

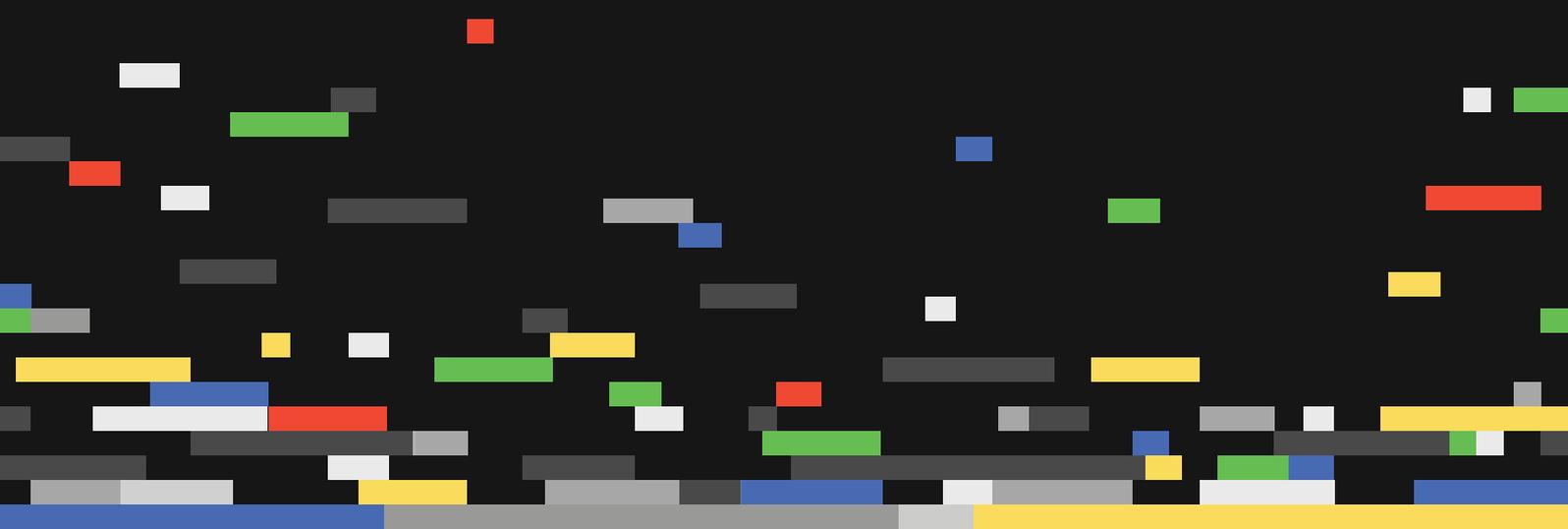
ActionStation & the Better Public Media Trust present

THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSION ON PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND MEDIA

NOVEMBER 2017

ActionStation 
people powered change


Better Public Media Trust





Foreword

The quality of our media matters. We rely on it for information about our own affairs and about how external events impact on us. At its best, it should convey a sense of and reflect New Zealand's identity in its many dimensions.

For the most part, New Zealand's media, public and private, has been balanced and fact-based, and where it isn't, there is recourse to redress. New Zealand radio is generally in good heart, with RNZ as a fine public broadcaster, and with the plethora of commercial and access/iwi stations which provide for many audiences.

Nonetheless, there are now signs of stress and disruption which need to be addressed if New Zealanders are to have the quality broadcasting and media they deserve and expect. For example:

- in-depth current affairs has disappeared from evening television;
- locally-made science, arts, wildlife, and social documentaries are rarely screened;
- RNZ has suffered from years of underfunding;
- NZME and Stuff are struggling to survive, and warn of imminent layoffs; and
- whole sections of New Zealand's population are invisible on our television or online media.

At the root of all these symptoms is a structural problem: New Zealand has drifted away from the Australian, Canadian, and British model of having a central non-commercial public broadcaster.

We allowed advertising on television, in small amounts at first, but then steadily growing. We separated and sold off various public television departments to become separate, privately-owned or at least commercially-driven, entities. The drama department became South Pacific Pictures, and the wildlife unit became Natural History New Zealand. TVNZ became increasingly commercially driven, and RNZ was left to run public radio on a stagnant budget. NZ On Air became the public funding department for broadcasting, with Te Māngai Pāho performing a parallel function for Māori media.

Despite sporadic attempts over the years to stop or slow these trends, New Zealand has arrived at a point where, in essence, it relies on commercial media to deliver almost all its public service broadcasting outcomes. That is unsatisfactory.

This report, the People's Commission on Public Broadcasting and Media, is the product of a new approach to addressing this long-standing challenge: a crowdfunded public inquiry. The goal of the inquiry was to find consensus on the problem and on possible solutions by collating the opinions of a wide spectrum of New Zealanders, industry experts, and observers.

The report aims to be of use to politicians of all parties, with recommendations which offer a way forward.

Our perception of New Zealand - the nation, its people, its history, and its future - is influenced by our media. We badly need public policy which can deliver the media we New Zealanders need to inform us and to reflect our nation's past, present, and future.



Helen Clark

Helen Clark
Former Prime Minister
of New Zealand

What is the People's Commission?

The People's Commission on Public Broadcasting and Media is a crowdfunded review into the current state and future prospects of public media in Aotearoa New Zealand.

ActionStation and Better Public Media (BPM) joined forces with six industry experts:



Bill Ralston
Journalist and broadcaster



Kay Ellmers
Producer and director



Lance Wiggs
Investor and business writer



Lizzy Marvely
Columnist, musician, blogger, social media campaign creator



Mark Jennings
Journalist, producer and consultant



Shamubeel Eaqub
Economist, author and commentator

In February and March of 2017, we travelled to Wellington, Dunedin, Tauranga, Nelson, Christchurch and Auckland to gather the views of the public and experts, on how we can make Aotearoa's media better. Submissions were also collected on a custom-built website.¹

The views of over 500 people were received. The panel has condensed and refined those views into the following report and recommendations.

We are asking politicians, government officials, and policy advisors to read the report and implement its recommendations.

What did we learn?

Three key themes emerged:

01 Investment

Strong support for sufficient and sustainable funding that is not vulnerable to political or commercial demands.

02 Independence

A desire for robust and autonomous broadcasting and media that effectively holds power to account, and supports healthy democratic debate.

03 Inclusion

A yearning for diverse content, perspectives, and ideas connected to communities in a range of accessible formats and platforms.

What do we recommend?

In striving for consensus on the recommendations, the panel recognised the need for any policy changes, present and future, to be based on a set of principles to help guide those decisions. In an ever-changing technological, political and media landscape, this seems more important than ever.

10 Principles

- 01 Protect and enhance Aotearoa New Zealand's democracy.
 - 02 Uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
 - 03 Ensure a diversity of perspectives, audiences and genres.
 - 04 Guarantee secure and sustainable funding that is annually adjusted for inflation and population changes.
 - 05 Ensure governance structures have robust cross-party, cross-sector and citizen participation and consultation processes, at the heart of policy decision-making.
 - 06 Maintain editorial independence from government.
 - 07 Remain flexible to rapidly adapt to changes in the media landscape so as to keep abreast of technological advances and audience changes.
 - 08 Ensure content is easily discoverable and freely accessible to all people in New Zealand, including the elderly, children and people living with disabilities.
 - 09 Measure success in holistic terms, considering people, place and planet first, followed by profit.
 - 10 Require that all public media funding decisions are governed by a Charter which gives effect to these principles.
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Six Recommendations

01

New Zealand On Air and Radio New Zealand funding should be increased now, and annually in line with inflation.

02

A charter should be established to ensure that all taxpayer funded public interest media, regardless of platform, form or publisher/broadcaster, fulfills certain standards and objectives in line with the Principles above.

03

New Zealand On Air should be further mandated to fund the production and promotion of more news, current affairs and citizenship education material, including text-based content.

04

Media literacy and critical analysis of traditional, digital and social media should be included as a core component of the New Zealand Curriculum.

05

There should be an independent review of all taxpayer funded media structures and institutions including TVNZ, New Zealand On Air, Creative New Zealand, RNZ and the New Zealand Film Commission to ensure that the Principles outlined above are achieved.

06

There should be Government funding for ongoing professional development in public service media vocations.

Two Non-consensus Recommendations

07

Government should explore new revenue streams to fund public media including:

- An increase in the Telecommunications Development Levy
- A Diverted Profits Tax
- Revenues from TVNZ
- A general tax on advertising
- A tax on foreign companies with NZ customers
- A tax on all payments sent overseas with exceptions for foreign currency transactions arranged through registered banks

08

Dedicated funding should be established for children's and youth programming, with a focus on interactivity and youth participation in media creation and consumption.

Notes to Recommendations

Note to Recommendation 2:

In late 2016, NZOA launched a new investment strategy that included nine investment principles. Our recommendation proposes a higher level of public media principles, in the form of a charter, which would apply to all public media.

Note to Recommendation 5:

An example would be a review into funding for different media that have converged.

Note to Recommendation 6:

Professional development could include contributions to international secondments for journalists or writers of drama and comedy. It could be done on a match-funded basis with the private sector. There should be emphasis placed on initiatives that improve capacity and representation in currently underrepresented demographics.

Note to Non-Consensus Recommendation 7:

Many experts and members of the public want the Government to explore different avenues to pay for public media, creating arms-length and sustainable funding which addresses market failures.

Note to Non-Consensus Recommendation 8:

We acknowledge that NZ On Air's new children's media project with TVNZ² may solve some of the many concerns around children's media. But public media for youth and young adults remains a serious concern that is currently unaddressed.

² NZ On Air's Online Children's Media Project with TVNZ

Methodology

Panel Selection

When choosing the six-person panel we sought a variety of ethnicities, ages, genders, agendas, industry expertise, and people from across the political spectrum. We also wanted independence from ActionStation, BPM and vested interests.

In the end our panel of six, while it isn't representative of New Zealand, strikes a balance across these requirements, comprising a formidable level of intelligence, expertise, compassion and analytical skills.

Terms of Reference

The scope of the People's Commission on Public Broadcasting and Media included all public and privately-owned media, with particular focus on mainstream media and public media.

It included scripted and unscripted genres of all kinds on all platforms - funding, classification, taxation, participation and governance. Three things were outside the scope:

- Quality of TV reception
- The loudness of TV advertisements
- Opinions on individual journalists and broadcasters (from Kim Hill to Mike Hosking)

How we collected submissions

In the public meetings experts presented short oral submissions. We then encouraged broad public participation by workshopping in small groups, 3 questions:

- Why is public media important?
- What are the challenges and barriers that public media face?
- How can we get around those barriers, particularly in relation to platforms, content, governance and funding?

These group conversations were annotated onto sheets of paper and digitised in a public Google Document that is available in full online.³

Submissions were also collected online via www.makeourmediabetter.org.nz. The website was promoted through traditional and social media and to over 100,000 people via the ActionStation and BPM mailing lists.

In total:

332 people attended the meetings
208 written submissions were received
24 experts presented at the meetings

With additional research and assistance from Dr Sylvia Nissen and Dr Michael Schraa, our panel have condensed the submissions and notes from the workshops into the report and recommendations.

How we funded the project

The entire project cost \$22,200 and was funded by small donations from almost 1000 individuals in the ActionStation community, and a \$5,000 contribution from BPM.

³ <http://bit.ly/2sT80J4>



About ActionStation

ActionStation is an independent, crowdfunded community campaigning organisation representing over 170,000 New Zealanders acting together to create what we cannot achieve on our own: a society, economy and democracy that serves all of us - everyday people and the planet we love.



About the Better Public Media Trust

Formerly known as the Coalition for Better Broadcasting (CBB), the Better Public Media Trust is a charitable trust dedicated to supporting and promoting public media in New Zealand

“The one thing that was clear from travelling around New Zealand and talking to people about the state of the country’s media was the overwhelming support for public service media. It is now seen as perhaps the last bastion of independent, quality news and current affairs, in a media world that is collapsing under a deluge of click-bait and the impact of failing financial models.”

– Mark Jennings

“We know the future of media is highly fluid and what has happened internationally is truly frightening. We are increasingly unable to control or regulate content, at least without measures that we would struggle to accept in our society.”

– Lance Wiggs

“The key themes that emerged for me were a passion for trustworthy news that didn’t focus only on the urban centres and a yearning for ‘the New Zealand story’ to be told.”

– Lizzie Marvally

“We need trusted independent journalism providing citizens with the information they need to participate meaningfully in our democracy. However information alone is not enough. Public service media also has an important role to play in promoting the desire to participate.”

– Kay Ellmers

