

# Broadcasting and Digital Media

## Highlights

### Labour will:

- Create a new Public Digital Media Service, with the working title ‘RNZ+’
- Create a Public Media Funding Commission (PMFC) to fund and oversee non-commercial publicly-funded media
- Ensure growth in content services for special interests and needs, such as Children’s, Pasifika, other ethnicities and those with disabilities.

## Introduction

As citizens, we have a right to locally-produced public interest broadcasting and digital media which provides choice, has universal appeal, promotes culture and debate and contributes to our national identity. We have a right to expect that every part of our nation is valued by telling our stories regularly, and celebrating our many cultures.

An informed democracy demands a strong, independent, free public media service. Public media, backed with sustainable funding, is essential to ensuring all New Zealanders are engaged and heard. We need a public sphere where we share and explore opinions, facts, analysis, and different views of the world. Robust and independent news and current affairs services need to be strengthened so that they continue to speak truth to power.

A commercial market cannot deliver all of this. The media and broadcasting landscape has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. The media that once existed to protect and enhance the integrity and interests of citizens is being over-run by the pursuit of profit, exacerbated by technological disruption and a lack of foresight and preparedness.

New Zealand is an outlier with the lowest level of public service media funding of almost any developed country. There is no real sign of increased expenditure on Kiwi content or news and investigative journalism. The range of voices in all media is narrowing despite our growing and diverse population.

Labour believes in public digital media services that inform, entertain, and uplift—services that reflect the Labour values of cultural diversity, artistic expression, renewal, independence of thoughts and ideas— with this content produced to meet standards of quality and relevance that meet the needs, interests and aspirations of New Zealanders.

## A Public Digital Media Service

Labour wants to better serve the public media interests of New Zealanders via television, radio and the internet with a service that:

- Creates and promotes the production and distribution of public interest audio-visual content that values New Zealanders as citizens rather than as consumers.
- Provides universal public access for such content at no cost at the point of use.
- Allows for diversity and plurality in the structures and content of the private and public entities that create and deliver digital media content.

**Labour will:**

- Develop a new public digital media service as a non-commercial, audio-visual and multi-platform entity, with its services expanded to include a free-to-air non-commercial television service, and available to all New Zealanders at no cost at the point of use. This service will be progressively developed from Radio New Zealand. The working title is 'RNZ+'.

RNZ+ would be enabled and resourced to:

- Increase in-house production and distribution of New Zealand content as resources allow
- Commission external production from its own resources
- Acquire offshore programme material that conformed to its Charter
- Research--frequently and in depth-- the needs, interests and aspirations of New Zealanders, and have the resources to actively promote and market itself
- Expand existing news and current affairs services
- Capitalise on opportunities from the convergence of media.

RNZ has the public trust, independence, and internal culture to allow for considerable and cost-effective expansion of its services across all digital media platforms and systems. Dedicating time, effort and funding on building a new public digital audio-visual public media service from the outset would create unnecessary costs—and delay.

## Funding

The development of RNZ+ will require funding beyond existing levels.

**Labour will:**

- Immediately provide extra funding for public broadcasting of \$38 million for the year 18/19
- Require the Public Media Funding Commission (once established) to recommend ongoing funding levels to deliver consistent and sustainable revenues to support RNZ+, improve funding levels for New Zealand on Air, and support new investigative journalism initiatives.

## A Public Media Funding Commission

In order for a publicly-funded commercial-free media service to contribute to a stronger democracy it must be editorially and operationally independent of any government. Such independence can be more confidently guaranteed with a process for identifying opportunities and allocating funding on a sustainable and long-term basis.

**Labour will** establish a part-time Public Digital Media Funding Commission (Commission) in our first year of government which would:

- Recommend directly to Parliament, and on a three year budgeting and planning cycle, the amount of funding that, in its judgement, would be necessary to meet the development plans, objectives and public purposes of each of the non-commercial publicly-funded media entities within its funding mandate - RNZ+ and New Zealand on Air (NZoA) – and to support new investigative journalism initiatives
- RNZ+ and NZoA would remain annually accountable to the Government for their individual performance as at present, but the Commission would also report its views on their performance to Parliament and to the entities themselves
- Undertake research to develop and to communicate to the public an independent and high-level view of the health and medium and long-term needs, opportunities and risks of the public digital media sector.

The Commission would be:

- Responsible directly to Parliament, with the Commissioner being appointed on a basis and with constitutional independence, similar to that of the Ombudsman, the Government Statistician and the Auditor-General.
- Made up of five part-time members with legislatively-prescribed expertise, with one member appointed after consultation with the digital media sector
- Funded for its own costs but to a budget approved by the Minister.

## Other public media entities

The Commission would not have the power at any time or for any reason to direct the funded agencies on any content, operational, administrative, or governance matter. The Boards of the funded agencies (RNZ+ and NZoA) would continue to be appointed by the Government, and would develop their plans, services, and deliver their KPIs as required by the Minister in their formal statements of expectation. They would continue to report to Select Committees.

## NZ on Air

While it is timely to review its Charter and scope, NZoA's general mandate and role would not change — that is, to provide funding support to the independent commercial production sector and the *commercial* networks for the production of content valued by citizens.

RNZ+ would be funded directly through the Commission, not through NZoA, which would concentrate on working with commercial digital networks to support local producers and distributors, and to increase the provision of some special public services—such as captioning and audio description—across as many platforms as resources allowed.

A review of NZoA would in due course consider:

- The content and public interest priorities in NZoA's legislation, and the balance of its funding and emphasis across all types of commercial digital distribution platforms.
- How to strengthen NZoA's remit when dealing with commercial digital media services.
- Providing New Zealanders with a greater variety of types and styles of local production.

- Sustainable models for regional and community access media in respect to supporting their content, distribution and discovery.

## Broadcasting Standards Authority

We will continue to protect the public against potential harm from broadcast and digital media. The BSA remit, performance, and funding will not be a matter for the Commission and, in line with our general approach to sector diversity, there is no policy to bring all media and advertising standards and complaints procedures together under one entity.

Labour will consult with the sector to ensure the best ‘fit for purpose’ of the existing co-regulation and cost-sharing model for broadcasting and digital, and to ensure alignment with other public entities dealing with privacy, confidentiality, and digital security (such as Netsafe, Department of Internal Affairs, and the Privacy Commissioner).

## Supporting the role of the ‘Fourth Estate’

As well as creating a new public digital audio-visual content media service, we believe there is further to go to maximise the benefit to society of digital convergence. This technology-converged and fast-changing sector creates opportunities for services that are focused on people’s needs as citizens rather than as consumers.

The critical relationship between a democratic society and journalism on all media platforms is universally accepted, and Labour recognises and supports the public obligations of the Fourth Estate.

Realism demands a policy of technology neutrality, and this inevitably affects print journalism. Independent analysis and investigative reporting demands a place on all platforms. Our starting point will be to engage with print media to identify potential means of supporting funding (and incentives), the types of businesses and organisation that could be funded, and how this support could be administered and distributed in a way that guaranteed independence from *any* government.

### **Labour will:**

- **Require the Public Digital Media Funding Commission to engage both commercial and not-for-profit media outlets to identify ways support new independent and investigative journalism initiatives across all media platforms.**

## TVNZ will remain in public ownership

### Labour will:

- Encourage TVNZ to continue to develop commercially and competitively, including via joint ventures and commercial relationships with other media platforms
- Require TVNZ, if recommended by the Commission, to provide specified technical, operational and 'back-office' services to RNZ+. Such services would be provided at audited and transparent cost with an agreed margin derived on an 'open book' basis.

## Reflecting our diversity and ensuring accessibility

Labour is committed to ensuring that the increasing diversity of New Zealand's population is reflected in the Charter for RNZ+ as the national public non-commercial service, and by New Zealand on Air in its dealings with commercial networks. We expect Maori, Pasifika, and other ethnic communities, people with disabilities, education and entertainment for children of different ages to all benefit from Labour's policy.

In particular, we will encourage and enable the growing Pasifika community to make the most of their long tradition of storytelling, and strengthen their culture and traditions. We will extend Labour's previous work in government that established Radio 531pi and Radio Niu FM.

The current level of captioning and audio description is a barrier to community integration for people who are hearing or visually impaired.

The special and independent status of the funding arrangements for the Maori Television Service are not affected by our policy for public digital media, and Labour sees no need to review them.

### Labour will:

- Require NZoA as a routine part of their relationship and commercial contracts with free-to-air television national networks, to progressively grow targets for delivery of captioning and audio description services
- Develop a Pasifika television channel or audio-visual content service within the RNZ+ 'family' of platforms and services
- Ensure that the development of RNZ towards RNZ+ does not result in any reduction in the funding or the quality of content and delivery of any of their current specialist services including, but not limited to, Radio NZ Concert
- Continue to support the Maori Television Service and iwi radio, require all public digital media to foster greater use of Te Reo Maori, and ask the Funding Review Panel to report on the benefits of sharing some back-office services and content development between MTS and RNZ+
- Increase the quantity and quality of children's programming on all digital audio-visual services.

Labour's objective is to improve and increase these important special interest service through a consultative process with all stakeholders. Ultimately, however, we are prepared to regulate for the provision of such services.

## Our Priorities

Changes to the remits of New Zealand on Air and the Broadcasting Standards Authority may, in the light of our policy, be necessary, but we believe that dealing with these is not the first priority. Most of our policy can be implemented in parallel, and Labour will ensure that our key policy outcomes are in place and operating before the end of our first term.

Our priority is to do whatever is necessary to identify sources of new funding to add to the existing commitment from the taxpayer, establish the Commission, and ask Radio New Zealand to prepare its proposals for a revised Charter and its plans for developing 'RNZ+' in a manner ready for presentation to the Commission.

This is a technology-converged and fast-changing sector with great opportunities for services that are directly and unashamedly focused on all of us as citizens with ideas and aspirations-- not just as consumers. Non-commercial, publicly- funded, editorially- independent media is at the centre of strong democracies everywhere.

New Zealanders have waited long enough.

