

ALL ABOUT US

Public interest broadcasting in the digital environment

Broadcasting Policy

Our Vision

The power of sound and images together is incredible: film and television are core elements of culture in the twenty-first century. Broadcasting is a vital component of the fabric of any nation, and New Zealand is no exception.

New Zealand will fully realise its potential as an innovative nation when our population is digitally literate and has clear pathways to education for life and skilled and high-wage jobs. A key marker of success will be wide access to creative content, developed by and for this country and its people.

Content describes the creative material available to New Zealanders. This includes films and drama, documentaries, science, special interests, news and current affairs and sport, and music of all genres. It must be diverse, challenging, and provide access to the full range of cultures and ideas in our society. Above all, this content must be accessible at no cost to the viewer via television, radio, and the Internet.

A competitive and thriving media and content creation sector is needed to deliver diversity. Labour considers that the current commercial market framework does not deliver diversity because it lacks a public service broadcaster aside from Radio New Zealand. It is time for this to change.

This Broadcasting policy has been developed in conjunction with Labour's Information and Communications Technology Policy policy. Readers are invited to refer to that policy for more detailed coverage of the regulatory and policy framework summarised in this policy. See <http://www.ownourfuture.co.nz/communications-and-ict>.

Public Broadcasting Renewed

A strong, independent free public broadcasting media service not driven by commercial interests is essential to an informed democracy. This is a function of true citizenship that includes reflecting our own culture and stories, and provides the forum for insightful, relevant and fact-based debates on issues of public interest.

It also means that important New Zealand content is made freely available to all Kiwis in real time. This is a fundamental principle behind public broadcasting. All New Zealanders should be represented by and be able to receive public broadcasting content, including news and current affairs across radio, TV and the Internet.

There is a significant gap in our market and there remains a need for a local and publicly funded television broadcaster. Government must continue to invest in public broadcasting in order to meet the needs of a diverse society and ensure that local, quality content is both produced and delivered.

Labour does not believe that a combination of broadband, Sky, and access to international product via the Internet remove the need for public broadcasting. Convergence does not end the content market failure; it does not always mean those with minority and special interests can use their devices to find the sorts of content they want and view it when they want.

TVNZ in its current form is not able to deliver public television broadcasting that New Zealanders want and need. Its corporate values and commercial focus and culture cannot be changed by tinkering. New Zealanders need better in terms of public broadcasting than what can be delivered by what is now effectively a state owned commercial broadcaster.

Labour believes a new approach is required; a new model, to bring together elements of public broadcasting that already exist, to strengthen and broaden them in the digital environment.

Labour will establish a new model for non-commercial public broadcasting. It will be based on the outcomes of a nationwide public debate to be held within one year of taking office.

The core elements of the model Labour will present for consultation are:

- the core output of the new public broadcaster would be commercial-free, statutorily independent radio and television services, including:
 - the functions of Radio New Zealand and TVNZ 7
 - consideration of a new nationwide news service, and
 - possibly some other non-commercial programming.
- greater independence for public broadcasting, through a more ‘arm’s-length’ governance model: the creation of a New Zealand Broadcasting Trust, which would sit above the public broadcaster’s board and independently appoint the members of that board.
 - Members of the Trust would have long terms and be appointed in consultation with the Opposition.
 - The model could retain separate boards for existing institutions, as there is no “problem” to be solved with, for instance, Radio New Zealand’s operating model or corporate structure.
- long term, sustainable funding arrangements to ensure independence, develop strong relationships with the production industry, and allow for the training and professional development of staff.
- improved cooperation and sharing of material between national-level public broadcasters and regional television and non-commercial radio, including access radio.
- a commitment to making New Zealand content readily available, including through digital means.

The public debate will allow New Zealanders to have their say on the shape of future public broadcasting. It will include a discussion of the institutional form, legislative framework and range of funding options, including the use of existing assets and dividend streams, and other international models, such as those used in Europe and the United States.

After full public discussion, Labour will have a clear view of how to proceed and will implement the new model.

This commitment to restoring public broadcasting in New Zealand marks an important change towards a contemporary Kiwi approach to protecting and promoting New Zealand’s culture in the twenty first century. It is not made lightly, and it is a commitment Labour will see through.

Other Content Industry issues

Labour will encourage a competitive environment in digital commercial media, and investigate the merits of providing special tax status to low-profit limited-liability content development companies which are New Zealand owned and who commit to a defined programme of re-investment in their business.

Labour will continue to fund Maori Television and iwi radio and review the strategic contribution these mediums make to raising proficiency levels of Te Reo Māori.

Labour will establish a review of free-to-air Pasifika content and look at ethnic broadcasting content with a view to supporting better programming outcomes for the diverse cultures of New Zealand.

Labour will encourage a stronger representative voice in the broadcasting and New Zealand content sector, particularly with reference to the impact of new media. Labour will pay particular attention to the Law Commission's review of regulatory gaps and the new media with regard to the consumer voice.

Labour will continue to encourage the screen production industry. Funding through NZ On Air will continue at present levels, but with a review of the organisation, its goals and objectives, and its models for allocating its funding to local content to ensure that its objectives and funding models are appropriate in the current environment and the digital age.

The role of NZ On Air relative to the new public broadcaster will be carefully considered and will form part of the wider public debate.

An audio standard for New Zealand television

There has been an ongoing debate in New Zealand for some time around volume and consistency between featured programmes and commercials on TV, where there are concerns that the audio of television commercials are broadcast at louder sound volumes than the television programme material they accompany. The issue is not straightforward, but the solutions are.

Labour believes broadcasting networks have been slow to adapt and revise their Technical Delivery Requirements to reflect digital technology.

Labour will bring the TV broadcasting industry together to establish a consensus for new Technical Delivery Requirements and a unified national standard for all broadcasters that reflects international best practice.

Convergence between broadcasting and telecommunications

The convergence of technology across the telecommunications, ICT and broadcasting sectors require a converged policy framework to deal with them effectively and efficiently.

Convergence means that content types that used to be available only on separate networks are seeping across into each other. Audio-visual material can be carried over the Internet as it can over

broadcast TV; voice works over the copper phone network, over the Internet and over cellular mobile networks. This trend is accelerating, and isn't going to reverse.

That is why Labour wants to see a shared policy, regulatory and legislative framework for the broadcasting, telecommunications and Internet realms. Many other countries including the United Kingdom and Australia have already taken this approach. As the technologies converge a number of issues arise around the networks that will be needed to carry content produced inside New Zealand and that which comes from outside the country.

Labour believes a single network regulator for Telecommunications and Broadcasting has merit.

Labour will prepare a proposal for public consultation within six months of taking office setting out the path towards a single powerful regulator for telecommunications and broadcasting.

It is our expectation that the converged regulator will be located within the Commerce Commission and would obtain any additional resources required by means of an industry levy system. The legislation would be modelled on the way the Telecommunications Act currently works.

Labour would have particular regard to addressing the impact of monopolies in both the telecommunications and broadcasting marketplaces.

The consultation will also consider the regulatory mechanisms for content carried on broadcasting and telecommunications networks. It may be that the functions of the Broadcasting Standards Authority, the Press Council and the Advertising Standards Authority could be brought together.

In parallel with these regulatory changes, the policy arm of government dealing with these issues may be able to be done more efficiently brought together. Current policy is spread across a range of agencies including the Ministry of Economic Development, Department of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Culture and Heritage, State Services Commission and others.

Labour will investigate creating a Ministry of Communications and IT, based in the Ministry of Economic Development, to bring together all policy involving broadcasting, communications and information technology issues.

Among the tasks for the new Ministry would be to ensure that both broadcasting and telecommunications policy considered the wider cultural context in which they operate, by liaising closely with the Ministry of Culture and Heritage in the work that they do.

Compared with other countries, the consumer voice is largely missing in both the telecommunications and broadcasting markets. The Australian Consumer Communications Action Network provides a model.

Labour will investigate ways to ensure there is a strong mechanism for New Zealanders to voice their issues, concerns and vision with regards to telecommunications, broadcasting content and the digital environment.