

14 January 2022

Hugo Vitalis
Kaikōmihana Tuarua
Deputy Commissioner Integrity, Ethics and Standards
Te Kawa Mataaho – Public Service Commission

Kia ora Hugo

Thank you for your letter of 22 December 2021 regarding the handling of a disclosure by Kāinga Ora concerning a sponsored article. You asked for additional information about political neutrality, and for clarification regarding several specific areas.

Additional information requested

1. Information about the election period – Atamai link, page 54

This is provided as **Attachments 1a** and **1b**.

2. Explanation of the standards – Atamai link, page 71

This is provided as **Attachment 2**, taken from the Kāinga Ora intranet, Atamai.

3. Onboarding modules: Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission and Standards of integrity and conduct – page 74.

Kāinga Ora uses the Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission module ([Induction module | Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission](#)) in its induction material, which is what was referred to in our original response.

The Kāinga Ora induction checklist is also provided as **Attachment 3**. This sets out what is expected from our people by the end of week one of employment, including that they have read and understood the Public Service Commission Standards of Integrity and Conduct (**Attachment 2** from the Kāinga Ora intranet, Atamai). The online learning modules includes an interactive exercise on the Standards of Integrity and Conduct and theoretical scenarios where a potential conflict may arise.

We would also welcome the provision of any other information demonstrating how you understand and apply political neutrality at Kāinga Ora. This might include further information about the work of the Government Relations team.

Kāinga Ora is fully aware that a cornerstone of New Zealand's Public Service is its commitment to political neutrality. As a Crown entity with significant commercial activities, and people recruited from the private sector, we are keenly focused on ensuring all leaders and their people understand, observe and implement our responsibilities as public servants.

As outlined above, the Kāinga Ora induction for new employees includes interactive training and guidance on what is expected of a public servant, including the Te Kawa Mataaho online module for Public Service Induction, a Standards of Integrity and Conduct interactive module and a module on political neutrality.

Kāinga Ora also provides regular guidance and communication to its people on related topics such as conduct in the pre-election period, the Public Service Act 2020 and Official Information Act requests. When the Public Service Act 2020 was introduced, the Kāinga Ora Legal Team provided a webinar on the Public Service and You. In that webinar, they covered topics such as what the public service is, and how Kāinga Ora fits into the ecosystem; why the public service legislation has changed and what is especially relevant to Kāinga Ora. This webinar also provided a refresh of the culture and behaviours required from Kāinga Ora people under the Act.

Kāinga Ora has a Government Relations Team which manages the flow of information between Kāinga Ora, Ministers and government agencies, and ensures that Parliamentary and statutory responsibilities are met. This team has provided education sessions on ministerial servicing and government relations to groups and teams within Kāinga Ora and provides skilled advice and support to the organisation as required. This includes in-person targeted training given to the Urban Development and Delivery business unit (the team involved in the sponsored article) by the Government Relations Manager. This training session covered Official Information Act requests, briefings, protocols with dealing with local MPs in relation to our developments, our relationship with Ministers' Offices, and how the Government Relations Unit can assist the team with its work.

In addition, we are keen to learn more about the Shaping Kāinga Ora restructure, which is mentioned on page 3 of your response.

In 2020 the Shaping Kāinga Ora programme undertook changes to Kāinga Ora structure, internal governance and delegation frameworks in order to better deliver on the new organisational vision and the operating mandate defined by the Government in creating Kāinga Ora in 2019.

Shaping Kāinga Ora brought together the different functions and cultures from the three legacy organisations into a structure that was designed to enable collaboration, consistency and excellence.

Key to these changes was moving to a place-based operating approach to support the legislative requirement of being community- and Māori-led, and to enable resolution of issues and specific social and geographical decision-making closer to our customers, our stakeholders and their communities.

Clarification of specific areas

1. *The OIA response to s9(2)(a) [redacted] includes redactions. Your response says that "in general [the information withheld] included names and information about people contacted to be part of the story". Could you please review the information you redacted from those emails and Facebook messages and provide any information that is not names or information about other people who were contacted to be part of the story. For example, on page 31 of your response to the Commission, a line is removed from an email from s9(2)(a) [redacted] to s9(2)(a) [redacted] which appears to relate to Arena Williams' concerns about the sponsored article.*

The redactions are, in general, names and information about people contacted to be a part of the story. They also include contact details (mobile numbers and private email addresses).

There are two sentences redacted in the document that are not this information. One is the one you referenced on page 31; the other is on page 20 of our response. Both of these were redacted as private information relating to Arena Williams. Ms Williams and Minister Woods' Office were both consulted during the preparation of the OIA response and their views were taken into account.

Provided below are these sections without redactions. Given that this information has been withheld previously, please ensure that it is not released publicly.

It should also be noted that the second redaction was withheld on Ms Williams' request during consultation, as she felt that s9(2)(a) had misunderstood the conversation that they had had about the article and that this was not a fair representation of Ms Williams' position.

From: s9(2)(a)
To:
Cc:
Subject: RE: Urban Development Media Coverage Report - 8 May 2020
Date: Thursday, 14 May 2020 3:55:37 PM
Attachments: lmsw001.mn

s9(2)(g)(i)
s9(2)(a) She was worried that putting herself out there in the media might suddenly seem like she's helping coordinate some publicity for herself. I assured her it wasn't a problem in my view. s9(2)(a) could proceed as though we didn't know about her media involvement. It was just a way to present to groups in the community that she was very much involved in this work.

From: s9(2)(a)
To:
Cc:
Subject: Re: Arena Williams article / pics
Date: Tuesday, 19 May 2020 6:13:18 PM
Attachments: HPGR FINAL.docx

PS - I know you both said to me that Arena was leery of being seen to be campaigning and I was open with her about this - s9(2)(g)(i)
s9(2)(g)(i) But if you mean that Kainga Ora would rather not be seen to be leaning either way, that's another matter and I'm happy to explain

2. Media coverage in November included reference to an email from a senior media advisor to Business Desk - <https://businessdesk.co.nz/article/politics/shocking-revelation-kainga-oras-selective-memory-on-labour-links>. Please provide that email and any other correspondence exchanged with media responding to questions about the sponsored article.

Attached are email conversations (**Attachments 4a** and **4b**) between Kāinga Ora and BusinessDesk and Kāinga Ora and Newshub relating to the article.

3. The timeline you provided says that on 19 May 2020, s9(2)(a) received and approved the draft story from the freelance writer. We weren't able to track this decision through the documents you provided. If you have any correspondence to help clarify the decision-making process that would be helpful. We would also like to understand whether s9(2)(a) approved the draft article before or after the paragraph about Ms Williams' intention to stand for parliament at the 2020 election was removed.

s9(2)(a) advises that she approved the article after the paragraph was removed. She advises that there are no documents that show this decision; approval was given verbally.

4. Your response explains that s9(2)(a) was s9(2)(a) manager in May 2020. Could you please explain the relationship between s9(2)(a), who was copied in on some of the relevant correspondence in the OIA response.

s9(2)(a) was the Marketing Coordinator at the time, reporting to s9(2)(a).

Nāku noa, nā

Sarah Butler
Manager - Chief Executive Office

Your role in this year's General Election

- Page published: 10 Jun 2020
- Page updated: 06 Jul 2021

Know your rights and role in the upcoming election.

On 17 August 2020, the Prime Minister announced that the general election will be moved from 19 September 2020 to 17 October 2020, to ensure that a safe and accessible election is achievable, given the change in COVID-19 alert levels. Please note that the pre-election period has already commenced, following the dissolution of Parliament on 6 September 2020, which means we need to follow the official advice from the Public Service Commission until 17 October 2020. With the election just over a month away, it's timely to remind each other of our rights and what to be aware of as we go about our day to day work.

We have rights and freedoms like all New Zealanders

As public servants we have the same rights to freedom of speech and political activity in our private lives as other New Zealanders. We also need to be aware of how we exercise these rights in balance with remaining politically neutral (External site) in our work.

During the election period, we need to take extra care in our workplace and on social media to maintain the political neutrality of our roles.

How we can all do the right thing

The State Services Commission have produced fresh guidelines to help us understand in more detail what is expected of us pre-election, during the election and post-election.

The new guidelines take into account COVID-19 and that we are operating still in different times – they also offer help on election-related issues and preparing for an election as a government agency.

Together, we all have a role to play in ensuring the integrity of our electoral process and throughout the election period, we need to be mindful of what this means.

In its simplest form, the guidelines come back to doing the right thing at the right time and knowing how this translates in practice to the work we will be doing during the election period.

Guidelines available in full on the Public Service Commission Website

You are encouraged to read the guidelines on the Public Services Commission (PSC) External site) website so you can get a full understanding of what they may mean for you personally.

The guidance is set up in an easy to read format so you can draw on key information.

- Sections 1-4 focuses on the workings of the State Services
- Sections 5-6 covers the different parts of the election process
- Section 7 provides specific guidance for:
 - advertising, publicity and media, and
 - information requests and releases.



The election period has begun, so learn your rights and what to be aware of.

FAQs

Please also read these FAQs and note where you can go for further assistance within Kāinga Ora, if you have more questions.

-
- Contact person: Ryan Jones

s9(2)(a)

Election 2020 - Frequently Asked Questions

Please note that the election period commences on 19 June 2020 and ends on 18 September 2020.

Media & OIAs

1. Am I still able to make statements to the media in my official capacity during this period?

- Yes. If part of your role is to give comment to the media, you can continue to do so. These statements must be strictly factual and impartial.

2. How should I manage Official Information Act (OIA) requests during this period?

- The Official Information Act 1982 has an important role in ensuring the government of the day and its agencies are transparent and accountable to the general public.
- Official information should continue to be released in a timely manner to enable a well-informed electorate.
- As always, state servants must not become involved in assessing the political consequences of releasing information.

Tenant rights

3. Can Kāinga Ora tenants host election hoardings/signage at their property?

- Tenants can, if they wish, place political hoardings/signage at their Kāinga Ora tenancies, but they must not be attached to the building itself.
- The exception to this is if the hoarding/signage is not located at an individual tenancy. Any political signage placed at a Kāinga Ora complex or block of flats must be removed.
- Tenants should also consult their local territorial authority before installing any hoardings to ensure it complies with local bylaws.
- All political hoardings/signage must be removed before election day.

Staff rights

4. Am I allowed to participate in the political process during the election period?

- Yes. You can be politically active during the election in a personal capacity. However, as state servants we must keep our jobs out of our politics and our politics out of our jobs.

5. Can I express my political views on social media?

- Yes, as long as your activity does not undermine the political neutrality of the Kāinga Ora and the wider state services.
- For example, state servants must not link their personal political comments to their LinkedIn work profile or refer to their work or employer in their comments.
- There must be a clear separation between state servants' work role and their personal use of media.

Kāinga Ora site visits

6. Can Ministers, Members of Parliament or candidates in the general election attend Kāinga Ora sites (ie a building site) during the election period?

- During this period, the business of government continues and this may include, for example, the opening of new developments. That means Housing Ministers will continue to attend these events as part of business as usual.

- Particular care is needed around ceremonial events to avoid perceptions of being associated with any political aspects of such events, particularly if candidates are attending the events with Ministers.

Advertising

7. Can Kāinga Ora advertise its services during the election period?

- During the election period, state servants must be alert to the heightened political sensitivity around government advertising and any perceived risk that government funds are being used to pay for publicity for political parties.

Follow up questions

8. If I'm still not sure about things, where can I go for more guidance?

- Contact your Government Relations team at Kāinga Ora: mb-grujobs@kaingaora.govt.nz

Public Service Commission Standards of Integrity and Conduct

Home > Legislation that guides the way we work > Public Service Commission Standards of Integrity and Conduct

The Public Service Commission Standards of Integrity and Conduct applies to Public Service departments and Crown Entities.

120 organisations and 190,000 people that make up the State sector are required to comply with minimum standards of integrity and conduct set out in the code. Ultimately this means that all the agencies and staff sharing responsibility to serve New Zealanders act with the **spirit of service**.

The Standards of Integrity and Conduct supersedes the Public Service Code of Conduct - the behaviour that is expected under the new code is no different from before. The values implicit in that code are enduring. What has changed is the way they are expressed.

The PSC Standards of Integrity and Conduct state that we must be **fair, impartial, responsible** and **trustworthy**.

Fair

We must:

- treat everyone fairly and with respect
- be professional and responsive
- work to make government services accessible and effective
- strive to make a difference to the well-being of New Zealand and all its people.

Impartial

We must:

- maintain the political neutrality required to enable us to work with current and future governments
- carry out the functions of our organisation, unaffected by our personal beliefs
- support our organisation to provide robust and unbiased advice
- respect the authority of the government of the day.

Responsible

We must:

- act lawfully and objectively
- use our organisation's resources carefully and only for intended purposes
- treat information with care and use it only for proper purposes
- work to improve the performance and efficiency of our organisation.

Trustworthy

We must:

- be honest
- work to the best of our abilities
- ensure our actions are not affected by our personal interests or relationships
- never misuse our position for personal gain
- decline gifts or benefits that place us under any obligation or perceived influence
- avoid any activities, work or non-work, that may harm the reputation of Kāinga Ora or of the Public Service Commission.

Kāinga Ora foundation documents values and behaviours, and customer philosophy provide the framework for what is expected of us as staff - these all support the PSC Standards of Integrity and Conduct.

Remember: "There is no such thing as a small lapse in integrity" - Tom Peters

Please note in People Hub that you have read and understood these standards.

Page Details

Content Owner



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Content Status

General

Onboarding: My Checklist

Kia ora and welcome to Kāinga Ora.

You'll have started meeting your team and will be getting to know more about what we do and who we are. Your people leader and team members should be getting you up and running, but if you do need any help getting set-up, use this checklist as a guide.

By the end of week one, I have

- Met and started getting to know my people leader and my team
- Explored my work site and know where I will be sitting, where the emergency equipment and evacuation areas are, and know where the amenities are
- Received and set-up my devices and equipment (including printer, email and MS365)
- Set up my email signature in Outlook
- Explored the **Atamai** site
- Explored **I'm new here**
- Explored the **Teams and Structure** tool
- Completed the **Staff & Contractor Health & Safety Induction** form
- Completed all my **Declarations** via People Hub
- Read and understood the **Public Service Commission Standards of Integrity and Conduct**
- Requested all software applications required for my role via **People Hub** under 'Position Profiles'

By the end of month one, I have

- Started having conversations with my people leader to agree what I'll focus on and discuss my development
- Met with the relevant people I will work with regularly and have begun forming a partnership
- Started to understand how my work contributes to Kāinga Ora's vision and strategy
- Completed the compulsory **online learning modules**



s9(2)(a)

From: Martyn Watterson
Sent: Friday, 26 November 2021 5:45 PM
To: Sarah Butler; Donna Jennings
Subject: Re: Nicola Willis - Kāinga Ora: The Labour Party candidate, the taxpayer-paid ad, and the cover-up

Here's the other media statement as noted earlier.

Thanks

From: Quentin Bright <Quentin.Bright@kaingaora.govt.nz>
Sent: Wednesday, 10 November 2021 10:08 PM
To: s9(2)(a)
Subject: Re: Nicola Willis - Kāinga Ora: The Labour Party candidate, the taxpayer-paid ad, and the cover-up

s9(2)(a) Perhaps you should read the actual story first. <https://www.oneroof.co.nz/news/how-hobsonville-pts-community-spirit-became-an-antidote-to-covid-19-37953>
When it was begun Arena Williams was not a Labour candidate. And still wasn't when the story was published. Anyone can clearly see it's not political, rather it's residential or community-focused! I can't help but notice Nicola Willis hasn't linked to the actual story anywhere. I wonder why?

Here's the response we sent to Newshub today, (that ran its original story back in June on exactly the same topic.) It's all we'll be saying on the matter. It's all there is to say.
Kind regards
Quentin

Please attribute the statement to a Kāinga Ora spokesperson

The story that ran on One Roof (in May 2020) was very clearly about community work at Hobsonville Point. It featured a Hobsonville Point resident who was involved in the work. Kāinga Ora made this clear in its response to an OIA from Newshub on the subject (in June 2021)

In the latter stages of the story being put together Kāinga Ora was made aware of the fact that one of the story's main interviewees was potentially going to be a political candidate. A Kāinga Ora staff member made a personal judgement call that as the story was about a Hobsonville Point community response to helping out Hobsonville Point residents this did not matter. The story clearly has no political reference or bias.

Kāinga Ora takes its responsibility regarding political neutrality seriously. The article was written and published prior to Arena William's candidacy being announced. However, as a result of this matter, to make sure Kāinga Ora maintains its neutral position as a government agency under the Public Service Code of Conduct, the relevant staff were reminded to check with senior management to ensure all the necessary steps are taken to fulfil those obligations.

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From: s9(2)(a)
Sent: Wednesday, November 10, 2021 9:04:27 PM
To: Media Enquiries <MediaEnquiries@kaingaora.govt.nz>
Subject: FW: Nicola Willis - Kāinga Ora: The Labour Party candidate, the taxpayer-paid ad, and the cover-up

Some people who received this message don't often get email from s9(2)(a). [Learn why this is important](#)

Kei te Rangatira, tēnā koe

I will be running a story about this on Thursday.

The context is – I have just filed an unrelated story in which I talked to academic s9(2)(a) about the political neutrality and integrity of the public service – so the allegations around your handling of the Arena Williams matter is topical.

I understand that Minister Woods has expressed her disappointment in the conduct of your agency.

Can we please arrange a time to speak on Thursday morning?

Ngā mihi

s9(2)(a)

Reporter

call: +64 2040574983

email s9(2)(a)

BusinessDesk.
[Subscribe for just \\$24 a month.](#)

From: Ani O'Brien <ani.obrien@parliament.govt.nz>
Sent: Wednesday, 10 November 2021 6:32 PM
Subject: PR: Nicola Willis - Kāinga Ora: The Labour Party candidate, the taxpayer-paid ad, and the cover-up



Nicola Willis
National Party Spokesperson for
Housing & Urban Development (including Social)

10 November 2021

Kāinga Ora: The Labour Party candidate, the taxpayer-paid ad, and the cover-up

Sarah Butler

From: Quentin Bright
Sent: Tuesday, 11 January 2022 9:31 PM
To: Donna Jennings
Subject: Fwd: Newshub request

Newshub response

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On Wed, Nov 10, 2021 at 3:43 PM Quentin Bright <Quentin.Bright@kaingaora.govt.nz> wrote:

Kia s9(2)(a), please see the following statement in relation to your query – the same topic that was covered back in June by Newshub – and our response today is exactly the same as it was then. I respectfully ask that Newshub does not name the Kāinga Ora person or people in the email thread in its story. Thanks very much.

Ngā mihi

Quentin



Quentin Bright

Senior Media Advisor

Corporate Communications and Media
National Services

Mobile: s9(2)(a)
Email: quentin.bright@kaingaora.govt.nz

Please attribute the statement to a Kāinga Ora spokesperson

The story that ran on One Roof was very clearly about community work at Hobsonville Point. It featured a Hobsonville Point resident who was involved in the work. Kāinga Ora made this clear in its response to an OIA from Newshub on the subject.

In the latter stages of the story being put together Kāinga Ora was made aware of the fact that one of the story's main interviewees was potentially going to be a political candidate. A Kāinga Ora staff member made a personal judgement call that as the story was about a Hobsonville Point community response to helping out Hobsonville Point residents this did not matter. The story clearly has no political reference or bias.

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From: s9(2)(a)
Sent: Wednesday, 10 November 2021 2:27 PM
To: Media Enquiries <MediaEnquiries@kaingaora.govt.nz>
Subject: Re: Newshub request

Some people who received this message don't often get email from s9(2)(a) . [Learn why this is important](#)

Hi following up on this, thanks

On Wed, Nov 10, 2021 at 10:48 AM s9(2)(a) wrote:

Kia ora

This is a request for an interview with Andrew McKenzie about emails showing Kainga Ora was aware Arena Williams was planning to run as a Labour candidate when it used her for advertorial content and took steps not to disclose the fact.

This is for a story running on Newshub at 6pm tonight. My deadline for the interview is 4pm at the latest.

Thank you,

s9(2)
(a)

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s9(2)(a) | POLITICAL EDITOR | NEWSHUB | MOBILE +s9(2)(a)

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s9(2)(a) | POLITICAL EDITOR | NEWSHUB | s9(2)(a)

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