

2019/2020 - 2023/2024

## **Statement of Intent**

Electoral Commission Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri



To be presented to the Minister of Justice and published on the Commission's website pursuant to section 149 of the Crown Entities Act 2004.

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Electoral Commission Level 10 34-42 Manners Street PO Box 3220 Wellington New Zealand

Phone: +64 4 495 0030 Fax: +64 4 495 0031 Email: enquiries@elections.govt.nz



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## Foreword

Voter expectations and voting behaviours have changed in recent years and the Electoral Commission has adapted to meet those expectations. We provide information and services to meet the increasingly diverse needs of New Zealand's communities and there is a growing expectation that services will be delivered at a time and in a place that is convenient.

The Commission sees itself at a tipping point where change must happen to meet these growing expectations and challenges that lie ahead.

Since the successful delivery of the 2017 General Election, the Commission has been working towards simplifying and modernising our services to better align them with the needs of electors, while at the same time ensuring high standards of integrity.

We have identified four key outputs that are the focus of our efforts. These are:

- Improving people's understanding of New Zealand's electoral system
- Making it simple and straightforward for people to enrol and vote
- Maintaining and protecting the integrity of the whole of the roll and the electoral process
- Preparing for and conducting well-run and riskmitigated electoral events

The 2020 General Election will be a very challenging electoral event. It will occur within a complex international and national environmental context. It includes the potential for significant legislative change and one or more referendums.

Looking further forward we will continue to review and refresh our services and activities such as our public education resources.

Maine Enoy

**Marie Shroff** Chair

Jane Meares Deputy Chair

Mindful of the complex environment we are operating in, and with the aims of increasing New Zealanders' participation and maintaining trust and confidence in the process, the Commission will continue to plan, prepare and be measured in our approach to the General Election in 2020.

We are privileged to work with, and have great confidence in the team of people at the Commission who have successfully managed our electoral system over multiple elections.



Alicia Wright Chief Electoral Officer

## Introduction

The Commission is an independent Crown Entity under the Crown Entities Act 2004 responsible for administering all aspects of Parliamentary elections, by-elections and referendums. It is independent of Ministerial direction other than giving effect to directions to support a whole of government approach as required under s107 of the Crown Entities Act 2004.

This Statement of Intent, covering the five year period 2019/20 to 2023/24 has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of section 141 of the Crown Entities Act 2004 and has been developed within the context of the Government's expectation that improved services are delivered within tight fiscal constraints. The functions and activities described below are subject to these fiscal constraints.

This document was prepared for submission largely by the previous Board.

#### **Functions**

The statutory objective of the Commission is to administer the electoral system impartially, efficiently, effectively, and in a way that;

- facilitates participation in parliamentary democracy;
- promotes understanding of the electoral system; and
- maintains confidence in the administration of the electoral system.

To fulfil its objectives the Commission:

- is impartial, acts in accordance with law, and maintains its independence;
- is committed to protecting electors' privacy;
- supports the rights of voters to vote without undue influence and in secret;
- undertakes community engagement to promote participation in elections, particularly in communities that have lower rates of participation;
- works with community groups and schools to promote understanding of MMP and how to participate;

- works to reduce barriers to participation, both for voters and for parties and candidates;
- provides electoral advice and guidance to parties, candidates and third parties;
- maintains a comprehensive and accurate elector roll;
- delivers timely and accurate election results;
- is open to public, judicial and parliamentary scrutiny.

#### **Activities**

The activities of the Commission in this period comprise:

- registering electors and maintaining the electoral rolls, including supplying the rolls to local authorities for the 2019 and 2022 local authority elections
- promoting public awareness of electoral matters including the conduct of education and information programmes
- conducting the 2020 and 2023 General Elections, including the allocation of broadcasting funding
- conducting by-elections and referendums as and when required
- administering compliance with electoral laws by making available information, including advisory opinions, to assist political parties, candidates, and third parties to meet their statutory obligations with respect to electoral matters
- supporting the boundary review process to be undertaken by the Representation Commission in 2019/20 and implementing any required changes to electorates
- registering political parties and party logos
- considering and reporting to the Minister and to the House on electoral matters including the provision of independent, high quality advice on proposed or desirable changes to electoral laws
- filling any list vacancies as and when they arise

#### **Strategic mission**

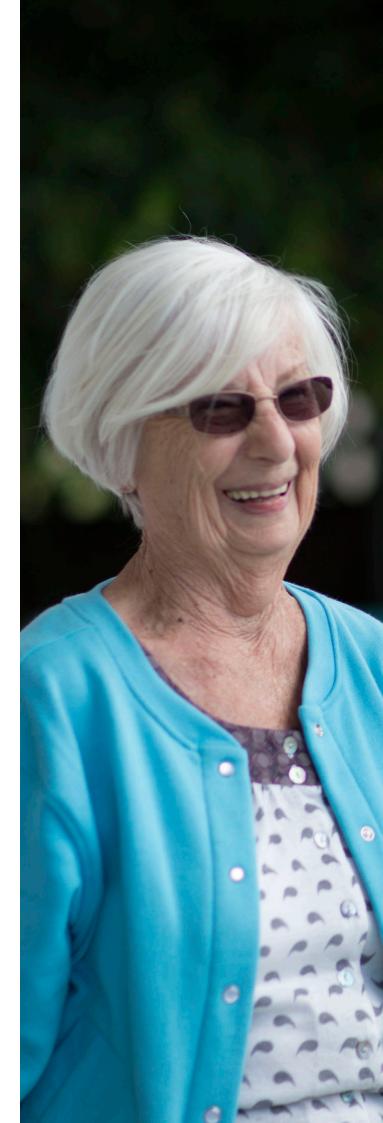
#### New Zealanders trust, value and take part in parliamentary elections

The Commission wants New Zealanders to understand their electoral system, to have trust and confidence in our administration of their electoral laws, to find enrolling and voting easy, and to value and exercise their right to vote.

#### **End state**

New Zealanders expect a democratic process which is free, fair and trustworthy. They expect secure systems that are easy to navigate, information to be provided in an accessible form irrespective of their individual circumstances, and that information be protected. Electors want to be able to enrol and update their enrolment details easily and conveniently, including during the election period when they want to enrol and cast their vote safely, at a time that suits and at locations that are convenient.

It is the Electoral Commission's goal to meet these expectations within the confines of legislation and other environmental factors.



## Context

### **Current state of Parliamentary** electoral administration

New Zealand has a high rate of enrolment and an accurate electoral roll when compared internationally. Over the last two elections turnout has increased.

Despite increased turnout there remains a need to increase levels of public awareness about electoral matters. There has been limited civics and citizenship education in schools and the community. The growing numbers of migrants to New Zealand have particular needs, especially those from countries with little or no democratic traditions or where systems are subject to manipulation and fraud.

The Commission regards education about the value of voting and encouraging participation as fundamental to supporting New Zealanders to take part in Parliamentary elections. In the main we looked to achieve this through enhanced communication with voters and with community partnerships as well as at schools, and with direct involvement with communities through our community engagement programme and network of community liaison and youth advocates.

Furthermore, in the 2017 election, increased accessibility and changing voter expectations had a positive impact on enrolment and voting levels. The impact is detailed in the Commission's report on the 2017 General Election published in April 2018.

The planning for the 2017 General Election focused on two critical priorities: promoting voter participation and finding ways to meet the changing needs and expectations of voters.

As part of this focus the Commission employed community engagement advisers and youth advocates and entered into strategic partnerships. We refreshed education programmes and public information and we enhanced access for voters by providing enrolment services in voting places and more accessible voting place locations and times – including for the first time shopping malls and supermarkets, and advance voting on the Sunday before election day and more evenings. The conduct of the election was successful and we saw growth in turnout of enrolled voters.

Voter behaviour showed three significant changes in 2017, which are forecast to grow again in 2020:

- increased votes cast in advance;
- increased demand for enrolling and voting at the same time during advance voting;
- increased special votes.

These three shifts require a step-change to meet service delivery expectations, and support our advance voting, enrolment and official count staff.

An ongoing challenge for the Commission is our current reliance on the postal service, which is rapidly diminishing and becoming increasingly expensive.

These changes are occurring within an international environment that presents some significant challenges for democracies around the world, including falling participation rates, mis-information and interference and physical and cyber security concerns.

To maintain confidence in the administration of the electoral system, continue to provide a good service to eligible electors, and issue results on time the Commission needs to deliver its services in new and better ways that continue to maintain integrity and elector privacy.

The Commission has reviewed how it delivers its services and identified how technology and process changes can be harnessed in future elections to maintain service levels, whilst continuing its focus on participation. Safety of people and information is a priority.

The Commission has identified what changes and improvements can be made for the 2020 election and towards 2026. This planning process is guided by the Commission's strategic mission, which will always be at the centre of the work the Commission undertakes. The outcomes framework described in this document shows the relationship between the Commission's services and activities and the outputs and impacts we are seeking to achieve, as a key part of a healthy democracy in New Zealand.

## **Outcomes Framework**

The framework below summarises our services and the results or impacts they will deliver towards our main goal of a healthy democracy.



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## **Operating Intentions**

The Commission serves as a steward or guardian of the democratic process in New Zealand and all our processes seek to protect it. The accuracy of the roll, secrecy of the ballot, confidence in the accuracy and timely provision of election results, and security (both physical and digital) all contribute to the acceptance of an election outcome as legitimate and to widespread trust in the electoral system.

We maintain this trust by :

1. ensuring all those who are eligible to take part have the opportunity to do so as easily as possible (accessibility) and

2. ensuring there are appropriate safeguards to protect the process and information held from the risk of manipulation or fraud (integrity).

Integrity and participation are core to protecting the health of New Zealand's democracy.

#### People have trust and confidence

New Zealand ranks second highest on Transparency International's survey of public sector corruption with a score of 87<sup>1</sup> and it has been in the top two countries since 2012. While this is something to celebrate, it would not take much for New Zealand to begin to fall. Risks such as foreign or domestic interference, security breaches, or fraud all have an impact on perceived levels of corruption. It would be naive to think such risks will not occur in New Zealand.

Maintaining integrity in the democratic process gives New Zealanders confidence in the country's electoral administration and strengthens how New Zealand's overall integrity is perceived internationally.

Of particular significance to New Zealand's democratic process is confidence in the integrity of the roll. The Commission holds significant personal information about every enrolled elector in New Zealand including their enrolment history. Maintaining trust and confidence in elections requires that the Commission be a careful steward of roll data, keeping it safe from inappropriate use. Misuse of electoral and other information could significantly undermine confidence in the Commission and in electoral participation.

Policies, processes and standards are in place to ensure that the data is used appropriately to the extent that we have the authority. It is timely, however, to review these to ensure they are fit for purpose in recognition of changing expectations and a changing environment.

Further to maintaining the accuracy and security of our data, the Commission also protects our electoral system by working with Parties, Candidates and Third Parties to help them to comply with their respective obligations. Easy to follow guidance and advice is provided to help maintain fair processes and systems.

The Commission aims to ensure voters are enfranchised by making voting places accessible and easy to use. Increasing participation reinforces the integrity of New Zealand's electoral system.

Finally, the Commission achieves trust and confidence in the electoral system through the successful delivery of accessible, robust and wellrun electoral events. These require long-term logistical planning and preparation to ensure that the Commission is ready to deliver by-elections, referendums and general elections when Parliament requires them (as well as other services such as the Māori Electoral Option, support of the Representation Commission and allocation of the Broadcasting Fund.

Successful delivery of electoral events and services is fundamental to providing the New Zealand public with trust and confidence in the Commission's functions.

#### **Our intentions**

The Commission wants to:

- maintain trust and confidence in the Parliamentary electoral system
- maintain its independence and impartiality, both actual and perceived
- ensure both the cyber security and physical security of its staff, property, materials, systems and information (especially the electoral roll)
- design, test and implement any changes to the system in ways that ensure continued accessibility
- prepare for and conduct well-run, riskmitigated electoral events.

#### More people take part

Our customers are all New Zealanders - with a focus on those people who can participate in New Zealand's electoral system – this is almost everyone in New Zealand who is 18 years or older. In 2018 this was approximately 3.6m people. Our customers include candidates who want to stand and parties that want to register.

The Commission wants to ensure New Zealanders have a healthy democracy by encouraging high levels of participation. This will be achieved through:

- ensuring that people have a good understanding of the electoral process, and
- making it simple & straightforward for people to take part

Understanding how New Zealand's electoral system works is critical to ensuring that people understand how to participate and feel confident in doing so.

#### **Our intentions:**

We will provide information and services at a place and time that is convenient and in a way that meets the needs of our customers. The Commission will use traditional methods to communicate with electors as well as our networks of community liaison and youth workers through our community engagement services and community partnerships. The Commission will provide accurate and sufficient information that is appropriate for target audiences. Information will cover:

- how to enrol and vote
- how New Zealand's democracy works, and
- the value of taking part.

The Commission wants to:

- improve understanding of New Zealand's electoral system
- get the right information in the right form to the right people
- actively encourage people to participate particularly young people and communities with traditionally lower participation
- review and further develop our approach to civics education, and communication with target groups.

#### **Making participation easier**

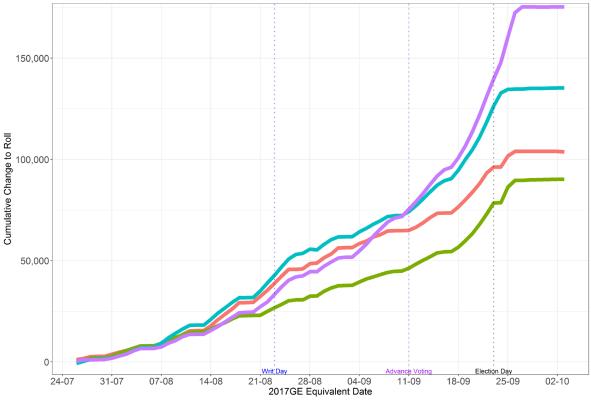
In addition to increasing participation through understanding, the Commission is working to make sure that our services are accessible, convenient and straight-forward to use. We are also responding to changes in the way that customers make use of our services.

#### Enrolling and voting at the same time

In 2017 our customers showed us that they appreciate being able to enrol when it suits them.

Writ Day is the date at which the electoral rolls used in voting places are printed. In 2017 enrolments after Writ Day grew by 65% over those in 2014. There were 130,000 enrolments after Writ Day. This is forecast to rise by between 90,000 and 130,000 in 2020. The current legislation requires those who enrol after Writ Day to complete a Special Vote which takes ten times longer to process. Special Votes are not included in the Preliminary Count on Election Day but are sent to their home electorate, qualified by the Registrar of Electors, and if found eligible are included in the Official Count processes.

#### Graph 1: Cumulative changes to the roll in the two months prior to recent general elections



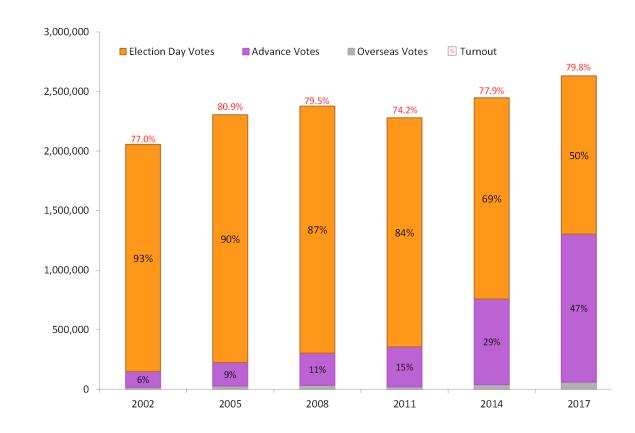
Election = 2008GE = 2011GE = 2014GE = 2017GE

#### Increased votes cast in advance

In 2017 our customers showed us that they appreciated the enhanced opportunities to vote when it suits them.

Advance voting levels grew significantly to 47% of all votes (1,240,740 votes) compared with 29.3% in 2014 and 14.7% in 2011. The Commission planned for this growth and was able to manage it.

The demand for advance voting and the ability to enrol and vote at a voting place will likely increase - for 2020 we will be assuming that advance voting will overtake election day voting and may grow to as much as 65%.



#### Graph 2: Comparison of election day, advance votes, and overseas votes in past general elections

### Accessible voting places and increased special declaration votes

In 2017 our customers showed us they appreciate the enhanced opportunities to vote where it suits.

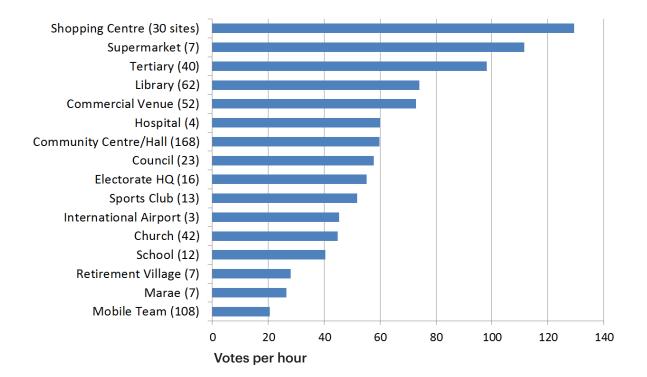
In line with the Commission's objective to make voting more accessible, wherever possible advance voting places were established where people live, work and congregate. In 2017 at least 94% of electors were within 5km of a voting place or advance voting place.

We focused on using spaces in highly visible and high traffic areas, such as libraries, community centres, schools, universities, polytechnics, wānanga and marae, and for the first time shopping centres and supermarkets. These new locations were extremely popular. We also provided mobile voting services in remote locations, Corrections facilities, hospitals and rest homes.

We worked with Foodstuffs North Island Limited and Scentre Group (Westfield) to trial the provision of voting services in supermarkets for the first time and to increase our presence in shopping malls. Almost 35,000 votes were taken in the seven supermarket voting places in the Auckland region. In the Te Atatū electorate, for example, in 2014, there were 7,873 advance votes. In 2017, this grew to 20,581. A total of 8,921 advance votes were taken at one supermarket alone. The voting place was open 10.30am to 7.30pm every day including the Sunday before election day.

We adapted our services to adjust to the open-air nature of operating in a shopping mall to ensure voters had a good voting experience. We came up with different approaches to managing voter flows and ensuring voter privacy.

Some voters said the supermarket was their only opportunity to vote. Disabled and elderly voters especially appreciated taking advantage of fully accessible parking, and being able to shop and vote at the same location.



#### Graph 3: Voting places by popularity

In 2017, there was a 35% increase in the number of special votes (446,287 special votes compared with 331,005 in 2014). Approximately 130,000 of the special votes were enrolled electors voting outside their electorate.

With the trend towards people enrolling later, and more people voting outside their electorate and from overseas, special votes are projected to continue to grow significantly as the table below illustrates.

	2011 Actual	2014 Actual	2017 Actual	2020 Projection
Estimated Eligible Population	3,276,000	3,391,100	3,569,830	3.7m - 3.8m
Enrolled Electors	3,070,847	3,140,417	3,298,009	3.4m - 3.5m
Electors added to roll after Writ Day	56,971	79,445	130,757	180k - 260k
Total Votes Cast	2,278,989	2,446,297	2,630,173	2.8m- 3.0m
Total Advance Votes	334,558	717,579	1,240,740	1.3m - 2.0m
Total Special Votes	263,469	331,005	446,287	550k - 700k

Note: The estimated eligible population number is based on data from the 2013 Census. The age of this data has an impact on the reliability of estimations and projections for 2020 and beyond. Estimations also do not include possible legislative changes that may affect voting and enrolment patterns.



Special Votes have to be transported back from overseas, and from electorates around the country to the electorate where the voter is enrolled.

The deadline for special votes to be received by Returning Officers is ten days after election day. This period is required to allow time for special votes to be returned through postal services and overseas consulates. Special votes delivered after the deadline must be disallowed. Reduced postal services make this timeframe even more difficult.

Special Voting significantly increases the accessibility of New Zealand's electoral system. However, the potential for significant growth has important implications for future elections. Special votes growing to 700,000 – 800,000 by 2026 would place so much pressure on the official count it would place it would no longer be possible to declare the final result within the two week period.

Additionally, as the proportion of special votes increases, the election night provisional result would give less and less certainty as to the final result. This could impact on government formation negotiations.

#### **Our intentions**

The Commission will:

- expand into further retail locations for future elections
- increase accessibility to enrolment and voting services and concentrate voting places in easily accessible locations such as supermarkets and malls

- reduce special declaration votes while maintaining accessibility
- make enrolment and voting easier and faster
- introduce new methods of voting for remote voters
- improve digital enrolment options
- further develop options for enrolling and voting at the same time (subject to legislative change).

#### Candidates, parties and third parties

Candidates, political parties and third parties are critical to the health of democracy. They each have compliance obligations to fulfil and the Commission provides information and advisory opinions on points of law to make understanding and meeting these obligations as easy as possible.

The Commission also independently administers a broadcasting allocation where it provides state funding to eligible political parties for broadcasting election messages during the election period.

Over the period the Commission will investigate ways of making participation easier so that candidates, political parties and third parties do not see these obligations as barriers to participation.

#### **Partnerships**

The 2017 General Election was the second consecutive election with increased turnout.

Participation gains are hard won and the Commission wants to build on them. Various factors affect turnout, some of which are outside of the Commission's control (e.g. weather, contestability of the election, and interest and understanding of policy matters). The Commission works hard to provide opportunities for participation over which we have much more control e.g. accessibility and availability of voting places; ease of enrolling and updating.

The Commission's approach to increasing participation in part relies on partners who can help us engage with communities and get information and services to voters. Examples of partnering successes include:

- Foodstuffs (North) providing advance voting places in some of its New World and Pak'nSave stores
- Te Puni Kōkiri (TPK) providing funding for additional Community Engagement Advisors and Youth Advocates
- Supporting On the Fence, Policy and Vote Compass online tools - which provide voters with clear information about parties and their policies. This helps address one of the major barriers to participation.
- Pasifika Futures extending our reach into Pacific communities as a Pacific Whānau Ora agency
- Auckland Regional Migrant Services Trust and the Chinese New Settlers Services Trust reaching Asian, Indian and new migrant and refugee communities in Auckland.

Other partnerships include the Warehouse, Countdown, Farmlands and Work and Income Offices who provided customers and staff with enrolment and voting messages. The Commission also received support from other public sector agencies to help find suitable properties for electorate headquarters.

Partnerships are critical to the Commission successfully delivering its services. These partnerships have evolved over time and the Commission will strengthen the partnerships it has and develop new ones with a similar passion for communities. We will identify and work with partners who see their community's participation in elections as mutually advantageous.

#### **Our intentions**

The Commission wants to:

- Increase turnout amongst Māori, youth, Pacific peoples, Asian, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Ensure voting places are in easily accessible locations while maintaining safety of people and materials
- Investigate ways of making participation and compliance easier for political parties, candidates and third parties
- Develop and implement a strategic approach for engaging with stakeholders
- Implement tools and processes to support improved partnerships and stakeholder management.



#### **Our people**

The successful delivery of our services is highly dependent on the skills, experience, judgment and integrity of staff. In 2016 the Commission took the maintenance of the electoral roll into its structure, growing from 26 to 102 permanent staff, many of whom came from Enrolment Services, NZ Post. This move, which is the first time in nearly 40 years where all aspects of Parliamentary electoral administration is handled by one agency, creates significant opportunity for improvements to the Commission's services to its customers.

The Commission will implement new ways of working together that capitalise on the benefits of this fully integrated organisation. We aim to have engaged, diverse and productive staff who are committed to providing an excellent service.

During the period of this Statement of Intent we will build on the approaches already begun to enhance our performance and build our capability. The planned actions are outlined below, and will be reported in the Commission's Annual Reports.

#### **Good Employer**

The Commission recognises that a diverse workforce is essential to deliver the services we provide to the public of New Zealand. We aim to provide equal employment opportunities to make the most of the talents and diversity in the workforce. We assess our status as a good employer against the elements and criteria set out by the Human Rights Commission. Over the term of this statement we will continue to ensure that all elements are in place and working well.

#### **Our intentions**

- Invest in our people capability
- Further develop our leadership and management capability
- Leverage technology and systems development to better support staff

## Current and future wellbeing

The activities of the Commission impact on the current and future wellbeing of New Zealand through our significant contribution to a healthy democracy. Our work aligns with the Treasury's Living Standards Framework in the following ways<sup>2</sup>:

Independent, fair and trustworthy democratic processes are an expectation of life in New Zealand, and a key factor supporting participation in the electoral system (*civic engagement and governance*) as well as people's general sense of trust, trust in Parliament and perception of low corruption levels (social capital domain). The Commission's core services provide information about, and opportunities for, *civic engagement and governance* (as measured by *voter turn-out*). Our services also contribute to *cultural identity* - the extent to which people feel a sense of belonging to New Zealand, expressed by and enhanced by participation in our democratic system. We also support the Crown-*Māori relationship* through active partnerships with Māori to facilitate engagement and provide enrolment and voting opportunities.

A healthy democracy relies on citizens having trust in the integrity of the system and the administration of electoral processes. The Commission serves as a steward or guardian of the democratic process in New Zealand and we have well-established mechanisms and systems to protect that process and the enabling data. The Commission will continue to maintain and enhance these mechanisms and systems, addressing potential risk in this area and providing us with greater resilience to respond to any challenges (*risk and resilience*).

<sup>2</sup> Items in italics are elements of the draft Living Standards framework – either domains or measures within the domains



## Assessing our performance

The following table identifies the impacts that the Commission is working to achieve and the key measures that we will use to monitor our performance. Targets are given for the three year 2020 electoral cycle, including 2018 for reference. Year 1 of the electoral cycle begins on 1st July in the year following a General Election.

Further measures at the output level are included in the Commission's 2019/20 Statement of Performance Expecations.

For a number of the performance measures given below, there can be considerable "seasonal" variation. For example, the number of enrolled electors can vary significantly throughout the threeyear electoral cycle. Numbers will be highest at the time of a general election. They will be lower at other times and may change suddenly at points during the year, for example after a routine roll-maintenance procedure to maintain roll accuracy. For this reason, comparisons with the most recent reporting period may be misleading, and trends across time will be more informative.

It should also be noted that while the Commission works hard to encourage voter turn-out, various factors may affect a person's decision to participate, some of which are outside of the Commission's control. Weather, contestability of the election, and interest and understanding of policy matters can all affect how engaged voters are with a particular election. For this reason, while voter turnout measures are included in the Commission's performance measures , these need to be considered in the context of opportunities for participation over which the Commission has much more control e.g. accessibility and availability of voting places. These opportunity factors are reported on by electoral event.

# Impact: People have trust and confidence in the electoral system

Key Performance Measures	Year 1 18/19	Year 2 19/20	Year 3 20/21	Reporting Frequency
Percentage of accuracy of the electoral roll (determined by annual independent research)*	85% (or more)	85% (or more)	95% (or more)	Annual
Percentage of voters satisfied or very satisfied with the voting process		80%		By General Election
Key GE2020 preparation milestones achieved		100% completed	sted	Annual

## Impact.. More people take part in the electoral process

Key Performance Measures	Year 1 18/19	Year 2 19/20	Year 3 20/21	Reporting Frequency
Number of people enrolled (daily average for the period) *	3.29m	3.24m	3.41m	Annual
		3.45m		By General Election
Number of 18 to 24 year olds enrolled (daily average for the period)*	0.315m	0.270m	0.325m	Annual
		0.34m		By General Election
Number of enrolled electors of Mãori descent	0.47m	0.46m	0.48m	Annual
		0.49m		By General Election
Turnout of enrolled electors		2.691m		By General Election
Turnout of enrolled electors who are 18 to 24 years old		0.234m		By General Election
Turnout of enrolled electors of Māori descent		0.357m		By General Election
Percentage of enrolment transactions that are conducted digitally $^{\star}$	10%	15%	35%	Annual

\* Note: Measure included in the Commission's Estimate of Appropriations

Year 1 begins on 1 July in the year following a General Election.



#### Electoral Commission Te Kaitaki Take Kōwhiri

Level 10, 34-42 Manners Street PO Box 3220 Wellington 6140 New Zealand

(04) 495 0030 enquiries@elections.govt.nz

vote.nz elections.nz

