



PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE FRONTIERS IN NEW ZEALAND

Evan Berman and Girol Karacaoglu

**PUBLIC POLICY
AND GOVERNANCE**

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Evan Berman

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GOVERNANCE FRONTIERS IN
NEW ZEALAND**

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PREFACE

Andrew Kibblewhite

New Zealand is a small country, a long way from pretty much anywhere else. We face our own unique set of challenges and opportunities, our own geography, social and cultural makeup and our own, distinctly evolved, institutions of government and governance. Though we have much to learn from the experience of other countries we are not the same. We cannot just import and apply others' policy prescriptions. We need to develop New Zealand understandings, policies that reflect who we are, our challenges and aspirations.

This book offers the fruits of an important collaboration, a useful collection of perspectives on public policy, by a group of distinguished students, shapers, and implementers of public policy over several decades. It is intended for both international and domestic audiences that wish to learn about our experiences in a convenient and thoughtful way.

One of the advantages of being a small, relatively well run country is we can move quite quickly from idea, to policy decision, to implementation. This is a strength when the ideas and policies are good – but can be disastrous when they're not! Our fleetness of foot in policy creates a higher premium on the quality of our policy community: our politicians, public servants, academics, and commentators.

One of my preoccupations as previous Head of the Policy Profession, and of the Policy Project team that supported me, was how to build the capability of the policy community for thoughtful, long term, insightful advice – for policy stewardship.

We have been on this journey for at least three decades now, with a progressive bolstering of the formal expectations for stewardship advice in more recent times. In 2013, as a response to the recommendations of the *Better Public Services Advisory Group*, a new responsibility for CEs – to be responsible for their department's capability and capacity to offer free and frank advice to successive governments - was included in the State Sector Act. In 2017, the Cabinet Manual was updated with more specific stewardship obligations on CEs and Ministers. And in 2017, the State Services Commissioner issued two sets of guidelines, for *Free and Frank Advice* and for *Policy Stewardship*, setting out expectations for public servants in these important and related areas. Looking forward, the Public Service Bill, which at the time of writing is still before the House, includes a new obligation on public service Chief Executives to produce and publish 'long-term insights' briefings.

In parallel with this more formal framing of policy stewardship, we have also seen a growing and welcome emphasis on the role of evidence in policy. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor (first Sir Peter Gluckman, now Professor Juliet Gerrard), the network of departmental science advisors has assumed an increasing role, with their work often now used to frame policy discussions and test the efficacy of interventions. Alongside this, the development of the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) by the Department of Statistics offers the promise of a world leading repository of data and information that can be used to test policy proposals.

In public policy, the quality of the ideas and research is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. There also needs to be a constructive relationship between advisors and Ministers, characterised by trust, by mutual respect, and by a mature understanding of the role each other plays. Public servants and politicians need to have enough confidence in each other, and in the confidentiality of their discussions, that they can speak freely and openly. That they can test policy ideas in private without necessarily having to justify that questioning – or their disagreements – in public.

As well as insisting on more timely and sharper performance in responding to Official Information Act (OIA) requests, the Chief Ombudsman (Peter Boshier) has explicitly recognised the importance of Ministers and public servants having greater certainty about what will or won't be released under the OIA, and the desirability of protecting, as free and frank advice, early stage, 'blue skies' thinking. Policy stewardship will flourish when Ministers and public servants do not face too great an incentive to self-censor – when challenging ideas can be tested at a preliminary stage – without the distraction of premature public debate.

So, there is some useful wind in the sails of good public policy in New Zealand, which is important, as we are often running against the tide. We have few think tanks focussed on public policy, an academic community of a size that reflects our population, and journalists under pressure, still working out how to cope with the immediacy and frequent superficiality of the modern media environment.

We also suffer from an inevitable short termism in politics, arising from the three-year Parliamentary term. The pressure on Governments to develop, launch and implement policies in time to have something to show at the next election creates an unhealthy bias against thoughtful public policy. It is a credit to successive New Zealand Governments they get as much achieved as they do.

Publications such as this one are too rare in New Zealand. They help build the conversation between the public service and academia, between the blogosphere and the commentariat, among the community. We need to look for more opportunities to build that conversation, to create more fora where ideas and evidence can be tested.

Departments can help by publishing more data series, more working papers, and by funding and undertaking more research. They need to give effect to the expectations now upon them that they should prepare to answer the policy questions of tomorrow as well as those being asked today. This will necessitate taking a longer run perspective in their advice and having a well thought-through and longer run research agenda. It will require building up deep technical expertise.

This book is an important collaboration, a useful collection of perspectives on public policy in our country. I agree wholeheartedly with many of the insights offered and find myself disagreeing with a few as well. But in many respects that is the point. New Zealand needs more thoughtful, reflective, sometimes provocative contributions to the public policy debate. This edition offers many examples of that and I commend it to all those involved in public policy and governance in New Zealand.

I congratulate and thank the School of Government of the Victoria University of Wellington, whose stated vision is to be a globally recognised capital city university, for taking the initiative to pull the material presented in this book together. It is my hope that, in doing so, they have also made a valuable contribution to the very active international sharing of ideas on public policy and governance.

Andrew Kibblewhite,
Secretary for Justice and Chief Executive, Ministry of Justice
Former Chief Executive of the Department of the Prime Minister and
Cabinet and Head of the Policy Profession
September 2019

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Evan Berman is a Professor of Public Management at the Victoria University of Wellington (VUW). He is a leading scholar in public administration. Among his awards are the Fred Riggs Award for lifetime achievement in comparative and international administration (2015) and the NASPAA/ASPA Distinguished Research Award (2017) from the American Society for Public Administration. Prior to joining VUW, he was a Distinguished Professor at Louisiana State University. He is Adjunct Chair Professor at National Chengchi University, Taiwan's premier university of social sciences. He is the series editor of *Public Policy and Governance* (Emerald, UK). In 2020, he joined Fundacao Getulio Vargas, in Brazil, as Chair Professor.

Girol Karacaoglu is the Head of School at the Victoria University of Wellington, School of Government. Prior to joining VUW, he was the Chief Economist of the New Zealand Treasury and before then, he was the Chief Executive of the Co-operative Bank of New Zealand for nine years. His previous roles included General Manager at Westpac NZ, the Chief Economist at the National Bank of NZ, and a lecturer in Economics at VUW.