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PSA GUIDE TO LOBBYING MPS

Introduction

This guide gives some basic tips on lobbying Members of Parliament (MPs). It covers:

- Who are MPs?
- Why would we want to lobby them?
- How to lobby an MP; and
- What to do before, during and after meetings with an MP.

Who are MPs?

New Zealand's Parliament is made up of around 120 MPs.¹ Our system of Government elects two types of MPs: Electorate MPs and List MPs.

Electorate MPs are selected directly by the people of a particular geographical region each General Election. Electorate MPs are responsible both to their political party (if they belong to one) and to the voters in their electorate.

When we vote, we also vote for our preferred Political Party (Labour, National, the Greens, etc). Each party lists their candidates in order of preference. **List MPs** are elected to make up the difference between the number of MPs who won their electorates and the overall proportion of people who voted for the Party.

For example, if Labour gets 50% of the votes but Labour Candidates only win Electorate Seats equivalent to 25% of Parliament then List MPs are elected to bring Labour up to 50% representation in Parliament.² List MPs are primarily responsible to their political party but they often want to win over voters in a particular electorate.

MPs go to Parliament and make laws, debate important issues and oversee the running of New Zealand, including oversight of the Public Service. The political party (or parties) who have more than half the votes in Parliament get to form the Government. Some of their MPs are selected by the parties to be Ministers (including the Prime Minister). Ministers are responsible for particular Government agencies and

¹ There is a list of current MPs here: <https://www.parliament.nz/en/mps-and-electorates/members-of-parliament/>

² It's a bit complicated than this but this is the basic idea



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spending. The top 20 or so Ministers form Cabinet and Cabinet makes most of the country's major political decisions.

This means that you can talk to MPs in several different capacities and the rules as to what they can do are a bit different at each. For the most part, you'll usually be talking to MPs in their Local MP capacity if you go along to their Electorate Office, or perhaps in their political capacity if you're talking to a group of MPs with similar interests.

Why lobby MPs?

The most important reason to lobby MPs is because we are trying to make change on a particular issue. MPs may do this directly through their **power** to make or change a decision or indirectly through their **influence** on a decision-maker such as a Minister.

It is important to develop our understanding of **who** the relevant decision-maker is, **what** decision we're asking them to make (or change) and **when** we want them to do it. Knowing this helps us with the question of **how** we influence their decision. Some decisions can be made directly by the minister responsible, most things (such as regulations, major proposals etc) have to go to Cabinet and be agreed by the other ministers, and some things (eg, legislation) have to be passed by Parliament.

Lobbying MPs is usually a way to get a Minister to make or change a decision. This is not the only way to influence Ministers; they are also susceptible to public and media pressure, advice from officials, and occasional good sense and reason!

How to lobby MPs

The most effective means of lobbying MPs in whatever capacity is nearly always kanohi kitea: face-to-face.

Face-to-face is also a chance for us to use one of our most important strengths, our lived experience and our stories! Face-to-face meetings also give us a chance to take photos with MPs. They like publicity and we can hold them to commitments they make to us by posting these photos on social media.

There is still a place for written communication and that's in preparing for the meeting. It is important to know what we plan to say to MPs and what we are asking them to do.

A useful resource is a position paper which says who we are and why they should listen to us and then sets out our key ask(s) and supporting facts. We can leave this with the MP and it should form the basis for our



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conversation with them. If we're lobbying multiple MPs then a one pager means we're giving consistent messages to all MPs (and shows we're organized and effective).

What to do before, during and after meeting with an MP

Asking for a meeting

Before the meeting, write to the MP's office asking to meet. This is where it's important to know which capacity you're meeting with the MP in because the channels are different for each. Most MPs have offices at both Parliament and at their electorate or place of residence (for List MPs).

The link here will give you a list of Members of Parliament and their contact details
<https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/have-your-say/contact-an-mp/>

It is likely for big campaigns that the unions will be coordinating a range of MPs visits so get in contact with your local organiser to coordinate your efforts and join with other workers in your region.

If you are coordinating your own meeting, reach out to the MP's Office with a call or email, explaining who you are and why we want to meet with them. Ask when they are available and for how long.

Example: **'Kia ora, my name is XXX, I am an aged care worker employed by XXX. Myself and my 5 colleagues would like to arrange a meeting with XXX to discuss how XXX can help support the Care & Support Pay Equity Claim. Please could you let me know when XXX is available and how much time they would be able to spare to talk with us? Many thanks XXX.'**

Local Electorate MPs will often only want to meet with the voters of their electoral during their electorate clinic, so if you're looking for this sort of meeting, you will want to specify that you're a group of local voters keen to engage with their electorate MP.

Be polite and respectful in seeking the meeting and where possible try to provide any additional information requested. For a busy Minister, their diary might be booked up weeks or even months in advance, so it can help if you provide an indication of whether the meeting needs to happen within a certain timeframe. Requests for meetings can sometimes fall between the cracks, so if it's been several weeks and you haven't heard back you may want to send a polite follow-up email.



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Preparing for and at the meeting

When you've confirmed the meeting, get the team who will be attending the meeting together to practice what you're going to say and any questions that you think the MP might ask. It can be useful to get someone to roleplay as the MPs.

Some rules of thumb for effective lobbying meetings:

- Don't forget to print and take copies of the position paper including a copy for the MP and spares for their staff. **Hand this over at the start of the meeting;**
- Personal stories connect emotionally and are more persuasive than just dry facts and figures (it's still good to have a couple of particularly revealing facts and figures too). Make time in the meeting to tell a personal story illustrating the importance of the ask (but keep it tight- no more than 2-3 minutes and rehearse).
- A common mistake is not to leave enough time for conversation and discussion. A good rule of thumb is that your prepared comments should only take a third of the meeting and leave the rest open for discussion. For a 30 minute meeting, have 10 minutes' worth of prepared stories and information.
- Stick to your allotted time. MPs often have back-to-back meetings and are always time-poor, so they appreciate an organized meeting that runs to time.
- It can be useful to give some thought to what you might say if their conversation runs quickly and you're left with time to fill. It doesn't happen often, but if it does it can be good to be prepared. Eg, you may want to think of additional questions for the MP on the topic you've been discussing, or something the PSA is up to that they might be interested in.
- Be polite throughout the meeting, even when you don't agree with what the MP is saying. It's easier to dismiss someone's argument if they get mad at you.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say that you'll send through some information later on. This is much better than bluffing (and can help to improve our preparation for future meetings)
- Expect there to be other people present (sometimes a lot of them!). For Ministers, this could include people from a public service agency who are there to answer technical questions and take notes.



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- Sometimes you'll have to wait in a Minister's reception area for a meeting to start, along with officials from a government agency. It can be useful to think about what you might want to talk to them about informally while you're waiting.
- Assign someone to take notes of what was said, and questions asked, particularly by the MP.
- Don't forget to leave time for photos and ask the MP if they want to be tagged into your post.

After the meeting

Don't forget the follow up:

- Type up (if possible) the meeting notes and send them through to your local organiser so they can track the various responses. This is very important so please try and make sure you do it!
- Send your photo of the MP to your local organiser so that they can post it on social media. They will post it thanking them for their time and noting the commitments that they made in the meeting (and tag them if agreed)
- Write to the MP after the meeting thanking them for their time and noting down any commitments they made (and sending through any information you promised to send through. PSA staff can help track this down if needed).

Most importantly

It is normal and okay to be nervous! You are a real person talking about your real experience, not a polished professional public speaker. So just be yourself and try and relax and enjoy it! Have fun!