

Office of the Auditor General
Draft Annual Plan 2020-21
Comment by Transparency International New Zealand

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your Draft Annual Plan. We will focus on areas relevant to our mission and strategic priorities.

1. **COVID – OAG response**

- a. Like many other NGOs in New Zealand we have struggled to respond, as a civil society actor, to the urgent application of legislative powers and changes to legislation. For that reason we fully support reviews by the OAG of how extraordinary legislative powers have been used and to what effect. We would also support a review of concerns around any law that has been passed at speed.
- b. As noted in the OAG draft workplan, fraud and integrity risks increase when significant new money enters the system and there are expectations of fast and pressured delivery. Proving that we can maintain integrity under pressure will strengthen New Zealand's reputation as a trusted international partner, in business, foreign relations and collective international efforts for good. The OAG's role as a public auditor, is essential to realising that mana.
- c. TINZ' has had contacts with a range of public servants during the COVID-19 crisis response, and has seen people working under huge workloads and pressures. We are concerned about the capacity of public servants to maintain resilience through uncertainty over an extended period of time. We would support consideration of the mental health of public servants, with genuine plans to recognise their efforts, and to give them respite opportunities. We think this is a valid area for OAG to provide comment.

2. **Strategic Shift 2: Help New Zealanders become better informed about public sector performance and accountability:**

TINZ suggests that the OAG collaborate with the OGP to identify the issues of interest and concern to communities and to understand the ways they want to receive information. The objective of this would be the development of a workstream that provides information of interest and use to communities, in a complementary way to the reports it provides to Parliament.

3. **Strategic shift 3: Be more active in sharing insights about what "good" looks like.**

We suggest that OAG carry out work to consider how good governance and independence of perspective can be promoted and supported during a period in which there are many forces driving toward greater centralisation (ie the Public Service legislation and the response to COVID-19).

4. Integrity in the public sector.

The OAG lists integrity agencies that it proposes to work with on this topic. TINZ thinks it has much to offer and would also like to partner with OAG on the work plan for this area, particularly, in 2020/21. There are elements that are directly in our areas of interest:

- a. Developing integrity tools and supporting resources; and
- b. Creating discussion and promoting good practice

5. Procurement

- a. TINZ supports a focus on reviewing the extent to which integrity is baked into supply chains.
- b. TINZ has recently commented on general concerns about the transparency of reporting on government procurement– this also applies to procurement under COVID-19 emergency powers. TINZ hopes that consideration of MBIE’s response to challenges on inputting of data and procurement reporting would form part of the OAG monitoring of public sector COVID-19 response.

From the analysis done by our volunteers, the poor quality of data in the GETS Procurement system indicates:

- i. problems with the capacity of the GETS technology to delivery on consistent reporting, and to be fit for purpose;
- ii. considerable inconsistency between government agencies in complying with their procurement reporting requirements and in the quality of the data provided.

6. Whānau Ora, and Māori perspectives on accountability.

We are very supportive of work on Whānau Ora, Māori perspectives on accountability in the public sector and Treaty commitments to Māori. We hope that work is undertaken using a bicultural approach.

7. Health system accountability and transparency.

The recent Health and Disability Review has stated that continuing with the current model of care is ineffective and that it does not perform equally for all New Zealanders. The variances in expertise, and control of finances, capital investments and physical assets have also resonated in variable performances of DHBs during the COVID-19 crisis. It is TINZ contention that a focus on equity and transparency should drive OAG consideration of health system accountability. People should have access to verifiable comparisons of health sector performance between DHBs.

8. Sustainable Development Goals

The New Zealand country evaluation report and the people’s independent report showed that New Zealand is insufficiently addressing the SDG or measuring success against those goals. It is important for the government to show leadership in this area, but that mantle equally sits on business and civil society. We think a focus ought to be on how agencies are supporting collective approaches to the SDG.

9. Niue

Noting that the OAG is also the Auditor-General of Niue and Tokelau under their respective accountability arrangements, we raise the issue of the need for the Niue government to provide financial statements for the years from 2015-16. We appreciate there are difficulties, but there must be a plan in place to support the Niue government to be accountable, to its people and to donors.

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