

# Writing to Government Officials



Frustrated about the state of play here in New Zealand? Wish something could be done.. but don't know quite what to do?

This guideline outlines some clear steps you can take—individually, or as a group—to bring attention to information around topics of your choice... information which currently seems to be absent or overlooked at the highest level.

It includes a short analysis of the process our letters filter through when we send them, some do's and don'ts of letter writing, and specific advice on where to send letters on particular issues.

## WHO SHOULD WE WRITE TO?

The **Executive\* branch of government** is the powerhouse; it's where most policy directions and legislative implementation is generated. These directions are then filtered through the public service (via government 'advice'). The policy gains political approval, and is passed on to politicians.

Executive = policies/legislation → public service → politicians.

*\* In New Zealand, as in other countries who operate according to the UK Westminster system, the **Executive** means the public service, i.e the arrangement of government departments and ministries led by overseeing Cabinet Ministers.*

When we **send a letter to a Cabinet Minister**, this kicks off a chain with three separate people involved:

- (1) The Cabinet Minister's **designated staff member** who receives/receipts the letter, glances at the content, and passes it on to the relevant person. (This is either someone in Ministerial Services, or a relevant 'policy analyst' in the department concerned.) **The Cabinet Minister likely won't see the letter at this point.**

(2) The **person who responds** to the letter. It's this person's job to answer 'Ministerials' every day. They understand what they need to say on behalf of the Minister.

(3) The **Cabinet Minister**, who then signs off on the response. The Cabinet Minister still **may or may not read it** at this point; they're usually in a hurry, so they may just glance at it and sign off, trusting that person #2 has reviewed it appropriately.

**Because of the nature of the process described, there are actually very few people who have 'eyes on' a letter to a Cabinet Minister.**

Our aim is to **get more 'eyes on'** within the public service, so that **more people inside** the system see and therefore must think about our letters containing questions, complaints, or protest, and must consider the evidence/data included.

If more people within the public service begin to question the 'groupthink' so prevalent today.. we'll have a better chance to change the current situation.

## **LETTER WRITING DOs & DON'Ts:**

As a general rule:

- **Don't write to a Cabinet Minister and CC other parties.** It's much easier for the recipients to pass it off to one person to manage the response. (*The central staff person in Ministerial Services will shoot out a standard response saying your letter has been passed to person x for response.*)
- **Instead, write to each relevant person separately and don't CC anything.** You might still get only one response, but the aim is to try to make each person you're writing to **have to reply, or at the very least, read your letter.**
- If you have a printer and can afford the postage (postage is free to parliament), **send a hard copy letter as well as an email, and ASK FOR A**

**HARD COPY RESPONSE.** This again means they have to spend more time on it, not just shoot off a standard response.

- **Make sure you send the letter by email, as well as the hard copy letter.** If you just send a letter by hard copy alone, it means it's easier for them to say they've lost it, if you've got no email record to prove that it was sent.
- Even if you do send your letter/request by email only, **ask for a hard copy response** as well as response by email.

## **ADVICE ON WHERE TO SEND LETTERS ACCORDING TO THE SPECIFIC ISSUES THEY DEAL WITH:**

- **INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS, WHO (WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION) MATTERS**
  - Start with the **Minister of Health**, and all **Associate Ministers of Health**.
  - Then there's the public service level officials, i.e all ministries and government departments have either a **Secretary** or **Director-General** at the helm.
  - In the case of Health, at this level it's the **Director-General of Health** (Head of the Ministry), and **Chief Executive of Te Whata Ora**.
  - Then look at the **senior managers** of the Ministry of Health. These are the **Deputy Director General** level officers, and you'll find them on the **Ministry website** (listed under a heading such as 'Our Leadership Team'.) These senior managers are listed by portfolio, so select the portfolio that's most relevant to your enquiry.
  - Look at **Te Whatu Ora**, and in addition to the Chief Executive, target the relevant **senior managers** - in that case described as **National Directors**.

- For anything involving **international or local regulations**, also send the letter to the **Minister of Justice, all Associate Ministers of Justice** and the **Attorney-General** and **Minister of the Public Service**.
- Then the public service level for the **Ministry of Justice**, in the same way as above, i.e. starting with the **Secretary for Justice** and the relevant **senior managers**.
- Last but not least: the **Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights**.

## • CLIMATE ACTION PLANS

- Start with the **Minister and all Associate Ministers for Climate Change**.
- Also write to the **Minister and all Associate Ministers for the Environment**, and the **Minister of Energy and Resources**, etc.
- Depending on the content of the letter, you may also write to the **Minister and Associate Ministers of Agriculture, Forestry, Food Safety, Oceans and Fisheries, Conservation, Regional Development**, etc.
- Then follow the same logic as above regarding **the public service level**. Include **heads of MPI (Ministry of Agriculture), Ministry of the Environment**, maybe **MBIE** and other relevant ministries and departments. Where there is a **Director-General** as head of the Ministry, the next level of officials will usually be titled **Deputy Director-General**. Again, select the relevant portfolios from their website.
- Where there is a **Chief Executive** as head of the agency, the senior level of managers will have varying titles such as **National Director**, or other suitably 'executive' titles.
- Last but not least: the **Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment**.

- **JABS AND MANDATES**

- Start with the **Minister and all Associate Ministers of Health**.
- Also write to the **Minister and Associate Ministers of Justice, Social Development and Employment, Workplace Relations and Safety**.
- Also the **public service level** (as outlined above) at the Ministries of Health, Justice, etc.
- And **Medsafe**: both the **head** and **senior managers** with relevant portfolios, as identified on their website.
- Last but not least, the **Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights**.

- **DISCLOSURE & INVESTIGATION OF EXCESS DEATH STATISTICS**

- Start with the Minister and all Associate Ministers of Health.
- Also write to the Minister and all Associate Ministers of Statistics.
- The public service level at the Ministry of Health, Te Whatu Ora, etc, and Statistics Department, starting with the Chief Statistician, and then senior managers.

- **CENSORSHIP**

- Start with the **Minister and all Associate Ministers of Broadcasting and Media, Justice, Minister of Internal Affairs**, etc.
- Follow through to the **public service level** wherever relevant; eg. **Secretary for Internal Affairs**, and relevant **senior managers** of that department.

- **Ministry of Justice officials**, as before.
- Also write to the **Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights**.
- Last but not least, the **Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet**.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS:**

Lists of Cabinet Ministers and Associate Ministers are easily accessible online.

So get your well-referenced letters together, assemble your lists of recipients, and get sending!

Reach out to your local group for help getting a team to work together. <https://www.voicesforfreedom.co.nz/local-sign-up/>

Getting those letters into LOTS of hands and underneath LOTS of eyes is an effective way to take positive action.

Let us know how you get on, or send us a pic of your team's letter-writing efforts... [hello@voicesforfreedom.co.nz](mailto:hello@voicesforfreedom.co.nz). GOOD LUCK!

*We're grateful to our local group coordinator Kathryn for helping us create this helpful guideline.*