

# ENGINEERING A BETTER FUTURE FOR NEW ZEALAND, TOGETHER NATIONAL PARTY

Engineers are problem solvers whose work underpins almost every aspect of society. High-performing infrastructure is essential to economic prosperity and improving how we deliver and manage it must be a national priority. Engineers are central to this. The profession generates around \$16 billion a year for New Zealand's economy – 5.5% of our GDP – and leads the design of resilient infrastructure tailored to our unique natural environment.

Engineering New Zealand is the largest professional body for engineers in New Zealand, with over 23,000 members across a broad range of engineering disciplines. With both a regulatory and membership role, we are a leading voice for engineers and the construction and infrastructure sector within New Zealand.

We are doing what we can to regulate, provide training and advocate for the profession. Our focus is on supporting bold, coordinated and practical system reform; advocating for a sustained pipeline of infrastructure work; ensuring infrastructure is resilient now and into the future – with a workforce to deliver it.

We would like to partner with you to deliver the system improvements that would help not only the profession but improve the lives of New Zealanders. This document outlines our priorities and how we can help support you to drive change.

## **Coordinated reform is needed to support the infrastructure, building and construction sectors**

- We are strongly supportive of broad system reform. However, improved coordination and consideration of how each reform interacts across the broader system is needed. Reforms need to be integrated and aligned across programmes and regulatory systems.
- A Government roadmap – showing how related reforms fit together and are sequenced – would improve engagement and ensure interdependencies are well managed.

## **We need infrastructure that is resilient**

- Engineering New Zealand supports reform of the legislation underpinning our emergency management sector. The current framework is outdated and needs updating and clarification to support the high functioning system needed to manage our growing disaster risk. Recent weather events have exposed significant gaps in how the system responds, reinforcing the need for a better approach.
- We recommend a national approach to resilience. Buildings must be located appropriately, and when they are in high-risk areas, they must be designed for resilience. Councils need clear authority and tools to require resilient design in building and resource management systems – such as reliable hazard data, a risk-based consenting model, and the ability to require additional design responses in high-risk areas.
- New Zealand must ensure that our riskiest earthquake-prone buildings are remedied quickly. This will require a balance between remediation progress and protection of human life. Ultimately, the prohibitive costs involved in the existing system have caused inaction by building owners, leaving many buildings unaddressed. We are supportive of efforts to improve this balance. Engineers are integral to this and very willing to participate.
- We strongly support the commitment to improve New Zealand's fire safety system. All regulatory and guidance material must be integrated and follow a "Life of a Building" approach to ensure alignment between all parties throughout the construction, use and change to the building.

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### **Infrastructure system reform is vital to a prosperous New Zealand**

- Over the years, New Zealand's infrastructure pipeline has become increasingly subject to political change. Each change in government often reshapes the existing pipeline, widening the country's infrastructure deficit and affecting employment. We strongly advocate for a consistent, long-term approach to infrastructure planning that reliably meets the needs of our population.
- Clear guidance from government on expectations for infrastructure procuring agencies, along with robust monitoring, is essential. Engineering New Zealand supports the Infrastructure Commission's system work being expedited, particularly initiatives focused on maintaining existing assets. Deferred maintenance leads to chronic problems and higher future costs. We advocate for a process where maintenance funding is ringfenced and used as needed.
- Engineering New Zealand encourages greater collaboration between government agencies, supported by the Infrastructure Commission and Crown Infrastructure Delivery, to enhance procurement practices and enable government agencies to become smarter, more informed clients. This should include empowering agencies with medium-to-large infrastructure portfolios to appoint Principal Engineering Advisors at senior levels.
- To strengthen stability in the sector, we urge government agencies and local councils to prioritise and accelerate renewal and maintenance work. This should focus on roading and water infrastructure, while adopting innovative procurement approaches that foster closer collaboration with the industry.

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### **A sustainable pipeline of skilled workers is required to deliver the infrastructure New Zealand needs**

- New Zealand needs a strong cross-government approach to engineering workforce development and planning. This includes attracting engineers back from overseas and those who have left the profession due to lack of work. Strengthening our university and vocational system to support this is key, including stronger investment in engineering tertiary education.
- New Zealand requires 1,500 to 2,300 additional engineers each year to meet demand and sustain economic growth and the current down-turn and loss of engineers is exacerbating the long-term skill shortage. Our historic reliance on overseas talent to fill skill shortage gaps is no longer a sustainable strategy. Engineering New Zealand, Waihangā Ara Rau and AOE New Zealand have developed a [long-term skills action plan](#). This includes the work we are doing, such as our free STEM programme for schools – the Wonder Project.

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### **New Zealand's unsustainable standards system is a risk to public safety and inhibits productivity**

- New Zealand's standards system operates on a user pays model with limited public funding. Expecting industry to fund and volunteer their time to update standards – and then purchase the standards they helped create – is untenable. This model prevents Standards New Zealand from taking a proactive, strategic approach. The result is outdated or missing standards, creating significant risk for design and manufacturing. If nothing changes, New Zealand will fall behind international best practice, leaving our products and infrastructure uncompetitive or even unsafe.
- Government must enable Standards New Zealand to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose system. This requires a sustainable economic model. Our preference is publicly funded access and system improvements, or alternatively the use of existing industry levies. Engineering New Zealand is a leading advocate for reform of the standards system. To support this work we developed a [position paper](#).

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### **Effective planning and robust resource management are vital to the delivery of critical infrastructure**

- Engineering New Zealand supports development-enabling reforms. However, good outcomes require a careful balance between enabling development and protecting environmental resources incentivising sensible, innovative and cost-effective outcomes. We are concerned that there is an increasing focus on enabling greenfield development and encouraging urban sprawl rather than intensification.
- Integrated spatial planning is essential. Building the right infrastructure in the right places at the right time can transform how we manage growth and support development across New Zealand. Once infrastructure is in place, changes are costly. Without strong planning, there is a high risk that infrastructure will not meet future needs.
- Māori must remain central to environmental and development planning. As kaitiaki of New Zealand's natural resources, Māori bring centuries of traditional environmental knowledge. Engineering New Zealand is committed to integrating Māori innovation and mātauranga Māori into planning and development systems.