

**From:** [Ella Bambrugh-Copeland](#) on behalf of [James Palmer](#)  
**To:** [All Remote Staff](#); [All RM and NABS managers](#); [All Staff Auckland](#); [All Staff Christchurch](#); [All Staff Gisborne](#); [All Staff Wellington](#)  
**Subject:** 2023 General Election  
**Date:** Monday, 16 October 2023 12:52:39 pm  
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Kia ora e te whānau, I hope you are all starting your week well.

Many of you will be digesting the election results from Saturday night and wondering what it means for your work. As the Prime Minister has conceded that the Labour Party is not in a position to form a government, we are now operating under the “[caretaker convention](#)” principles until the new Cabinet is officially sworn in by the Governor-General. Our Ministers continue to hold their portfolios and we continue our day-to-day operations for now, but we need to consider any significant ministerial or management decisions on a case-by-case basis and respond judiciously. For example, decisions about matters that are potentially controversial or that have long-term implications that bind the incoming government should be deferred if possible. If deferral is not possible, we should look to put in place temporary arrangements. If you have question about this, please ask your Deputy Secretary or Pepi Batsos for guidance. You can also find more information on Te Taiao: [General election guidance as we enter the next phase \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

In parallel a political process is underway between parties to form the next government. The public service has no involvement in this, unless asked for specific advice on policy options that might be agreed to as part of coalition agreements. The process for providing such advice is managed confidentially through the Public Service Commissioner, and in the case of any environment or climate change matter myself.

The Leader of the Opposition can go to the Governor-General at any time and seek to form the next government if they can demonstrate they have the confidence of a majority of the members of Parliament. However, there are a large number of special and overseas votes yet to be counted, more than 20% of total votes cast, which may see final numbers of seats move around. Political parties are indicating their intention to wait until the official results are certified on 3 November before a government will be formed. There is a small risk this period will be extended further until the Port Waikato by-election on 25 November. Official results for this by election will be completed in early December.

While we are in the caretaker period, we are preparing to support incoming ministers to take up their roles and provide them with policy options for how to meet their objectives. It is clear from manifesto commitments that some of our current work programme will change, some of the recent reform work will need to be reconsidered, and there will be new work for us as well. More detailed planning is now underway for priorities likely to be progressed during the incoming government’s first 100 days, which will also set us up well to progress the next phase of environment and climate-focussed manifesto commitments. The intention of the political parties expected to form the new government, is clearly to reduce expenditure. The work we have been doing to review our operating model places us in a good position to work through

this. I am confident we can find savings and work more efficiently while continuing to deliver great outcomes for New Zealanders and Te Taiao.

While we go through this period of uncertainty and change, it is essential that we remain at our professional best and, in particular, that we uphold the 5 values enshrined in the Public Service Act 2020: *Impartial, Accountable, Trustworthy, Respectful, Responsive*.

As our thoughts are also with the people of Israel and Palestine, and their diaspora throughout the world, at this time we can give thanks for our peaceful democracy.

Ngā mihi,  
James

**James Palmer**

*Secretary for the Environment | Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Taiao*

EA: Ella Bambrough-Copeland [Ella.Bambrough-Copeland@mfe.govt.nz](mailto:Ella.Bambrough-Copeland@mfe.govt.nz)

Ministry for the Environment | Manatū mō te Taiao

[James.Palmer@mfe.govt.nz](mailto:James.Palmer@mfe.govt.nz) | [environment.govt.nz](http://environment.govt.nz)

