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# **Electoral Commission**

*Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri*

## **Statement of Intent**

**2014/15 – 2020/21**

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Information on election results: [www.electionresults.govt.nz](http://www.electionresults.govt.nz)



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## Foreword

The Commission wants New Zealanders to understand their electoral system, to have confidence in our administration of their electoral laws, to find enrolling and voting easy, and to value and exercise their right to vote. In short, we want New Zealanders to trust, value and take part in Parliamentary elections. This Statement of Intent sets out how, over the next three general elections, we intend to advance this vision.

In our view, we are now at a point where significant investment is required to ensure New Zealand's democracy remains healthy and its electoral administration fit for purpose. Democracy is not something New Zealanders should take for granted. The values and culture that underpin it need to be learned and nurtured. As New Zealand society changes and diversifies there is a growing need for citizenship education and engagement. And as New Zealanders' expectations to be able to access government services online continue to grow so will their expectations to be able to vote online grow more insistent.

Therefore, by 2020 we want -

- Voters to have the option to vote electronically either online or by telephone from anywhere in the world;
- Most voters choosing to enrol and update their enrolment details online;
- Voting in voting places to be simpler (including fewer special votes);
- The vast majority of voters to have confidence in the administration of elections;
- Eighty-five percent of young people enrolled and
- Eighty percent of all voters voting.

These are ambitious goals which we propose be tackled incrementally over the next three general elections. A number will need policy approvals, legislative change and significant investment to proceed.

The voter participation goal is particularly ambitious. Voter turnout is declining in most developed democracies but in New Zealand the decline is particularly steep. Turning the current trend around will not be easy and a concerted effort will be required from all sectors of society. However, high voter participation is fundamental to a healthy democracy. In our view, therefore, a whole-of-government commitment to encouraging high voter participation is essential and an aspirational target warranted.



Hon Sir Hugh Williams QC  
Chair



Jane Huria CNZM  
Deputy Chair



Robert Peden  
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 and referenda. It is independent of Ministerial direction.

This Statement of Intent covering the seven year period, 2014/15 to 2020/21 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.

## Nature and Scope of the Commission's Functions

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

- (a) facilitates participation in parliamentary democracy; and
- (b) promotes understanding of the electoral system; and
- (c) maintains confidence in the administration of the electoral system.

The functions of the Electoral Commission for the period covered by this statement comprise the impartial, efficient and effective administration of the New Zealand electoral system encompassing at a minimum:

- registration of electors and maintenance of electoral rolls including the conduct of the Maori Electoral Option when scheduled
- registration of political parties and party logos
- administration of compliance with electoral laws including making available information, including advisory opinions, to assist political parties, candidates, and third parties to meet their statutory obligations in respect of electoral matters administered by the Commission
- promoting public awareness of electoral matters including the conduct of education and information programmes
- administration of General Elections, including the allocation of broadcasting time and funding, in 2014, 2017 and 2020
- conduct of by-elections and referenda as and when required;
- consider and report to the Minister or to the House on electoral matters including the provision of independent, high quality advice on proposed or desirable changes to the electoral laws, and
- allocation of General Election broadcasting time and money
- support the work of the Representation Commission

## Strategic Objectives – 2014/15 to 2020/21

### The Commission's vision for Parliamentary elections in NZ

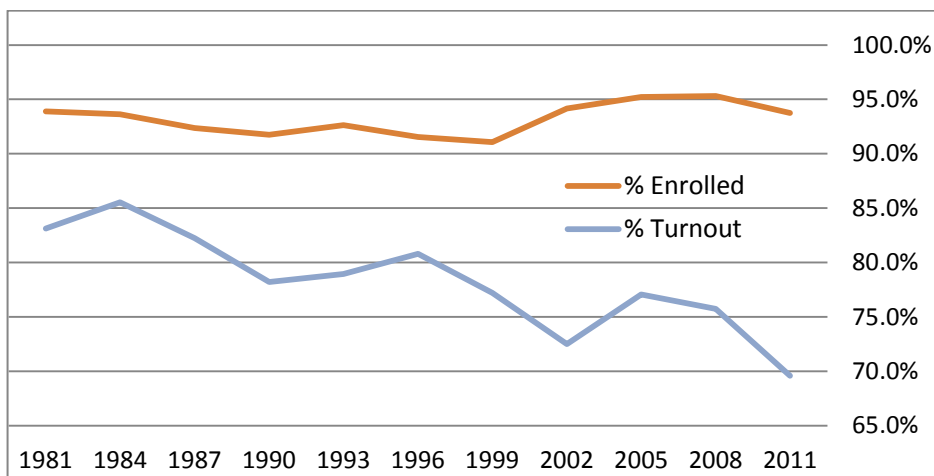
The Commission wants New Zealanders to understand their electoral system, to have trust and confidence in our administration of their electoral laws, to find enrolling and voting easy, and to value and exercise their right to vote.

In short, we want New Zealanders to trust, value and take part in Parliamentary elections.

### Current state of Parliamentary electoral administration in NZ

New Zealand still has a high rate of enrolment and an accurate electoral roll. However, voter turnout is in steep decline.

**New Zealand General Election Enrolment and Turnout by Voting Age Population 1981 – 2011**



There are generally low levels of public awareness about electoral matters and limited civics and citizenship education in schools or the community. The growing numbers of migrants to New Zealand have particular needs in this regard, especially those from countries with little or no democratic traditions.

The Commission has a small core of permanent staff and employs a large temporary field staff to deliver elections. The Commission's focus has been on making it easy to enrol and vote rather than addressing the question of why one should vote. While technology is extensively used to manage the electoral rolls and support the delivery of elections the casting and counting of votes is, by law, a manual and paper based process. This makes it easy for the public to understand and trust, difficult to abuse, and easily auditable.

Our post-election research shows voters find it is easy to enrol and vote and voters express high levels of satisfaction with the voting experience. Marginal improvements to voting services within the current manual processes will be possible but significant improvements are likely to require legislative and technological change and funding.

Most New Zealanders still prefer to vote in person at voting places, but a large number (37.1%) would prefer to vote online<sup>1</sup>. Some voters with disabilities find it difficult or impossible to vote unassisted using current methods. 14.7% of voters voted before election day in 2011 and the number of voters choosing to vote before election day is increasing by around 25% every election.

The electoral legislation has not been comprehensively reviewed in decades. Despite the law drafters' best efforts to modernise the legislation as opportunities arise, it remains in parts unduly prescriptive or otherwise unsuited for modern electoral administration.

<sup>1</sup> 2011 New Zealand Elections Study

## Encouraging voter participation

The legitimacy and health of Parliamentary democracy depends upon high voter participation. For this reason the steep downward trend in voter turnout at Parliamentary elections over the last 30 years is of great concern. It is in New Zealand's national interest that this trend be reversed and, in the Commission's view, this needs to become a matter of Government priority with multi-party support.

The trend will not be quickly or easily reversed. Each new generation is currently less likely to vote than the last. The causes behind this are complex. More research will be required to better understand the causes, identify solutions, and measure progress. But ultimately it will come down to New Zealanders valuing their democracy and their role in keeping it strong.

The Commission believes New Zealand should set itself some ambitious goals. The Commission would like to see 80% of those eligible to enrol voting at the 2020 election. This would be a large increase over the 2011 rate of 69%. But it would put New Zealand back amongst the world's leading democracies.

The Commission would like to see 85% of 18 to 24 year olds enrolled by 2020. This also would be a large increase over the 2011 rate of 78%. The Commission expects that technological solutions that make it very easy for young people to enrol and for the Commission to keep in touch with them will be required to achieve this.

The Commission recognises that Māori, Pasifika, and new migrants have lower participation rates than others and will require particular attention.

These are not things the Commission will be able to achieve on its own. Most of the factors that influence participation are outside the Commission's control. A concerted effort will therefore be required by those with the capacity to influence voter participation including politicians, political parties, public servants, the media, academics, educationalists, and community leaders and influencers.

For the 2014/15 year the Commission will deliver its 2014 voter participation strategy, published in 2013, which includes –

- Starting a national discussion on the implications of declining voter participation;
- Providing public information and education resources that facilitate and encourage participation; and
- Research on what affects participation.

The Commission will report to Parliament via the Minister of Justice after the 2014 election on the outcome at that stage of the national discussion on voter participation and next steps.

For the 2017 and 2020 election cycles the Commission intends to seek the funding necessary to progressively expand its capacity to provide public information on enrolment and voting, and to encourage participation and maintain public confidence in the integrity of elections. This will include expanding the Commission's schools and community programmes, in addition to a greater budget allocation for effective public information campaigns.

We want 90% of voters to have high trust and confidence in the administration of elections.

## Making it easy to enrol and vote

For the 2014 election, voters with a RealMe account will for the first time be able to fully enrol online. For the 2017 and 2020 elections the Commission will be looking to make it even simpler for people to enrol online, to keep their details up-to-date, and to receive information about upcoming electoral events. If we are successful, by 2020 most voters will be choosing to enrol and update their details online

At the 2014 election the Commission will enable overseas voters to return their ballot paper and declaration by uploading an image of them to the Commission's secure website. We will also be providing a phone dictation service for voters who are blind, or partially blind or have another physical disability that means they are unable to mark the ballot paper without assistance. However, the disability sector has made it clear that they still want an online voting solution.

For the 2017 election the Commission would like to provide some voters (perhaps overseas voters and voters with disabilities) with the option to vote electronically either online or by phone. The

Commission would like to make these options available to all voters for the 2020 election. These would be additional voting channels, rather than replacing the traditional voting methods.

E-voting has the potential to improve access to voting – especially for those sections of the community for whom paper-based ballots or physical attendance at voting places results in accessibility difficulties or an unsatisfactory voting experience. The availability of e-voting is unlikely by itself to motivate young people to vote. However, as young people become motivated to vote the Commission expects many will strongly prefer to vote online. The Commission needs to be in a position to meet that demand if electoral administration is to remain relevant and fit for purpose. Legislative change and additional funding would be required.

For the 2017 and 2020 elections the Commission will also look for ways to improve the speed, efficiency and accuracy of the services we provide in voting places. In particular we will look for ways to reduce the number and impact of ‘special votes’ – that is, voters who are not on the printed rolls or vote outside their electorate – which take at least five times as long as ordinary votes to process (over a quarter of a million special votes were cast in 2011).



## Our Operating Environment

### General Elections

#### Timing

General Elections normally occur in the third year of the parliamentary cycle. The actual date will not be known until announced by the Prime Minister, traditionally 7-8 weeks before voting day, although for 2011 and 2014 the date was announced well in advance. Until the date is announced the uncertainty around the date of each election is one of the major challenges in organising such a large-scale event. A number of important steps, for example employment of field staff and the procurement of voting places, cannot be completed until the election date is known.

#### Planning

Organising for a General Election of a quality which will maintain public confidence requires detailed planning to commence as soon as the previous General Election has been completed and analysed.

In the six months following an election we review our systems and performance, identifying beneficial operational and policy changes including any proposals for legislative reform, prepare the post-election report and participate in parliamentary reviews. Over the following eighteen months we undertake and test any required or approved updates to systems and processes. From that point onward we begin implementing our plan for delivering the next election including putting in place the temporary infrastructure and systems, and recruiting and training the temporary field force.

#### Results

Accurate, progressive and timely preliminary results on election night are important as they enable discussions to start at the political level on the shape of the future government. This is important to the credibility of the election itself. At the 2011 General Election 90% of the results were in by 10pm, that is, within 3 hours of the close of voting, and the balance by 11.30pm. The results are collated in our Election Management System and are fed to the website [www.electionresults.govt.nz](http://www.electionresults.govt.nz) and to the media within 2 minutes of being entered into the system by Returning Officers in the electorates.

The legal processes required to produce the official results over the two weeks following election day usually receive little public attention, compared with the focus on election night results. The exception to this is where recounts are required; such as following the 2011 General Election.

The post-election processes not only bring special votes into the count but recount the votes counted on election night. A number of detailed checks are also made, for example in relation to the electoral rolls, to ensure that the official results are completely accurate and form a proper basis for government formation.

### Parliamentary Vacancies

#### By-elections

A by-election to fill a vacancy in an electorate seat can occur at any time and is a major operation in its own right. Many of the steps necessary to manage a General Election are required although the scale is much smaller.

A by-election must be held within seven weeks of a vacancy arising. The Commission always has plans in place to manage by-elections and carries stocks of supplies and equipment in readiness should one arise.

#### List Seats

When a vacancy arises in the seat of a list Member of Parliament, the vacancy is filled by the Electoral Commission declaring elected the next available member on the party's list (who remains a member of the party and is willing to be elected). Filling a vacancy in a list seat is a comparatively simple process: usually completed on the same day the warrant is issued to fill the vacancy.

## Referenda

### Government Initiated Referenda

A Government initiated referendum is a referendum promoted by the Government. It can be binding or indicative (non-binding) and pose more than one question or questions with more than two possible answers. Legislation is required to enable a Government initiated referendum to be held unless it is conducted by postal vote under the Referenda (Postal Voting) Act 2000. The last Government initiated referendum was on the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) voting system and was held with the 2011 General Election.

### Citizen's Initiated Referenda

A citizen's initiated referendum (CIR) must be held if at least 10% of enrolled electors sign a petition calling for it. Two CIR were held with the 1999 General Election which resulted in voter confusion, queues and congestion in voting places and significant delays in the release of the Parliamentary election night results. To avoid these problems, legislation was enacted in 2000 to enable CIR to be held by postal vote and in 2009 the first CIR to be conducted by postal vote was successfully delivered.

The Commission developed its own software in 2013 to enable the electronic processing of postal voting papers. The system was used successfully with the 2013 CIR on assets sales.

Conducting a CIR with a General Election or by postal vote remains a significant logistical exercise. The Commission would normally need a minimum of 6 months notice to prepare for a CIR with a General Election and 3 months for a postal vote.

## Electoral Rolls

The foundation for a successful election is an up-to-date and accurate electoral roll. The rolls are updated on a daily basis – they may be required for an electoral event at any time. The Commission assumed statutory responsibility for the enrolment functions on 1 July 2012 but New Zealand Post continues to carry out the functions under delegation. At the 2011 General Election 93.7% (2008 – 95.3%) of the eligible population (3,276,000) were enrolled.

## Electoral Boundaries

The number of electorates and their boundaries, both general and Māori, are set by the independent Representation Commission after each 5 yearly census and the running of the Māori Electoral Option.

The Representation Commission is headed by an independent Chair appointed by the Governor-General. The Chief Electoral Officer is a member and the funding of the Representation Commission is provided through the Commission's appropriation. The Electoral Commission also provides administrative services to the Representation Commission.

The Representation Commission last convened in October 2013 and published final electoral boundary changes in April 2014.

## Māori Participation

Māori may enrol on a Māori electoral roll and vote in a Māori electorate or enrol on the general roll and vote in a general electorate. The Māori Electoral Option enables Māori enrolled in either general electorates or Māori electorates to switch rolls. The option is run after the census but before the Representation Commission starts work. The last Māori Electoral Option ran between 25 March 2013 and 24 July 2013

Voter turnout in the Māori electorates is significantly lower than in general electorates. To reduce barriers for Māori we:

- provide information in te Reo Māori in our key communications, including the EasyVote pack
- undertake face to face outreach programmes that encourage Māori to enrol and vote
- ensure those voting on the Māori roll get the same services as those voting on the general roll

- integrate counting of votes for Māori electorates with the counting of votes for general electorates, so that results can be reported at the same time

### **Electoral Legislation**

The Commission provides advice on proposed legislation or desirable legislation changes, working as required with policy advisors in the Ministry of Justice. As an administrator it is able to bring a unique practical insight into the workings of the electoral laws. Its statutory functions allow it to provide advice to the Minister of Justice and the House of Representatives as requested. Our statutory powers enable us to give proactive advice if we consider it necessary to discharge our functions.

It is highly desirable that any amendments to electoral legislation affecting the delivery of the election are enacted by the end of the second year of the cycle.

### **Broadcasting Allocation**

Registered parties can apply to the Electoral Commission for consideration for an allocation of money to broadcast election programmes, and for free time for opening and closing addresses provided by Television New Zealand and Radio New Zealand.

The allocation is generally made by June in an election year - there is no allocation for a by-election, nor directly to electorate candidates. Part 6 of the Broadcasting Act 1987 sets out the criteria the Commission must apply and the process it must follow.

### **Compliance & Advice**

The Commission prepares and publishes a wide range of guidance on the electoral process and in particular the requirements on all participants in electoral events. In addition any person may also ask the Electoral Commission to provide advice on whether, in its opinion, an advertisement constitutes an election advertisement under the law.

Key publications include the following guidance handbooks – all available on our website: [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz)

- Party Secretary Handbook
- Candidate Handbook
- Guidance for MPs - election advertising rules
- Third Party Handbook - parliamentary elections
- Media Handbook - parliamentary elections

The Commission is also responsible for monitoring compliance with electoral expenditure and donation and loan rules which requires advice and review of returns.

## Organisational Health and Capability

The key issues underpinning the Commission’s approach to maintaining and enhancing organisational health and capability include the need to:

- Deliver productivity and performance enhancements while respond to our operating environment and delivering on organisational priorities
- Financial sustainability
- Meet state sector good employer expectations

### Enhanced Productivity and Performance Improvement

During the period of this Statement of Intent we will work on five key productivity drivers in order to enhance our performance and build our capability. The planned actions in each of the areas are:

Productivity Driver	Actions
Investing in our people capability	<p>Examine and assess on a regular basis our capability mix to ensure it is fit-for-purpose</p> <p>Ensure we maintain a relevant and appropriate retention and remuneration programme for high performing staff</p> <p>Continue to train and develop staff in appropriate skill areas and in line with emerging technologies and methodologies relevant to the work of the Commission</p>
Leadership and management capability	<p>Develop a leadership and management development programme to build individual and collective leadership and management capability</p> <p>Continue with the annual Board self-assessment and development programme in addition to the staff engagement surveys to be run annually</p>
Organisational design and organising work efficiently and effectively	<p>Develop and work toward implementation of an updated organisation design and performance and accountability mechanisms</p> <p>Continue to support flexible work practices</p>
Leveraging technology and systems development	<p>Develop our capability to offer web-based services (e.g. online enrolment, and public education)</p> <p>Continuous review of our records management system to ensure efficient information storage and retrieval and that we continue to meet government compliance requirements including no privacy breaches</p>
Risk Management	<p>Continue to refine our approach to risk management and our framework that encompasses recruitment and retention, physical event/disaster and operation continuity, reputation, confidentiality and integrity of information, and operational risk</p> <p>Implement health and safety initiatives</p>

### Financial Sustainability

The Commission is funded through a mixture of fixed and variable funding. The mix allows for funding to be varied to offset changes in population and price over the three year electoral cycle. Additional funding is provided as and when required to cover one-off electoral events such as by-elections, referenda, the five yearly Māori Electoral Option, and support for the Representation Commission.

Our annual budgets are structured accordingly and are reviewed regularly to ensure we are meeting the Government's expectations for efficiency and effectiveness.

Variable funding requests for the 2017 electoral cycle, currently forecast at \$25m will be sought in 2014/15. In addition funding to undertake the conduct of the Māori Electoral Option and support the work of the Representation Commission following the signalled 2018 Census will be sought when they are confirmed by Cabinet.

### **Computer Systems**

The Commission operates two core systems. One covers enrolment and the rolls. This system is built on an open-source platform and has been continuously updated throughout its life. The system is considered fit for purpose.

The second system covers the conduct of electoral events. The Election Management System (EMS) is a legacy system that is increasingly vulnerable to security and maintenance risks. The system will meet our requirements for the 2014 General Election but will not be suitable for 2017 without significant upgrades likely to cost several million dollars.

The Commission's intention is, subject to funding, to replace the election management system in time for the 2017 general election. Firm estimates for the cost of replacing the system will be available at the end of the tender process in August 2014. The current estimate for completely replacing the system is \$2.5m.

### **Capital Expenditure**

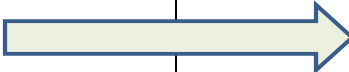
The Commission does not have a large asset base. The Wellington national office is leased and the fit-out is minimal. The key assets we have are the two software systems that allow us to manage our electoral and enrolment activity. The software for our core election management system is targeted for replacement before the 2017 General Election as mentioned above. The Commission has no plans to invest in anything beyond the cyclical replacement of office IT equipment and the redevelopment of the EMS system.

### **Good Employer**

We have a core workforce of 25 at National Office, and NZ Post Enrolment Services operates with 75 staff. The workforce expands to 4,500 in the lead-up to and following a General Election, and a further 15,000 on election day.

The Commission recognises that a diverse workforce is required 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 of all our people. 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.

## Summary of Initiatives through to 2020/21

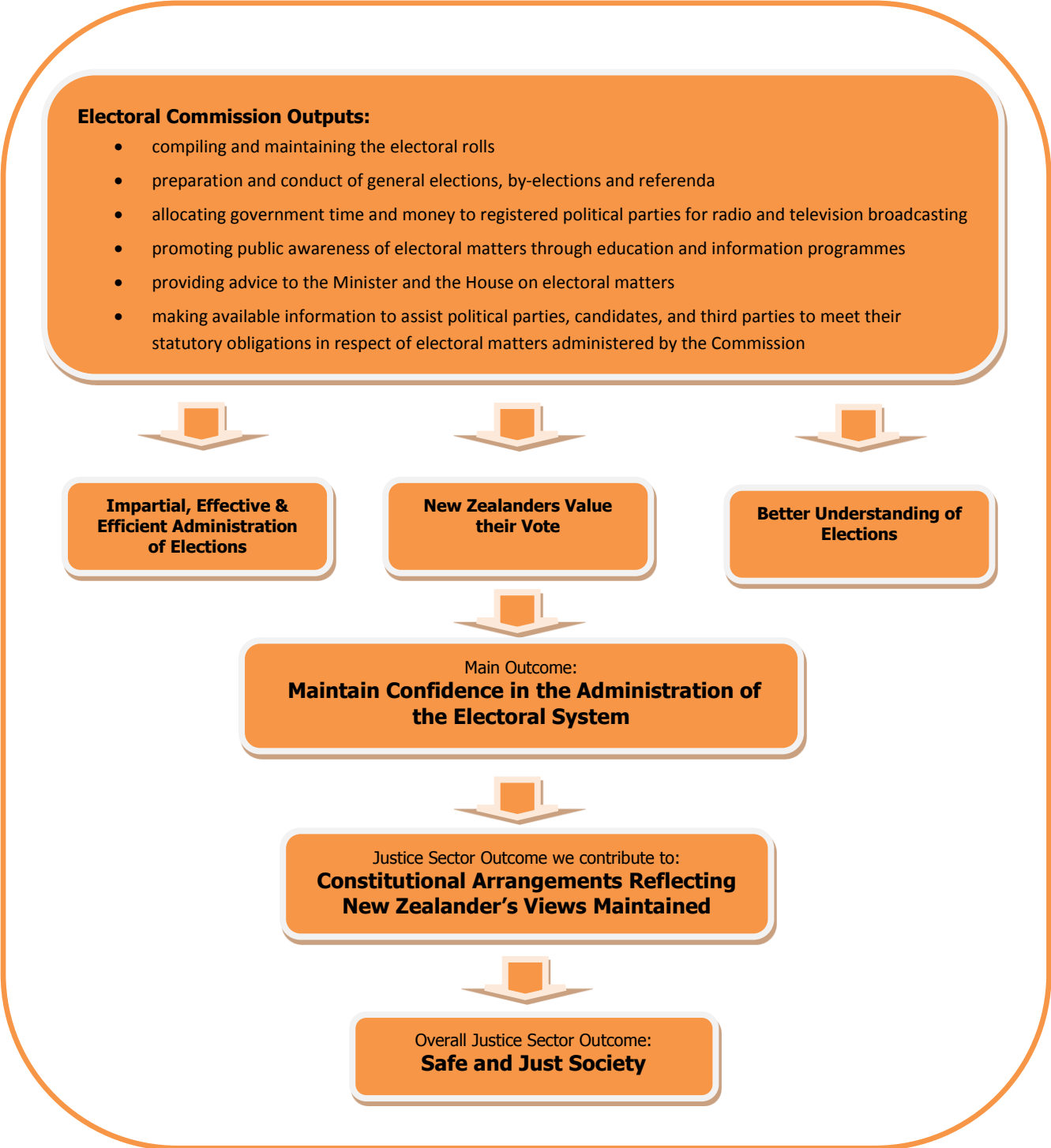
Strategic Initiative:	2014 Electoral Cycle		2017 Electoral Cycle			2020 Electoral Cycle		
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Facilitating Participation</b>								
Overseas Voters	<b>Overseas voter upload system:</b> Development and testing	<b>Overseas voter upload system:</b> Implementation and rollout for September 2014 General						
Blind or Physically Disabled Voters	<b>Telephone dictation voting system:</b> Development and testing	<b>Telephone dictation voting system:</b> Implementation and rollout for September 2014 General						
E-Enrolment	<b>Full on-line enrolment option:</b> Development and testing	<b>Full on-line enrolment:</b> Implementation and rollout for September 2014 General	<b>Simple on-line tool for enrolment:</b> ie: Smart Phone App Development					
E-Voting		<b>E-Voting Option:</b> solution definition	<b>E-Voting Option:</b> subject to funding approval and legislative change: solution development and testing		<b>E-Voting Option:</b> roll-out on-line voting option for some voters at the 2017 General Election			<b>E-Voting:</b> roll-out on-line voting option for all voters at the 2020 General Election
<b>Encouraging Participation</b>								
Raising awareness and building support for action	- Development of strategy - Conference on 29 May 2014: 'Valuing our Vote: Improving Voter Turnout in New Zealand'	- Promoting a national discussion on the implications of declining voter participation - Research on what affects voter participation - Report on outcome of discussion and next steps - Secure Government commitment to high participation goal						
Inform and motivate public		- Schools and community engagement programme - Public information campaign	Expanded Public Information, schools, and community education campaigns for 2017 General Election cycle			Public Information, schools, and community education campaigns for 2020 General Election cycle		
<b>Supporting Participation</b>								
Systems Upgrade		<b>EMS Re-Development:</b> Phase 1 (Mar-Dec 2014) requirements definition and supplier procurement Phase 2 (Jan 2015-Jun 2016) solution development Phase 3 (Jul-Dec 2016) testing and cut-over						
	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>

# Assessing Performance

## Outcomes framework

The Justice Sector has an aspirational outcome that all New Zealanders should expect to live in a safe and just society. To that end the justice system itself should be underpinned by effective constitutional arrangements. The Commission is part of the Justice Sector so has a role to play in achieving the outcomes set for the sector. The Commission's particular or main contribution towards these ends is to maintain confidence in the administration of the electoral system.

The framework below summarises our services, the results or impacts they will deliver and how these contribute towards Government priorities for the Justice Sector.



## Performance Measures

The Commission will assess performance through the applications of service management indicators. Process quality, compliance with standards and regulations, and coverage are used to measure the achievement against performance targets. These are summarised below. Contained within the annual Statement of Performance Expectations will be the detailed performance targets and measures for each year.

Key Objective/Impact	Service Output	Service Management Indicator	Frequency of assessment
<i><b>New Zealanders Value their vote</b></i>	Facilitate participation in parliamentary elections	Percentage of eligible New Zealanders enrolled Percentage of enrolled voters voting	By General Election
<i><b>Better understanding of elections</b></i>	Making available Information to assist political parties, candidates, and third parties to meet their statutory obligations in respect of electoral matters administered by the Electoral Commission	Satisfaction of candidates, parties and third parties with information provided by the Commission about the rules	Annual
	Promoting public awareness of electoral matters through education and information programmes	% of voters who consider the voting system easy to understand Rate of informal voting as a result of error in marking the ballot paper	By General Election
<i><b>Impartial, effective, and efficient administration of elections</b></i>	Providing advice to the Minister and the House on electoral matters referred to the Electoral Commission	Quality and timeliness of advice provided on legislative or policy proposals	Annual
	Compiling and maintaining electoral rolls	Timeliness, accuracy, and accessibility of registration and updates for voters Currency of the roll	Annual
	Conduct of by-elections and referenda	Timeliness of results	By event
	Conduct of General Elections	Timeliness of results New Zealanders confidence in the administration of the electoral system New Zealanders satisfaction with the administration of General Elections	By General Election





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**Websites**

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