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# Briefing to the Incoming Prime Minister

Rural Women New Zealand



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# Overview

Our rural communities are unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, are inherently resilient and unequivocally hold the economic, social and cultural strength of Aotearoa New Zealand in their hearts. Aotearoa New Zealand's history is populated by rural pioneers and entrepreneurs laced together with Te Ao Māori. Aotearoa New Zealand's rural communities are innovative, tight-knit and supportive. They value their heritage and contribution to our way of life which they hold dear and is the envy of many around the world. Rural women are the backbone of our rural communities and are vital to ensuring the communities in which they live, work, and play are strong and resilient. Rural women are leaders in their local communities. Government policies, legislation and decisions impact urban and rural communities differently.

## About RWNZ

Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation that since 1925 has been reaching into all rural communities and for nearly 100 years has been, and continues to be, a credible, respected voice on rural environment, health, education, technology, business and social issues.

RWNZ is affiliated to the Associated Country Women of the World and as such upholds all United Nations, ILO, FAO and WHO conventions and outcome statements as they relate to women and rural women in particular. RWNZ is a strong supporter of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and seeks acknowledgement of these in its submissions to Parliament.

# Role of RWNZ

RWNZ strives to ensure that all rural residents, workers and families have equitable access to services, inequalities are addressed by Government, and the wellbeing of rural communities is considered from the beginning of all policy and legislative development. Our Members play a vital role as leaders in their communities and as decision-makers at local, national and international level.

## Rural Communities come first

Change begins when a community comes together to discuss issues that affect it. When given the opportunity, this togetherness allows rural communities to discuss the effects of government policy and legislation on those living and working in rural New Zealand. Rural voices must be included in consultation and policy development to ensure positive outcomes for rural communities.

RWNZ recommends that the Prime Minister urges all Labour Members of Parliament and Ministers to ensure that all policy development includes both a rural impact analysis and a gender impact analysis to identify and mitigate any potential adverse impacts of the intersectionality of both gender and rural living which could occur from the proposed policies.

Currently there are guidelines for rural proofing at the Ministry of Primary Industries which support basic rural impact analyses and the Ministry for Women has the gender analysis tool, Bringing Gender In.

The desired action is that the Prime Minister urges Labour Members of Parliament and Ministers to ensure both these tools are put to use in policy creation and development.

RWNZ further recommends that the Prime Minister encourages all Ministers and their agencies to consult and communicate with rural communities to ensure effective participation and analysis.

Consultation can be achieved through the use of such mechanisms as focus groups, surveys and newsletters which are hosted and/or distributed by rural interest groups such as ours.

RWNZ suggests that the Prime Minister identify and encourage rural women to represent their communities on public and private sector boards, local decision-making bodies and in Parliament and further encourages Labour Members of Parliament and Ministers to do the same.

- Training: Given the expense and distance away from home many courses are, RWNZ believe that an initial investment in governance training and mentoring programmes for rural women via a Prime Minister's Scholarship would be ideal.
- Representation: Ensure that rural women are on Government appointed Boards, review Committees and taskforces set up by the Government and Parliament by including the requirement for rural women in the terms of reference for such groups and by contacting RWNZ seeking such representatives.
- Advocacy: Include a statement of encouragement in speeches and other engagement opportunities so that those present hear from the Prime Minister that opportunities exist for rural women in leadership and decision-making roles.

RWNZ would like to see the Government action the United Nations Human Rights Instruments, which have been ratified by Aotearoa New Zealand, as they relate to rural women and girls, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the outcome statement of the 62nd United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62); the Beijing Platform for Action and; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The action taken by the Government should include accepting and implementing any General Recommendations and State Party Specific Recommendations to Aotearoa New Zealand by the CEDAW Committee and any recommendations or conventions from the International Labour Organisation which particularly relate to rural women.

## Priority Areas

RWNZ has the following five priorities and asks that the Prime Minister note the recommended actions and using her strong leadership role, seeks to influence her Caucus, particularly the Ministers, in meeting the following recommendations over the next term of Government.

# Health and Wellbeing

Excellent health and wellbeing services are essential for rural communities to thrive. Lack of equitable access to affordable healthcare remains a central issue facing rural women and their families. Currently, many rural New Zealanders are forced to travel significant distances to reach health services often causing serious health and financial consequences for the patient.

Access to mobile health care and online health services remains limited by location, eligibility criteria and, in the case of online services, lack of reliable digital connectivity.

Mental health concerns and suicide rates are alarmingly high in rural New Zealand and access to mental health care is inadequate. The isolation experienced by rural New Zealanders during challenging times and adverse events is a major concern for many rural families.

The lack of adequate maternity services in rural areas places women and their families at risk. The allocation of resources to provide safe, timely and effective maternity care should be available to all mothers regardless of their location.

Well-resourced and professionally supported midwives, nurses and care workers are essential for the health and wellbeing of rural communities.

Recommendations for the Government:

- Invest in excellent healthcare for rural communities including increasing the availability and range of mobile and local health services and support for all rural health practitioners and providers including midwives, nurses and care workers;
- Establish and maintain network connectivity in rural areas to provide greater digital access to health and wellbeing services;
- Provide increased resources to enable improved access by rural New Zealanders to education on, treatment of and support for mental health, drug and alcohol abuse and wellbeing services;
- Ensure rural mothers and their babies receive the best maternity care possible including access to services and medical care in a timely manner;
- Improve accessibility to localised treatment options (such as screening and diagnostics) in rural New Zealand.

# Rural Connectivity

Internet connectivity and mobile coverage are essential to many aspects of our everyday lives. However, the lack of high speed quality and affordable telecommunication services in rural New Zealand creates inequity between urban and rural communities. This inequity hinders rural businesses by leaving them unable to undertake basic tasks online and delayed access to resources and information makes them less efficient and competitive.

Unstable connectivity is also a critical safety issue in the event of an emergency, accident, crime or adverse event. Large areas of rural New Zealand still do not have mobile phone coverage and are especially vulnerable in a crisis situation.

Lack of internet connectivity impedes educational opportunities for rural students and is problematic for those who are now expected to use the internet instead of cheques and cash.

Recommendations for the Government:

- Provide nationwide access to affordable, quality connectivity by future proofing our communications networks;
- Share information on ways to increase rural connectivity and regular, informative progress reports by government on the rural connectivity roll-out;
- Financially support research into new and innovative ways to provide quality, affordable connectivity to rural and remote areas.

# Environment

The wellbeing of our natural environment is a major concern for all New Zealanders and discussions regarding threats to our environment from climate change, and the opportunities to mitigate them, must include rural communities.

Financially and environmentally sustainable land-based businesses play an important part in protecting our land, water, and indigenous flora and fauna.

Finding a balance between urban growth and land use policies which protect our productive land is vital for food production and community resilience. Our natural environment and biosecurity is vulnerable to incursions by exotic pests and diseases. The potential effects of any such incursions on our rural communities, in both an economic and social context, cannot be understated.

The quality, quantity, availability and equitable supply of sustainable water must be the cornerstones of all decisions relating to it.

#### Recommendations:

- Ensure that economic, environmental and sustainable land use decisions are made in partnership with landowners, land users and rural communities;
- Secure funding to support the research and development of more sustainable primary industry practices and products;
- Improve domestic, national and international biosecurity protocols

to reduce incursions and strengthen monitoring, response and management of any incursions;

- Invest in strategies and actions for effective water storage and supply systems which ensure high quality, sustainable and equitable water supplies that keep pace with climate change and population growth;
- Develop funding programs to support rural communities to make any changes needed to mitigate climate change.

## Education

Quality education for rural New Zealanders is compromised by distance, isolation, telecommunication limitations and workforce recruitment and retention. As a result, rural educational opportunities are limited.

Rural schools continue to play a vital part in the social cohesion and economic viability of rural communities.

Rural New Zealanders should be able to access lifelong learning opportunities that will enhance their lives and enable them to contribute to their communities. Extramural and distance learning are integral at all levels of our education system today. Access to knowledge, skills and qualifications are essential for all New Zealanders regardless of where they live.

A lack of rural representation on school boards and government advisory committees creates a lack of awareness of rural perspectives in decision-making and inequity in the allocation of resources.

#### Recommendations for the Government:

- Include rural voices in the development of education policies, procedures and legislation;
- Formulate strategies which develop and retain a skilled and multi-disciplined rural education workforce that ensures equitable career advancement;
- Provide adequate resources to ensure that rural communities have effective access to all education services including special needs assistance, early childhood education and care, availability and financial assistance for school boarding and tertiary qualification support;
- Ensure rural schools have access to services including school property management and health and wellbeing services for students, staff and whānau.

# Safety and Security

The inconsistent quality and irregular maintenance of rural roads combined with speed, poor signage and a diverse range of road users leads to serious injuries and fatalities in rural communities. Speed on rural roads, particularly near rural schools and on school bus routes, endangers rural children.

Threats to personal security are increasing in rural New Zealand and isolation is an impediment to seeking and receiving urgent help when it is needed. More rural women experience family violence than their urban sisters and access to help and support is often hours away.

New Zealanders working and living in rural communities have the right to work and live in safe environments. Rural communities suffer high rates of injury and death amongst their workforces and families.

Recommendations for Government:

- Work with agencies including local government to improve the quality, maintenance and safety of rural roads through increased funding, driver education and effective road signage;

- Work with local government authorities to ensure that there are slower speed limits in rural school zones and 20kph limit while passing stationary school buses;

- Fully resource agencies and communities to reduce violence against women and children including the provision of safe houses and support close to rural communities;

- Increase policing in rural areas;

- Collaborate with rural communities and agencies tasked with keeping New Zealanders safe to improve workplace safety and ensure that management of hazards and incidents leads to a reduction in serious injury and death.

## First 100 days

The strategic intentions articulated in the first one hundred days of government are vital to the ongoing success of Aotearoa New Zealand and the transformational leadership needed to lead these intentions should be obvious to all New Zealanders. The economic, environmental, social and cultural strength of the nation is at its most vulnerable as a new Government settles in to its place and we look forward to hearing of the central role rural communities will be playing in those strategic intentions and leadership of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Rural Women New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to meet with you in these first one hundred days to discuss opportunities for collaboration and we look forward to hearing from your office to that end.

## He waka eke noa

Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei