



CABINET OFFICE

29 April 2021

BY EMAIL

Michael Torrance
Clerk
Constitution Committee
House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW
UNITED KINGDOM

Dear Mr Torrance

Lords Constitution Committee: Revision of Cabinet Manual inquiry

Thank you for contacting the New Zealand Cabinet Office regarding the process of updating New Zealand's *Cabinet Manual*. Michael Webster, the Secretary of the Cabinet, has asked me to respond to your letter. We trust the information below will be of use to the committee.

New Zealand's *Cabinet Manual* was first published in 1979. It has been reviewed and updated on a number of occasions since then.

The most recent edition was published in 2017, updating the previous 2008 edition. The current version of the New Zealand *Cabinet Manual* is available at <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-business-units/cabinet-office/supporting-work-cabinet/cabinet-manual>. The 2017 edition is also available in hard copy.

Whenever the *Cabinet Manual* is reviewed, the focus is on responding to and reflecting changes and developments in political, legislative, administrative, and constitutional arrangements and language.

The Cabinet Office commenced the review of the *Cabinet Manual* in 2016, with the Prime Minister's agreement. All government departments and Ministers' offices were invited to provide comments on the 2008 Manual, and to make suggestions for changes they considered necessary. The text was also updated to reflect legislative developments since 2008, and to incorporate guidance issued by Cabinet minutes or Cabinet Office circulars. The revised text also included guidance on some matters about which the Cabinet Office had provided advice since 2008.

Other agencies were consulted on particular chapters of the Manual, including the Parliamentary Counsel Office, Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives, the Legislation Design and Advisory Committee, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, the Office of the Ombudsmen, the Department of Internal Affairs, and the Parliamentary Service.

The revised text was reviewed by an interdepartmental group comprising senior representatives of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the State Services Commission (now the Public Service Commission), the Treasury, the Crown Law Office, and the Ministry of Justice.

The text of the revised Manual was provided for comment to a ministerial reference group. This was an important step in the process, as it gave Ministers an opportunity to test the changes we were suggesting, and to suggest some additional matters for inclusion.

The final step was for Cabinet to consider and approve the text. The authority of the *Cabinet Manual* derives from its adoption by Cabinet at the beginning of each new administration—it is “Cabinet’s manual”. So, this final step was a key part of the process, as Cabinet had to be satisfied that the guidance in the Manual was well-founded and was clear in terms of its implications.

The Prime Minister authorised the publication of the material that went to Cabinet for this purpose—a Cabinet paper with a revision-tracked version of the 2008 Manual showing the proposed changes for the 2017 edition, and the resulting minute confirming Cabinet’s agreement to the new Manual. These are all published at <https://dpmc.govt.nz/publications/approval-revised-text-cabinet-manual-2017>.

The committee may also be interested in the text of a speech given by the Secretary of the Cabinet following the launch of the last edition. This speech covers the history of the *Cabinet Manual* in New Zealand, the process that was followed in the most recent update, and highlights some of the more significant changes in the edition. The text of the speech can be found at <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-business-units/cabinet-office/supporting-work-cabinet/history-cabinet-manual>.

For completeness I note that the Cabinet Office also produces and maintains CabGuide, an online guide providing practical information and advice for public servants and Ministers’ offices on the procedures and operation of the New Zealand Cabinet, Cabinet committees, and the Executive Council. The information on CabGuide is intended to complement the procedural information available in the *Cabinet Manual*, and in Cabinet Office circulars and notices. CabGuide is updated on a regular basis, whereas the electronic version of the 2017 *Cabinet Manual* is simply an online version of the 2017 hard copy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rg Hayward', with a stylized, flowing script.

Rachel Hayward
Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet (Constitutional and Honours)