



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS
Te Kauae Kaimahi

**Submission of the
New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
Te Kauae Kaimahi**

to the

Justice and Electoral Select Committee

on its

Inquiry into the 2014 general election

P O Box 6645

Wellington

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We wish to appear before the Committee in support of our submission.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This submission is made on behalf of the 36 unions affiliated to the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU). With 325,000 members, the CTU is one of the largest democratic organisations in New Zealand.
- 1.2. The CTU acknowledges Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand and formally acknowledges this through Te Rūnanga o Ngā Kaimahi Māori o Aotearoa (Te Rūnanga) the Māori arm of Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU) which represents approximately 60,000 Māori workers.

2. CTU role in the 2014 election

- 2.1. The Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU) and its affiliate members played an active role in the 2014 general election. Through our '*Get Out and Vote*' campaign, the CTU and affiliated unions made a concerted effort to engage with union members and their friends, family and colleagues to encourage uptake of advance voting and voting overall. We ran nightly phone banks from 8 locations around the country during the advance voting period from September 3 to 20, held meetings and organised a number of other on-the-ground initiatives to mobilise people to vote.

3. Advance voting

- 3.1. We were very pleased with the unprecedented level of advance voting in 2014. This represented a significant shift in voting behaviour and built upon the previous election. The Commission's strong advertising campaign clearly was the major factor in provoking this change. The CTU also worked hard, as did other civil society groups, to promote advance voting. In post-election surveys of voting undertaken by the Commission it would be useful to investigate the demographic and geographic breakdown of those who advance voted, including their occupation, ethnicity, age and income levels.

4. Timing of communication regarding advance polling locations

- 4.1. We understand that the process of locating and confirming advance polling locations is a complex one. However there was a significant lag between the draft list of locations being released and final confirmation, on August 27, of all advance voting locations. With the shift to advance voting we recommend that this lag be minimised with a view to releasing lists of advance polling locations much earlier. This would allow the Electoral Commission and other organisations more time to promote advance voting and provide people with specific advice.
- 4.2. The CTU for example prepared posters to go out on to worksites with advance voting locations for each electorate, but also, especially in Auckland, some sub-region wide posters (for example South Auckland, West Auckland, North Shore and so on) that detailed the multi-electorate booths where people could vote for a number of neighbouring electorates from a particular booth. These posters were extensively used by union members on site and with their families and friends to motivate people to vote and make it easy, and we would have preferred to have these out on worksites much earlier than we did.

5. Location of advance polling booths

- 5.1. One issue that was raised often with us was the lack of clarity about how decisions to locate advance polling stations are made. For some voters (this was reported particularly in south Auckland electorates) there is no utility in having an advance polling station that is located a long way away from either where you live or where you work. With a very large number of people still not turning out to vote, unions wished to ensure that access to advance voting was as wide as possible, and if there was a rationale behind how advance voting locations were generated, we would like to know and contribute to this process. The use of mobile polling booths could potentially assist in alleviating this problem and we address this issue further below.
- 5.2. Our affiliate unions involved in higher education did not find the process for requesting an advance polling booth uniformly straightforward. We would like

to see more consultation with civil society groups involved in promoting the voting process, especially tertiary unions and student organisations, who believe every tertiary institution in the country should have a polling booth to encourage young people to vote and become engaged in voting. A similar comment was raised about the variability of District Health Board involvement as voting locations, and this is discussed further below.

- 5.3. As discussed above, we took steps to publicise the location of multi-electorate voting places, where people could vote outside their own electorate for a number of neighbouring electorates without having to cast a special vote. These were particularly helpful for people who work in a different electorate to their home, and for people who were fitting in advance voting around other commitments. We support more of these multi-electorate booths in large urban areas in particular.

6. Mobile polling booths

- 6.1. Related to the issue raised above regarding transparency of decision making regarding location of advance polling locations, is the issue of mobile polling booths. We were informed by Commission officials during the months leading up to the election that mobile polling booths were a phenomenon that came into being due to the Christchurch earthquake, were heavily resource intensive and were being phased out post the earthquake recovery.
- 6.2. There are significant issues for many people who work shifts and/or multiple jobs in being able to get to either advance polling stations or a station on the final day of voting. This raises potentially very significant equity concerns about who gets to vote which are only partially resolved by advance voting stations being established. We strongly recommend that the Commission be instructed to report back on the likely cost and logistical issues involved in establishing a system of mobile polling booths, especially in heavily industrial areas. It is not adequate to say that there are operational difficulties involved in rolling out a mobile process.

7. Variability of response regionally

- 7.1. Unions experienced a degree of variability in their interactions with Returning Officers. We encouraged our local union '*Get Out And Vote*' teams to make contact with Returning Officers to establish a point of contact and offer advice about suggestions for advance polling locations, based on our knowledge of the local workforce. In some instances we received good responses, in other cases flat refusals; one Returning Officer informed our local campaign lead that they 'don't deal with members of the public in that manner'. Our local organisers were coming from an informed background, and we recommend that Returning Officers are briefed on how to productively engage with civil society organisations like ours that can assist their work to improve voter turnout.
- 7.2. We were also aware of a situation in an aged care facility in one region where there was an advanced polling booth but staff, who do shift work, were not allowed to vote. Staff were told that the booth was only for residents, however we know that in other regions where there were booths in these facilities, staff were able to vote.
- 7.3. While unions generally reported positive interactions with enrolment officials, one of our member unions reported not being able to get an enrolment representative to travel to a large rural worksite with over 600 workers because of "lack of resources" to do that. This is concerning, given the low overall turnout.

8. State sector agencies

- 8.1. There is a tremendous opportunity for state sector agencies to play a significant role in promoting both enrolment and voting. People-facing agencies deal with a large and diverse range of people every day and could, with little extra effort, actively encourage members of the public to participate in the election.
- 8.2. Early in 2014 officials from the Public Service Association discussed this opportunity with the State Services Commission and the Electoral

Commission and found favour. The PSA then sought the support of agencies directly in the core public service and in the DHB sector - promoting enrolment and voting in key public service agencies and within DHBs. We understand that the SSC also communicated to state agencies its encouragement to develop concrete plans to encourage voter participation. DHBs already have a requirement by law to site advance polling stations on their campuses.

- 8.3. Overall however, even within DHBs, the PSA reports that the response by state sector agencies has been very patchy at best with most agencies not comfortable with the role of encouraging New Zealand citizens to enrol or vote. Some DHBs did not host polling stations, and some allowed patients but not staff to cast an advance vote (this latter issue was reported back immediately to the Electoral Commission and immediately rectified, but it raises a broader concern.) The New Zealand Nurses Organisation also reports that while some DHBs had advanced polling booths and fully supported them, others did not, and where there were booths they were generally only at locations for short periods of time, and once word had got around that a booth was on site it may have gone.
- 8.4. While a small number of public service agencies did respond, the vast majority responded poorly to the SSC and Electoral Commission's leadership and call to promote voter participation.
- 8.5. An obvious way to promote voter turnout through state agencies is schools, as they are often also polling booths for Election Day itself, they exist in all communities and are a well-known and trusted state agency. As we understand however the Ministry of Education did not proactively provide any resources or advice for schools to do this.
- 8.6. In Australia the equivalent of New Zealand's IRD, WINZ and DHBs actively promote enrolment and voting. The same approach should be promoted here. We strongly recommend that a concrete proposal for promoting enrolment and voting be developed by the Electoral Commission in tandem with the SSC for roll out in 2017. This proposal would need to include a

requirement for state sector agencies to actively participate in the campaign, including providing communication plans for distributing enrolment and voting promotional materials within their agency. It should also consider the extent to which front line staff can engage members of the public on the issue. State sector agencies need to be in no doubt about their responsibilities and the SSC's expectations. These can be contained in performance agreements set in place by the SSC for CEs and agencies. The Electoral Commission could also have a role in monitoring agencies' implementation of these plans.