

Community Sector Taskforce



Panui 006

29 April 2005

*He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka
Rough seas but we will handle it*

Tena koutou katoa and warm Pacific greetings.

Nearly four weeks out from the unexpected about turn by a Cabinet Committee, we are frustrated that we cannot report any substantive progress the development of a new entity for the Sector

In the week following the Minister's announcement on April 4th, the Taskforce met with Minister Rick Barker and Tim Barnett, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister. In subsequent weeks, through meetings and phone conversations between the Minister and our Co-chairs, Pat Seymour and Peter Glensor, an agreement has been made to jointly develop material to answer the questions raised within the Cabinet. The Taskforce has submitted a draft over a week ago and still awaits any response.

Throughout these conversations, the Taskforce has been repeatedly reassured by the Minister, and by the funding Minister, Steve Maharey, that "nothing has changed - Government still wants the same outcomes, and the money is all still there".

Strengthening the Sector and strengthening sector relationships with government remain the two primary goals of the Taskforce, and the new entity which the Sector had started to evolve. Since the Taskforce was established it has:

- a. engaged a wide range of groups within the sector
- b. facilitated discussion to define and work on high priority issues within the sector
- c. worked to raise the profile of and respect for the sector
- d. developed, through wide discussion, a mechanism (through the new entity) whereby the whole sector can inter-relate with each other and work more effectively with government
- e. reached agreement that any new entity or mechanism will adopt a "two house" way of working – where both Tangata Tiriti and Tangata Whenua are full participants
- f. sought to stay in touch with new developments within the sector, such as a possible new research centre, the proposed new satellite accounts for the non-profit sector, and the emergence of government-led initiatives on "capability building".

The Taskforce remains optimistic that Cabinet will support the new developments, in the spirit of the Statement of Government Intentions (SOGI), and will approve and endorse the Taskforce continuing to put the foundations into place. The Principles of the SOGI and the government commitments made in the SOGI have both been put at risk by the Cabinet committee decision not to proceed.

In the meantime, we regret that we have had to put substantive work "on hold". This work included

- communication and engagement plans to ensure wide and active participation in the national forum
- trustee nomination and selection processes
- planning for the inaugural AGM which was to have been held four weeks from now
- setting in place the arrangements for a sector-based secretariat, after the current team's contracts end on 30 June.

We have proposed to the Minister that the inaugural AGM could be postponed until later in the year (late September/early October) and that we convene an urgent meeting with strategic leaders from across the Sector. We are holding the date of 27th May for this meeting, and will confirm a date as soon as we can.

We have also let the Minister know that we must still urgently proceed with replenishment of our Taskforce/Trust leadership as a number of our members have made other commitments beyond July 1st this year and cannot continue in their roles. Once the OK is given, we propose to re-activate the nomination and independent appointment panel process which has been put on hold.

A warm thanks to those of you who continue to let Ministers and Members of Parliament know how sector organisations feel about the situation.

We are confident that the Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector would value hearing directly from sector groups your support for the continuation of the Taskforce's work.

Extracts of some of the letters sent by various sector organizations to the Prime Minister and Ministers
Horomia, Barker and Maharey:

From the health sector:

“... Health and Social Services could not exist in this country in the area of mental health, public health and disability especially, without the Sector. The Government simply does not provide the services that are needed. Without the dedication and commitment at considerable personal cost of this Sector the people of New Zealand would be considerably worse off. The Community and Voluntary Sector add innovation, efficiency (most services run on the smell of an oily rag), and integrity with a distinct lack of bureaucracy. I would venture to suggest that to not proceed with supporting the foundation of this new body would be tantamount to irresponsible madness. I am sure that you all realise that the Sector itself does not have the spare cash to pay for the setting up or running of the administration of a body like this - all their income is spent on providing services and there is little left for drawing people together. The benefits of working together would be enormous however, leading to lack of duplication and even more innovation and efficiency.

I would implore you to reconsider this decision and allow the foundation of a national entity for the Community and Voluntary Sector, with full financial backing in the interests of all the people of New Zealand.... A move to form this body would confirm the importance that the Government places on working with the people of New Zealand to help them help themselves.”

From social services:

“As a past member and Chairman of NZCOSS I state my disbelief and dismay that the Cabinet has decided to renege on its commitment to work in trust with the community and voluntary sector.

..... Since the Memorandum of Understanding (Statement of Government Intentions) was signed by the Prime Minister in the presence of representatives of the community voluntary sector. NZCOSS and its associated Councils have consistently advocated on behalf of the partnership. This advocacy was often in the face of grass roots cynicism that Government would remain true to its word.

In this election year sadly it appears that this cynicism was well founded. The vision of a people based participatory democracy is now at risk.

I urge the Government to rescind its decision”

“.... this decision displays a level of disregard for the community sector which will be very difficult to heal.”

From the recreation sector:

A number of our members have expressed their disappointment with your surprise announcement to no longer fund the work of the Community Sector Taskforce. In our view, the Taskforce was making good progress in developing the relationship between government and the Voluntary Sector organisations so your announcement seemed premature, at best.

We hope that you will find a way to ensure that the promising work begun by the Community Sector Taskforce is able to continue.

An extract from an environment sector communication:

“...the Cabinet, having signed a statement of intent...to fund an entity to represent the Community and Voluntary Sector and to try to improve relationships with the sector and government has now pulled the plug

As you will know, a lot of effort and govt & NGO money went into setting this up and the community sector was setting it up with a legal structure at Cabinet's request.

Given what they have done in the RM & Electricity Bill we should not be surprised, but this latest move suggests that hostility to this sector is not confined in the government to the environmental sector.”

And an extract from a letter to the Taskforce:

“I would just like to say thank you for your hard work and commitment from you all and many of you over the period of 5 years. I find the decision senseless and extremely difficult to understand. It gives little confidence to many groups when the Taskforce worked so hard to communicate with Government Ministers and Officials and kept them informed along the way to be told at the 11th hour that they (Cabinet) did not agree with the entity.”

Background information on the Community Sector Taskforce and its development to date can be found on <http://www.nzfvwo.org.nz/?/cst>.