



EVENT BRIEFING

BusinessNZ Corporate Affairs Meeting, 21 May 2025

Date:	16 May 2025	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:	In Confidence	Tracking number:	0013525

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon James Meager Minister for the South Island	Attend and speak at the BusinessNZ Corporate Affairs Meeting.	21 May 2025

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Karl Woodhead	General Manager Strategy, Planning and Performance, Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit (Kānoa)	Privacy of natural persons	
Cory Hagenaars	South Island Lead Advisor, Kānoa	Privacy of natural persons	✓

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

Minister's office to complete:

☐ Approved

☐ Declined

☐ Noted

☐ Needs change

☐ Seen

☐ Overtaken by Events

☐ See Minister's Notes

☐ Withdrawn

Comments



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Purpose

To provide background and supporting information for your attendance and speech at the BusinessNZ Corporate Affairs Meeting in Wellington on Wednesday, 21 May 2025.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) recommend you:

- a **Note** the information in this briefing to support your attendance and speech at the BusinessNZ Corporate Affairs Meeting.

Noted

Karl Woodhead
General Manager Strategy, Planning and Performance

Kānoa – Regional Economic Development
& Investment Unit, MBIE

Hon James Meager
Minister for the South Island

15 / 05 / 2025

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Background

1. On Wednesday, 21 May 2025, you will attend and speak at the BusinessNZ Corporate Affairs Meeting (the Event), at Level 13, NTT Tower, 157 Lambton Quay, Wellington.
2. The Event is being held from 11.00am to 1.00pm and attendees will be both in-person and online. You are attending from 11.00am to 11.45am only.
3. You will speak on your portfolios, including opportunities and challenges for your South Island portfolio. Draft speech notes are attached at **Annex One**.
4. Following your speech, you will participate in a questions and answers (Q&A) session. Backpocket Q&A information for this session is being prepared by your office.
5. Attending this Event offers an opportunity for you to engage with stakeholders on your priorities for the South Island portfolio and Government policy development.

Logistics

6. You will be met on arrival by Phil Love, Deputy Chief Executive and General Manager, BusinessNZ. Phil will show you to your seat at the front.
7. Katherine Rich, Chief Executive (CE), BusinessNZ is the Master of Ceremonies (MC) for the Event. She will invite you up to the lectern to speak. There will be a microphone and lectern for you to deliver your speech from.
8. The agenda for the Event is provided below.

Time	Action	Who
10.45am	Guests arrive	
10.55am	Guests invited to be seated	BusinessNZ
11.00am	Welcome and introduce Hon James Meager	Katherine Rich
11.05am	Hon James Meager to speak	James Meager
11.25am	Hon James Meager – moderated Q&A	James Meager / Katherine Rich
11.45am	Introduce John Small, Chair, Commerce Commission	Katherine Rich
11.47am	Commerce Commission team to speak	John Small
Noon	John Small and Commerce Commission Q&A	John Small/ Katherine Rich
12.20pm	Katherine to thank John Small, Commerce Commission. Closing remarks, invite guests to network	Katherine Rich
12.25pm	Light lunch and networking	
1.00pm	Event concludes	

BusinessNZ

9. BusinessNZ is a membership organisation that represents and supports New Zealand businesses. BusinessNZ serves as a network for businesses to advocate their interests in policy and the policy making process.
10. The BusinessNZ Network (the Network) includes the Employers and Manufacturers Association (EMA), Business Central, Business Canterbury, and Business South. It advocates on their behalf through:

- Promoting enterprise and amplifying the voices of thousands of businesses across New Zealand, driving progress through innovation, productivity, and forward-thinking initiatives.
 - Leveraging its ability to engage with government officials, community groups, Members of Parliament and Ministers, ensuring business interests are effectively represented throughout the policy-making process.
11. The Network represents businesses in the following divisions:
- Major Companies Group (MCG)
 - Comprising of more than 100 of New Zealand's largest companies. Together they account for a large portion of New Zealand's Gross domestic Product. This includes companies such as Air New Zealand, ANZ, and Toyota.
 - Affiliated Industries Group (AIG)
 - Made up of more than 60 member-based organisations that advocate for their respective industry, sector, and professions.
 - AIG members include organisations such as industry associations, federations, councils, forums, and other representative groups.
12. The Network also provides advisory and advocacy services through ManufacturingNZ, ExportNZ, Sustainable Business Council, BusinessNZ Energy Council, and the Buy NZ Made Campaign.
13. BusinessNZ is a member of the International Organisation of Employers, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and International Labour Organization.

BusinessNZ is supportive of Government initiatives aimed at enhancing economic growth

Going For Growth

14. BusinessNZ highlighted the potential benefits for exporters and domestic businesses, through reforms in procurement rules and the promotion of global trade and investment.
15. BusinessNZ's vision for a more productive business environment aligns with the Government's Going For Growth focus on innovation and artificial intelligence.

Recent changes to employment law that may be topical/raised at the Event

Equal Pay Act 1972 – amendments

16. On 6 May 2025, Government passed the Equal Pay Amendment Bill, amending the Equal Pay Act 1972. This bill adjusts the process for raising and resolving a pay equity claims and amends the regulatory framework for parties to a pay equity claim to assess whether there is sex-based undervaluation. Some of the amendments include:
- Increasing the threshold for raising pay equity claims by requiring claims to have merit and by increasing the threshold for what qualifies as work that is "predominantly performed by female employees".
 - Introducing a hierarchy of comparators so that comparators in a closer proximity to the employer must be selected, where they exist.
 - Restricting the ability to re-raise a claim so that a claim can only be raised after a settlement unless there are exceptional circumstances and only if it meets the new requirements for raising a claim.

17. The Equal Pay Amendment Bill introduces significant changes that will impact businesses across New Zealand including:
- Businesses may see fewer pay equity claims due to the raised threshold for claims.
 - Existing pay equity claims have been halted, requiring businesses to reassess any ongoing negotiations under the new framework.
 - The Government states that the changes will make the pay equity process more sustainable, reducing financial burdens on businesses and the public sector.

Employment Relations Amendment Act – Trial Periods




18. In December 2023, the Government enacted amendments to the Employment Relations Act 2000 (ERA), allowing all businesses to incorporate a 90-day trial period in employment agreements for new employees.
19. Previously, 90-day trial periods were only available to employers with fewer than 20 employees.
20. The Employment Relations Amendment Act introduces changes that will impact business across New Zealand including:
- Allowing businesses a longer period to assess how a future employee will fit into their company.
 - The employee does not have the ability to bring a personal grievance claim for unfair dismissal, if they are dismissed within their 90-days.

Prime Minister's Pre-Budget Speech to BusinessNZ

21. On 8 May 2025, the Prime Minister outlined the Government's financial strategy for the upcoming budget at a BusinessNZ event. Key points of his speech include:
- The Government's plan to raise the net capital allowance to \$4.0 billion. This increase aims to support investment in critical public services such as health, education, defence, and transport. This investment also represents an opportunity for businesses to promote growth and develop critical skills and capability.
 - Operational spending is set to decrease to \$1.3 billion, down from \$2.4 billion. This marks the smallest operating allowance in a decade and aligns with the Treasury's goal of forecasting an operating surplus.
 - An emphasis on the importance of investing in key areas that would drive future economic opportunities for New Zealanders, ensuring higher living standards and a dynamic economy.

About the audience

22. Approximately 120 stakeholders are expected to attend (including 30 attendees online).
23. Biographies of notable attendees are below.

	<p>Katherine Rich, Chief Executive, BusinessNZ</p> <p>Katherine was appointed Chief Executive of BusinessNZ in August 2024. She brings a wealth of experience from her career in both politics and industry.</p> <p>Katherine served as a New Zealand National Party Member of Parliament from 1999 to 2008.</p> <p>Prior to joining BusinessNZ, she was the Chief Executive of the New Zealand Food and Grocery Council from 2009 to 2023, advocating for the interests of grocery manufacturers and suppliers as well as advocating for trade liberalisation as a member for the APEC Business Council for five years.</p>
	<p>Phil Love, Deputy Chief Executive and General Manager, BusinessNZ</p> <p>Phil has responsibility for commercial partnerships, member retention and development and policy forums including the Major Companies Group's Chief Executive Officers Forum.</p> <p>He is BusinessNZ's representative on the Regional Entrepreneurial Advanced Programme with Massachusetts Institute of Technology Boston and the Australia New Zealand Leadership Forum.</p> <p>Previously Phil worked in shareholder and media relations at Telecom (now known as Spark).</p>
	<p>Dr John Small, Chair, Commerce Commission</p> <p>John was appointed Chair in 2022.</p> <p>He has experience undertaking competition analysis in a range of sectors, including energy, transport, agriculture, telecommunications, payment systems, and construction.</p> <p>He is founding director of Covec, an economic consultancy firm. He was also the former Head of the Economics Department at the University of Auckland.</p>

Risks and mitigations

24. No risks identified.

Communications / Media

25. Media have not been invited.
26. Organisers have indicated photographs may be taken during your session.

Contacts

Name	Position / organisation	Telephone	Will meet you on arrival
Phil Love	Deputy Chief Executive and General Manager, BusinessNZ	Privacy of natural persons	✓
Jesse Blizzard	Executive Assistant, BusinessNZ	Privacy of natural persons	

Annexes

Annex One: Draft speech notes

Annex One: Draft speech notes

You will be introduced by Katherine Rich, CEO BusinessNZ

Your allocated speaking slot is 15 minutes, with an additional 15 - minutes Q&A.

INTRODUCTION

- It is a pleasure to be speaking here as Minister for the South Island, home to around 150,000 businesses and just under a quarter of all New Zealand's GDP.
- I'd like to start by acknowledging **BusinessNZ** for the important role it plays in representing and supporting businesses across New Zealand.
- By ensuring the perspective of business are understood and considered in policy decision BusinessNZ plays a critical role across the country.
- I'd also like to acknowledge Katherine Rich, CEO BusinessNZ, Dr John Small, Chair of the Commerce Commission, and of course all of you - It's good to see some familiar faces at this event.
- Today, I'll discuss how the recently introduced Going For Growth approach is a starting point for us – in particular the pillar that is most relevant to the workshop this morning – my portfolio priorities for economic growth for the South Island.
- In my role as Minister for the South Island, I want to make sure that the South Island economy gets its fair share of economic growth and job creation so that we can all benefit from the opportunities and prosperity that economic growth provides us.
- My primary objective is to advocate and coordinate policies which will stimulate economic growth in the South Island, ensuring we're making the substantial contribution to New Zealand's overall economic success that we are capable of.
- There is a raft of untapped potential across the South Island. This was highlighted in ASB's recent Quarterly Regional Scoreboard, where the South Island secured the top four places for economic growth and performance, with Otago in first place, Canterbury in second, Tasman in third, and Southland taking the fourth place.
- As the Prime Minister, Rt Honorable Christopher Luxon, highlighted in his pre-Budget speech to BusinessNZ in Auckland earlier in May, this Government's steady diet of pro-growth deregulation, strong focus on RMA reform, and fresh efforts to break into new export markets are part of that agenda so far.

GOING FOR GROWTH

- As I mentioned, the Government is working hard to unlock New Zealand's potential and make our economy grow faster.
- We are working within a challenging international backdrop, with trade tensions overseas seeing growth forecasts revised down across the world, as both exporters and consumers coming under sustained pressures.
- For a small, open economy like New Zealand, the international environment clearly matters a lot, but this Government remains confident about our economic recovery.

- Many of you will be aware that in February of this year, the Government published our Going For Growth approach, released by the Honourable Nicola Willis in the newly created role of Minister for Economic Growth.
- We were pleased to see that BusinessNZ endorsed the plan when it was released. I know your members see the plan as an opportunity to stimulate a more productive business environment to drive even further productivity and economic growth, and I look forward to talking to you today about how we can make that a reality.
- Going for Growth outlines a range of actions we are taking to get the economy moving, and to realise its vast potential. Each of those action fits into one of five pillars critical to drive our push for economic growth – **developing talent; competitive business settings; promoting global trade and investment; innovation, technology and science; and infrastructure for growth.**
- Economic growth is key to raising living standards, creating higher-paying jobs and delivering the vital infrastructure and public services New Zealanders want and deserve, as well as supporting businesses to thrive across the country. That's why earlier this year this Government created the Economic Growth portfolio and the Going For Growth approach.
- Our economic potential will be unleashed by focusing on the five pillars and fostering investment, innovation and taking calculated risks. Removing barriers and creating incentives empowers businesses to drive growth, ensuring market forces fuel prosperity.
- As outlined by the Prime Minister, each of these Going for Growth Pillars will have strong representation in Budget 2025.
- In particular, he wants to see a much sharper focus on commercialisation, stronger ties to the business community, and rapid access to ideas and innovation from overseas.
- This is alongside boosting New Zealand's global trade opportunities and promoting New Zealand as an attractive destination for investment and, as he says, a shelter from the global storm.
- These are areas where I see great opportunities for growth for businesses in the South Island.

THE SOUTH ISLAND

- Through my role as Minister for the South Island my primary objective is to advocate for and coordinate policies which will stimulate economic growth, ensuring the South Island's substantial contribution to New Zealand's overall economic success.
- I have three key areas to focus on for the South Island portfolio, which are directly linked to *Going For Growth*. These are:
- **Aiming to double our exports and lift the contribution to GDP:** This means not only increasing the amount we export but increasing the value of our exports.
- The South Island makes up around 23 per cent of New Zealand's population and 22 per cent of the national GDP. By increasing productivity, expanding market access, and enhancing global competitiveness by strengthening key industry, the South Island can be a real driver for economic growth in New Zealand.

- **Investing in resilient, reliable infrastructure which supports growth:** Like the rest of New Zealand, the South Island has an infrastructure deficit which is constraining our productivity and economic growth. The South Islands' infrastructure is vulnerable to natural disasters and disruptions, so it is key that we ensure the South Island has the resilient and future-focused infrastructure necessary to drive economic growth, support communities, and mitigate the impacts of natural disaster.
- **Enhancing and improving delivery of core public services:** It is critical that the South Island has improved core public services, including healthcare access and workforce retention, and enhanced law and order services.
- The South Island has huge potential. We need to tap into our leading role across top economic growth statistics like tourism and retail confidence to keep the South Island economy moving.
- Doing that, and connecting the right people, resources, and organisations together will help improve living standards and economic outcomes for the South Island.

INVESTING IN BUSINESS/ECONOMY

- I want to return to talking about how the government is investing in growing the New Zealand economy, for two reasons – the importance for getting us on track, and that this is an event hosted by BusinessNZ, who I know have been providing expertise in the South Island for more than three decades, delivering solutions tailored to regional needs.
- I see the great work being undertaken by Business Canterbury and Business South to champion businesses across the South Island, helping them to connect and thrive across our New Zealand's regions.
- New Zealand's infrastructure deficit is limiting productivity and higher living standards. According to the International Monetary Fund, closing New Zealand's infrastructure gap could increase real GDP by as much as 0.8 per cent in the long term.
- New Zealand faces several challenges in delivering world-class infrastructure. It has become too difficult to build in New Zealand, with complex and inefficient resource management and regulatory processes having slowed down project approvals and delivery. The affordability of large-scale infrastructure projects remains a key issue, necessitating innovative funding and financing solutions.
- I know the South Island faces infrastructure funding challenges, including for its large roading network and its community infrastructure which is managed and delivered by local councils. Additional infrastructure is also needed to support the resilience of key sectors, such as tourism infrastructure to support high visitor numbers in regional destinations with small populations, and water infrastructure for agriculture.
- The Government has set up and is delivering the \$1.2 billion Regional Infrastructure Fund to invest in regional growth initiatives to grow local economies and create jobs, and passed the Fast-track Approvals Act to speed up consenting decisions of projects with significant regional or national benefits.
 - We've already approved \$^{Confidential advice to Government} RIF funding for the South Island, including funding for projects that will increase productivity and connectivity for businesses and communities in South Island region, like the Southern Link Logistics Park – Rail

Siding project, announced by Minister Jones at the Otago Regional Growth Summit last week.

- \$8.2 million RIF funding will be invested into the development of a three-track rail siding connecting Dunedin's Port Chalmers to the Southern Link Logistics Hub development in Mosgiel.
- We're also pursuing a programme of investment in water storage across the country, with several projects concentrated in Canterbury, a key grower of New Zealand's key dairy and horticulture products and a region in need of water security assets.
- Investments of these types reflect this Government's targets to increase exports, targeting investment into regions and projects that can support our primary sector businesses to diversify and grow, and to make the most of our Going For Growth approach to promote global trade here in New Zealand.
- By the end of 2025 we intend to have completed a 30-year National Infrastructure Plan and finalised the first City and Regional Deal between central and local government to support collaboration for long-term infrastructure investment.
- As a Government, we can't do this on our own. We need to lean on the experience and expertise of organisations like BusinessNZ, with its networks spanning industry association, regional business groups, and employers. You can provide a valuable link between the private sector and policy makers – helping to ensure that decisions reflect the realities that businesses are facing.
- For too long the focus has been on delivering highly bespoke projects in small Southern regions where reinventing the wheel seemed like the only option. If we are to get serious about growing productivity in New Zealand, and we are, we need to focus on solutions that are developed at the national level but optimised and delivered at the local level. That's where we need to work in partnership with each other.

THANKS/CONCLUSION

- Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today. I look forward to working across central and local government and with regional stakeholders to ensure the huge potential of the South Island is realised.
- I look forward to engaging with you over the course of this morning, and over the coming months, on how we can work together to realise the potential of the South Island.
- Thank you.