

[James' blog - 14 June 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

I also touch on our operating model review which was announced last week. Do listen out for some updates on the project, coming very soon.

[James' blog - 20 June 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Hopefully you've had a chance now to explore the [operating model project hub](#), your one-stop shop for the latest on the project. The hub will grow and develop over time, and we expect to share some further updates this week, so look out for those.

[James' blog - 4 July 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

By now you may well have met our [operating model project team](#) who will facilitate this mahi for us. The team brings a sophisticated understanding of Te Ao Māori and Te Tiriti, strong knowledge of the public sector, operating model expertise, and institutional knowledge of MfE.

The focus of the first phase of the project, discovery, is on running a great process to collect and synthesise information about the Ministry as a whole.

We will shortly be launching a walkthrough of recent insights gathered on hybrid and flexible working, kicking off your opportunity to provide thoughts, feedback and suggestions.

This walkthrough will be hosted virtually so everyone has the opportunity to contribute and will be self-paced, so you can jump in and provide feedback at a time that works for you. We'll let you know once this is up and running, so watch out for more information about how you can contribute next week.

[James' blog - 18 July 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

One way we support our people to do that is with our [flexible by default](#) approach to how and where we work, so it's great to see so many of you jumping into the first of our [virtual whiteboard walkthroughs](#) on this topic.

These walkthroughs are a key part of the discovery phase of our [operating model project](#). The focus of this first one is on hybrid and remote working - an important part of our future, and something we want to do well.

The team are really keen to hear thoughts and ideas from everyone, whether you work remotely or not, so if you've got a moment do [find out more here](#) and send through your ideas before Wednesday 19 July. We've had some great feedback already, so thank you to everyone who has contributed.

[Sam's blog - 24 July 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Thanks also to everyone who took part in the first of our virtual whiteboard walkthroughs on hybrid and remote working. These walkthroughs are a key part of the discovery phase of our [operating](#)

[model project](#). The team are just in the process of summarizing the insights and are looking forward to sharing these soon.

The next walkthrough topic is, 'Working as one - Processes, technology and you'. The whiteboard will open later this week and we're looking forward to hearing all your thoughts on what enables you to collaborate effectively, or what roadblocks you are encountering.

[James' blog - 3 August 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

In this week's vlog I discuss the future that lies ahead of us, including the operating model review and the upcoming election.

[James' blog – 8 August 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Part of our preparation for that is also getting ourselves ready for change. Elections are the foundation of our democracy. They give us a mandate for our work – to create laws and regulations and to use taxpayers' money.

The election gives us an opportunity to reset as well, which is why we have timed the review of our operating model for now. I'm continuing to see agencies across the public service doing this kind of work. The pressure on government finances and our challenging economic environment certainly makes it important, so our own efforts to step into this are right on point.

But even if we weren't operating in that constrained fiscal environment, the work of Manatū Mō Te Taiao demands that we look at how we can have the greatest impact for Aotearoa. Our environmental challenges are pressing, and the world we live in is only getting more complex and demanding. That's why it's so important for us to look ahead, think about the future, and the crucial role this Ministry plays in shaping our tomorrow. It was great to talk more about this with you all at the [operating model project](#) ask me anything session earlier today.

Do take a moment to get up to speed on [what's happening](#) with the project here, and look out for more opportunities to contribute. In the meantime, you can continue to share your thoughts and feedback with the team at any time on FeedbackOpModel@mfe.govt.nz

[James' blog – 14 August 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

These are also some of the questions explored in our next operating model whiteboard walk through - [Te Ao Māori at Manatū Mō te Taiao](#). We're really keen to hear how you think we can better incorporate Te Ao Māori into our work and fulfill our obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, so please do take a look and add your feedback [here](#).

[James' blog – 23 August 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

I am looking forward to connecting with you all later today to discuss the [operating model project](#). For those that can't make it, the session will be recorded and a link shared afterwards.

Just on the operating model project, a quick reminder that our next [whiteboard](#) closes on Friday. We're really keen to hear how you think we can better incorporate Te Ao Māori into our work and fulfill our obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, so please do take a look and [add your feedback](#) here.

[James' blog – 30 August 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Changing how we work is a big topic and I'd encourage you all to keep talking to each other and share thoughts and questions with your senior leaders. There'll be an opportunity to ask pātai in the all-staff session next week and in your business group Q&A sessions, and as always, you can reach out to the project team any time on FeedbackOpModel@mfe.govt.nz.

In the meantime, one of the key questions we are seeking to answer through the project is how we can better bring Te Ao Māori and Te Tiriti into our work every day. To do that, we need to understand where we are now, and where we need to be in the future. Supporting this mahi is MfE's annual [Tōnui cultural capability survey](#). If you haven't yet, please do take a moment to participate before the survey closes on Friday.

[James' blog - 17 October 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

I'm aware that this is an uncertain time for our kaimahi, particularly those who've never been a public servant during a change of government before. You might be wondering how a new government, and the operating model changes we're making at the same time, will combine to impact you and your work.

The simple answer is a new government *does* impact our work programme. And by definition it should; anything less and we wouldn't be living in a democracy. This reflects what we're here to do as public servants - serve the government of the day, whatever the shape, in a neutral way.

I really can't stress enough how critical this is. Every incoming government worries whether the public service is so heavily invested in the programme of the outgoing government that it won't be responsive to the incoming government's intentions and electoral mandate. Therefore, we have to earn the trust and confidence of any new government by demonstrating we are listening and responsive. Like any new relationship, this takes time and effort.

But I also want to stress that we have been planning for this and your senior leaders have considerable experience in managing transitions between governments. We certainly have a lot to work through over the next few months, but we are already getting ahead with the review of our

operating model. In the midst of post-election reorganisation, this is our opportunity to get clear about how we want to work, while fulfilling the government's agenda and delivering on our stewardship role.

This has been top of mind for me for the past few weeks, as I make decisions on our first operating model proposal. A key driver for this project is getting us well set up for the future, to meet our challenges head on and keep delivering on our vision of a flourishing environment for every generation. The structure and organisational design we have proposed is intended to enable us to flex around changing government priorities and funding, and to be durable in a more financially constrained future.

On Thursday next week, we will share our set of decisions with you and announce where to from here. You should have received an invite for that recorded session. If you missed it, you can add it to your [calendar](#) here.

I know that the next few months may well feel unsettled for many of us. Soon we're going to be giving effect to a new work programme, while also progressively working through our operating model review. Much of our current work will continue, but some will change. How we feel about all of that might also change over time, or even day to day. I want to remind everyone that support is always available through our [EAP services](#).

With change there is always opportunity, and the prospect of doing our work better, for greater impact and outcomes.

[James' blog – 6 September 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Last week, you may have heard the Government announcements around the [Fiscal Sustainability and Effectiveness Programme](#). Since Budget '23 the fiscal and economic environment has remained uncertain. Seeing announcements like this one can leave us feeling a little uncertain, but it's worth remembering that one of the reasons we embarked on the [operating model project](#) was to get ahead of the financial challenge.

A flexible, scalable operating model will allow us to meet any challenge, whether financial or otherwise, with confidence. The work we are doing on the operating model project will help us navigate this, and adapt to an evolving context.

Thanks to everyone who joined us for the project Q&A session on Monday. I really value the opportunity to connect with you all and hear more about how you're feeling. A quick reminder to keep checking in with the [operating model project hub](#), where you'll find information, resources and answers to pātai.

[James' blog – 19 September 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Looking ahead, it's a big week for our [operating model](#) review, as we share our first proposals and begin the consultation and feedback process. There'll be two steps to this. On Tuesday, we'll be sharing this information with tier twos and threes (that's Deputy Secretaries, Directors, Heads of, and Chief Advisors), and on [Wednesday](#) we will share this with the wider Ministry. During the sessions, we will run through the proposals, and talk through the next steps for consultation and feedback.

I want to acknowledge the range of emotions we might be feeling about the possibility of change, and that for some of us, this may vary one day to the next. Please continue to check in on each other, and reach out to hoamahi or your manager if you need some support during this time.

[James' blog - 27 September 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

It was a tough week for our whānau in Te Waipounamu, and a reminder of why our complex work in the climate adaptation and mitigation spaces is so important.

To equip ourselves and meet these challenges, Manatū Mō Te Taiao needs to be as effective and integrated as we can.

This is a key driver of our operating model project, so I'm really keen to hear what you think about our proposals. You can [check them out and share your feedback](#) here.

[James' blog - 3 October 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Whatever the outcome of the election, our work remains as important as ever for the wellbeing of Aotearoa. A huge amount of mahi lies ahead, and I'm confident that the work we already have underway on our [operating model](#) will help us get ahead of this challenge.

Thank you to everyone who's taken the time to share your thoughts on the [proposals](#). We've had some great, honest feedback, which will help us shape the next chapter for the Ministry. I've now had the opportunity to meet with kaimahi from [Tūmatakōkiri](#) and [Te Rōpu Māori](#) to hear their feedback, and in my meeting with our [Rainbow Network](#) I also got some ideas on how we build a more inclusive Ministry.

When we embarked on this project back in June, we knew from the outset we wouldn't get everything right. That's why the consultation and feedback process is so valuable, and why I'm really keen to hear from as many of you as possible.

The reality is that Manatū Mō Te Taiao is operating in a complex and shifting context, and while we have a good opportunity here to build off all the recent work to equip ourselves to meet the future as best we can, the uncertainty can leave us feeling anxious and unsettled.

When I have moments of doubt about the risks we might create by embarking on change, I reflect on some advice I heard recently from Pete Chrisp of NZ Trade and Enterprise that “organisations that change slower than their operating context eventually become irrelevant”. So, we know we have to continue to evolve, and I’m comforted by the fact that we have the wisdom of more than 1,000 kaimahi to draw upon.

I want to reiterate that no final decisions have been made, and to enable us to make those decisions in an informed way, it’s really important that we hear what you think through our official consultation and feedback process. So, if you haven’t yet, please do take a moment to visit the [operating model project hub](#) and share your feedback before 5pm on Wednesday 4 October.

[James' blog - 31 October 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Last week we took some big steps forward on work to set Te Manatū Mō Te Taiao up for the future. On Thursday I outlined [decisions about our new organisational structure](#) and senior leadership roles. On Friday, I announced four permanent and two acting appointments to our executive leadership team.

With these leaders in place, and our business groups preparing to line up behind our priorities, we’re in the best position to start working with the new government and refreshing both what we are working on and how we are doing it.

I hope you’ve had a good chance to look over the [decision document](#) and see where you and your team fit in.

We’ll be lifting and shifting entire teams into their new business groups on December 1. There’ll be adjustments and changes over the following weeks in various parts of the organisation, as the government’s priorities become clear, and our teams settle into the right position.

[James' blog – 15 November 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

I wanted to take a quick moment to shout out to everyone who is working hard to get us ready for two big events – the ‘go-live’ of our [new operating model](#) on 1 December, and responding to the incoming government. These are two significant pieces of work that bring together kaimahi from across the Ministry, working quickly and nimbly to get us ready, set and in the right position.

[James' blog - 22 November 2023 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

By now you will have caught up with the news about our Tier 3 appointments (Chief of Staff, General Manager, Programme Director and Chief Advisor roles), which were announced at the end of last week. This marks the next step in our move to the [new operating model](#), which will go live on Friday 1 December.

On Tuesday afternoon, it was reported that the National Party, New Zealand First and ACT had agreed their policy programmes, and talks were moving to agreeing ministerial roles.

I know we are all eager to have some direction from our new ministers about their priorities. I remain confident that we are in a good position to respond, whatever the outcome. No doubt you will have lots of questions, and we'll do our best to answer these over the coming weeks, as we know more.

As I'm sure you can imagine, there's been a huge amount of work going on behind the scenes to get us ready for the next phase at the Ministry. My continued gratitude goes out to everyone who has been involved with supporting that mahi. There will be opportunities for us to come together and reflect on what's happening, so do look out for more on those.

I'd also invite you all to explore the new [change hub](#) on Te Taiao, which brings together information and updates on the operating model project and the 100-day Plan Work Programme. The plan is to update the hub weekly, so a good one to bookmark as we move through the next chapter in the Ministry's evolution.

Change is a complicated thing. We all feel different things about it, and what we're feeling in the moment can shift around. I have days of excitement and others of anxiety. Please do continue to look out for each other. Often, just taking a moment to acknowledge what's happening for us can really help.

[James' blog - 1 February 2024 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Because MfE has grown by more than 50 percent since 2017, we're part of a group of agencies who've been asked to find 7.5 percent of savings, as opposed to the 6.5 percent set for others. This comes on top of the funds returned for RM implementation through the budget process, and our existing, planned decline in our baseline over the next few years as time-limited funding ends. Cumulatively this downward revision of our funding is challenging but we don't yet know what resources may be provided for work on the resource management system.

As many of you will know, teams have been busy working through an exercise to reset our priorities and budget in line with the government's priority work programme and the savings targets.

Reflecting the goal of the operating model to be a purposeful, strategy-led organisation we are also taking the opportunity through this to re-set our overall strategic priorities. From there, we will begin our business and work programme planning, refining it as we go as more information comes from the government.

What this means for you

I know many kaimahi are keen to know what the savings exercise and the reset of our work programme means for them. This is the same question being asked by people across the public sector, and I know the lack of certainty is really unsettling for some of our people.

In the past week Te Pūrengi has met several times to consider a wide range of potential savings options across our work programme and confirm which we put forward for ministers. As I write this, we have had our first meeting with our ministers and they made clear they understand the challenges our financial outlooks presents and the potential impact on staff. They have sought more detailed information about the implications of various choices and we are working this up.

Ministers will agree among themselves on the final shape and scale of savings and then propose this to the Minister of Finance. The outcome of this, along with any budget decisions, will provide us with the information needed to determine what impact there may be on jobs. In short, we don't yet know.

Relationship to the new operating model

Last year I outlined how Te Pūrengi would meet in the new year to decide on next steps for the operating model, once we had information from the Government about our budget and its priorities.

While it's all connected, the specific op model work has needed to slow in order to be informed by the current budget, priorities and work programme discussions with ministers. Its important to be clear on our finances before we consider any more changes to the way the Ministry is set up. Te Pūrengi will pick this up again in March.

I know you'd like more certainty than this for yourselves, your colleagues, and the work you value. I will continue to keep you up to date and to be open and honest with you, and ask that you look out for each other as we manage this busy time together.

[James' blog - 22 February 2024 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Over the weekend, the Prime Minister delivered his ['State of the Nation'](#) speech, during which he talked a lot about the "tough choices" he sees ahead (you can read the [full speech](#) here). I know you'll continue to have lots of questions about what this means for you and our mahi, so here's a quick rundown of where we're at.

What we know

Like most of the public service, we have been set some challenging savings targets by the government. The combined impact of this with our already declining baseline, along with the mini budget which saw \$300 million in resource management funding over the next four years returned, means the Ministry will have to reduce in size further than was previously envisaged as our time-limited funding peaked under the Labour Government.

We are going through an exercise to reset our priorities and budget in line with the new government's work programme and savings targets. We're also reshaping our strategic priorities. This reset also gives us an opportunity to ensure the ministry is a strategic, integrated and agile organisation in order to maximise the impact of our limited resources. This is the primary focus for Te Pūrengi at the moment.

What we don't know (yet)

We don't know how much smaller we are going to become, and what the impact will be on jobs. Te Pūrengi has been very focused on our work to deliver savings options to ministers, which are now being considered by the Minister of Finance. Until final decisions have been made, we won't have a full picture of the impact on jobs, or how the ministry is set up. That should become clearer as we approach the Budget in May.

What we're doing in the meantime

We are getting underway with our annual business planning process - what we're working on - which always takes place at this time of year. We're making sure this lines up with the functions and aspirations of the new operating model.

This time round, we are having to do this planning knowing that our budget is getting smaller (as will the Ministry), but without a final view of by how much. It means we will be stopping some work and scaling back elsewhere, while continuing to use the resources we have to make the biggest impact. While we wait for budget decisions by ministers we are planning around various scenarios.

I have no doubt this is going to be *the* hot topic at the Public Sector Leadership Team retreat I'm attending this week. And while I can't provide much in the way of further clarity at this stage, I do feel confident that MfE is as prepared as we can be to meet the challenges ahead.

Things to keep in mind

For now though, it's really important not to get ahead of the facts, or to fill the uncertainty with speculation. There are many decisions yet to be made by ministers and we are keeping you informed as well as we can.

Over the next month or so, the Safety and Wellbeing team are going to be running a series of webinars with Jane Davis, who specialises in positive psychology programmes and workshops. Each session has three time options for you to pick from. Find out more and [add the events](#) to your calendar here.

In any period of change or uncertainty, it's natural to need additional support. Please reach out to your manager if you need to talk, or connect with our [EAP services](#). They are there to help you.

When I'm feeling anxious or concerned during times of change, I try to step back and see the situation in the here and now, not letting my emotions be inflamed by things that haven't yet happened, and look at things in the broadest context possible.

This helps me create space for the most immediate pressures and to focus on the facts at hand. Plenty of exercise outside helps me clear my head, gain perspective and get better sleep.