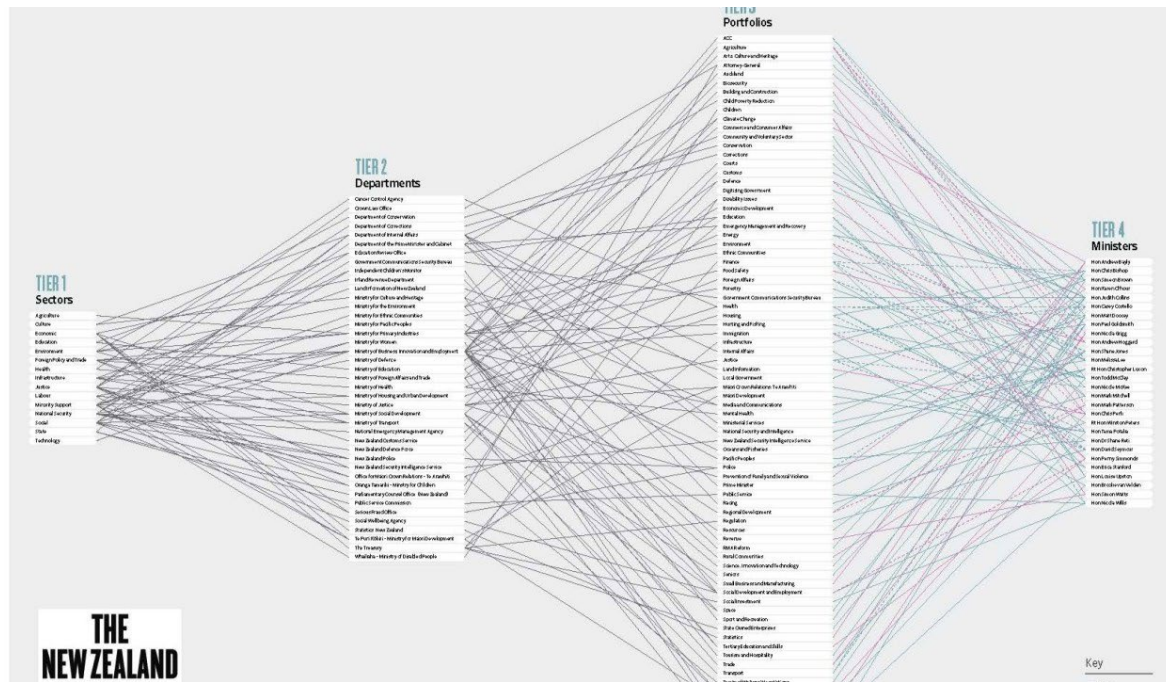




New Zealand's Public Policy Responsibility Flowchart. Source: The New Zealand Initiative

Petitions for Change



Renée Jens

Sustainability and Energy Manager at Dominion Salt

October 3, 2025

Please sign my two petitions.

The government exists to serve the public good, but with a convoluted design and short term thinking, our system is failing us. This is not the fault of the current government alone, but the result of decades of ineffective structure. Too many portfolios and departments exist which are handed out like a lolly scramble, providing inefficiencies, and leaving key areas like energy and infrastructure without the attention and respect they deserve.

The Hon Simon Watt's is the Minister of Energy, Minister of Climate Change, Minister of Local Government, and the Minister of Revenue. With multiple large portfolios, some also conflicting, how can we expect the energy situation to be effectively addressed. Infrastructure has a similar issue, with the Hon Chris Bishop being Minister of Housing, Minister for Infrastructure, Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, Minister of Transport, Leader of the House, Associate Minister of Finance, as well as the Associate Minister for Sport and Recreation. Each government will pick and choose how it divvies up the portfolios and what departments it wants to create, but the

underlying problem remains the same of too many responsibilities spread too thin. Combined with a 3-year election cycle and lack of long term planning, this leads to chaos and the inevitable situation we face today. Other factors will also be at play, but clear structure is key. A structural reform is sorely needed and other countries like Norway provide a great example for a simpler, more efficient version.

We urgently need a long term infrastructure and energy plan. Whether the energy plan sits within infrastructure or is standalone but complementary is not critical at this stage, but we need more stability with proactive thinking and bipartisan agreement. Singapore is one great example of a country that plans decades ahead.

That is why my first petition calls for a true, long term bi-partisan energy strategy. Energy is a critical issue we face now so should be prioritised. A 50 year term is an invitation to think long term and acknowledge the economic requirements for investment. I specify the inclusion of coal and gas because they, along with LPG, diesel and petrol are still crucial for our current energy needs. Whether they are key for thermal firming, or commercial business, hospitality, process heat, feedstock, food production, household use or vehicles, they cannot be neglected and rapidly phased out. They need to be part of the energy plan, identifying where it is possible to phase these out and also where they will still be necessary, alongside the costs to transition and the cost to keep them in and who should cover those costs to ensure affordable energy for all. An energy plan must foster innovation and use of all of New Zealand's resources to enable our country to be self-sufficient.

Geothermal should play a much larger role for industry and electricity and we can learn from Iceland on how to use it effectively. Low temperature geothermal can also support district heating schemes, reducing pressure on the electricity grid. Wind and solar will contribute too but they aren't quick fixes. Rooftop solar is likely viable in many areas, but it requires funding mechanisms and grid upgrades to handle the intermittent load. The same goes for large scale solar and wind farms. These projects can't simply be dropped around the country without addressing the capacity constraints and impact on load management. Careful planning is essential. Batteries are part of the solution but they can't provide all the backup needed for a renewable grid. With no new hydro planned, we must reassess on how to make the most of our existing hydro system. Biomass should be utilised more and better supported. New fuels like biogas, hydrogen and others still being developed (like small nuclear) can also be part of the solution.

LPG will likely remain important for hospitality, residential use, and some industrial applications. Coal and gas will still be needed for the foreseeable future. While some argue that no new gas has been discovered in 20 years, the reality is that there have been finds, but for over 7 years there has been little incentive or opportunity for businesses to explore, so it shouldn't be ruled out. Likewise, coal remains essential until alternative firming solutions are available, and in some regions coal boilers may still be required where biomass or grid upgrades aren't practical. Not everyone can afford an EV and the grid isn't ready for full electrification so we need to make sure petrol and diesel stay as affordable options.

A long term energy plan doesn't lock in fuels and technologies, it should foster adoption at the right time with the right support and be based on evolving knowledge with regular review. Electricity cannot be treated in isolation. A solution should not be knocked down just because it doesn't fit your world view. It is about understanding the opportunities and the limitations. Blanket rules like outright bans on oil and gas, coal boilers, or strict air quality regulations aren't

helpful as they often ignore the regional realities and business needs, and they are especially unhelpful without a plan for alternatives. We have to be open to all ideas.

I suggest the establishment of an expert advisory panel with independent chair to guide government on developing this energy strategy and in its regular review. Experts need to be from various industries, universities and regions. It needs to include technical energy experts, for current and future technologies, alongside economic and finance specialists, industry and business, community, and policy makers for diverse viewpoints but also enable consensus.

The solution won't be perfect and not everyone in this country will agree, but we need to start and create a roadmap to improve. Is that overly simplistic? Maybe, but sometimes the simplest approach is the most effective. Not everyone has the means to lobby, or the platform to be heard, but a transparent avenue for government advice and influence, through a well-chosen panel of representatives is essential.

You can sign the petition for a long term energy strategy here:

<https://petitions.parliament.nz/70f070fd-8146-4996-0c29-08ddee776699>

Which brings me to the point on how to incentivise change. It usually comes down to a carrot or stick approach, or a mix of both. The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is firmly a stick. Designed to reduce fossil fuel use and make renewables more competitive, it has had some merit. But from the outset my concern has been that you can't artificially inflate fossil fuel prices without providing practical, affordable alternatives. Without them, all the ETS really does is push up business costs which flows through to higher prices for consumers. And in a globalised market, if local costs climb too high, overseas competitors will simply undercut us.

One must also consider the practical realities of implementation. For example, if a company still relies on gas today and expects to for the next 5 to 10 years, it is a clear signal that the alternative options like electricity or biomass aren't yet feasible. Why else would a business still use gas when prices have more than doubled and supply is uncertain? Simply, the market does not yet provide a workable alternative. The capital cost to implement new technology is extremely high, especially for process heat. A new industrial boiler or heat pump will cost millions, and the business case is made worse if a current asset hasn't even reached the end of its useful life. And that is before considering the additional millions often required to upgrade local electrical infrastructure.

There are many areas in New Zealand where the local infrastructure does not currently have the capacity for a business to use more electricity, or even support new generation. If capacity exists, electricity often costs more than gas or coal. That means new technology must be extremely efficient to make the business case stack up.

The Government Investment in Decarbonising Industry (GIDI) fund was designed to help with capital costs, but in practice it only benefited a select few businesses. Instead of taking money from already struggling companies and pooling it into the government's general fund, why not allow each business to reinvest its equivalent ETS costs directly into its own efficiency improvements and capital upgrades? That would create real change. As it stands currently, there is little logic behind the ETS.

Beyond process heat and business electricity, we have to also consider rising household costs. Because electricity generation is still included in the ETS, removing it would be a straightforward

way to lower power bills for everyone. Thermal firming is essential for security of supply, it is not a nice to have. The ETS adds no value to the electricity system.

To drive change we need carrots (and some sticks). Australia has recently taken an approach of large, targeted funding to help industry and households decarbonise. They have recognised that the cost of a rapid technology shift can't be carried by families and businesses alone, pushing these costs onto them only weakens the economy.

Short political cycles encourage short term thinking. Why would any government choose to make its balance sheet look bad within a three year term? Yet the investment of funding mechanisms like Australia pays off over time. That is why a long term energy strategy is essential. If we are going to use an ETS, use it when viable alternatives exist. It doesn't work under today's economic and energy realities. Importantly, the Paris Agreement does not mandate an ETS. Let's think broader and smarter.

You can sign the petition to rethink the ETS here: <https://petitions.parliament.nz/aa0d5099-d132-4786-0c28-08ddee776699>

I ask that you sign these petitions to help drive the right change for all New Zealanders. Let's remind the Government that their role is to make the right decisions that genuinely improve our lives. By signing these petitions you help to strengthen the collective voice. Please share with others.