

Algorithm Charter – feedback from the AI Forum

The Artificial Intelligence Forum of New Zealand (**AI Forum**) has reviewed the draft Algorithm Charter that was released by Stats NZ for consultation in October 2019 (**Algorithm Charter**) and wishes to provide some initial feedback as set out in this submission.

We also wish to express our interest in participating further on the Algorithm Charter, any follow up work relating to the Algorithm Charter and other AI related work that Stats NZ may undertake.

About the AI Forum

The **AI Forum** is a purpose-driven, not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation that is funded by its members from the public and private sectors.

The AI Forum aims to bring together New Zealand’s community of artificial intelligence (**AI**) technology innovators, end users, investor groups, regulators, researchers, educators, entrepreneurs and interested public to find ways to use AI to help enable a prosperous, inclusive and thriving future for Aotearoa New Zealand.

We are working towards supporting the New Zealand government with various services, support and involvement, and aspire to continue partnerships that contribute to New Zealand becoming a world leader of inclusive and collaborative AI ecosystems focussed on wellbeing.

Support for the Algorithm Charter

The AI Forum fully supports the collaborative development of the Algorithm Charter in New Zealand, because:

- it is an important step in helping to ensure that any algorithms and associated data sets used within the public sector in New Zealand are developed and utilised in a fair and transparent way;
- it will help to raise awareness within the public sector (and more broadly within the private sector) about the significant impact, both positive and negative, that algorithmic methodologies can have on people and communities, and the importance of ensuring that those processes are robust and ethical;
- it will help to build minimum standards for the private sector to work towards;
- it encourages responsible ownership and application of AI related techniques, methods, augmentation and assisted decision making; and
- it emphasises the requirement to embed a Te Ao Māori perspective in algorithm development or procurement to support the use of algorithmic methods and assisted decision making in accordance with Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Comments on the Algorithm Charter

Our high level comments on the Algorithm Charter are set out below.

Name of the Charter

1. We recommend that the government considers amending the name of the charter to New Zealand Government Algorithm Charter (or similar), to ensure people understand that this is only applicable to government agencies (at the moment).

Scope of the Charter

2. The principles encapsulated in the Algorithm Charter should apply more broadly to the processes, techniques and insights surrounding the creation, application and incorporation of new algorithmic/AI methods (including data collection, pre-processing, bias correction etc), and should not be limited solely to the algorithm(s) itself.

Living Charter

3. The Algorithm Charter should be seen as a 'living' document to be kept under review by the government. It will be important to ensure that the principles embedded in the charter evolve over time so that they continue to reflect developments in AI technology and any changes across New Zealand society.
4. Algorithms and data sets require experimental development processes where failure is necessary and positive to ensure accurate and robust results. Living (and learning) AI culture needs reinforcing through this approach.

Unintended consequences

5. Principle 8 of the Algorithm Charter refers to the collection and review of data to assess it for unintended consequences such as bias. This principle does not expressly require that any bias that has been identified is addressed by the relevant public sector agency. We recommend that principle 8 is amended (or that an additional principle is introduced), to require that any bias or other unintended consequences identified throughout the dataset and algorithm life cycle are flagged and addressed.
4. Any reference to addressing bias or other unintended consequences should not refer solely to algorithms. It should be acknowledged that errors may be caused by factors other than the algorithms themselves – for example most early algorithm inaccuracy is caused by poor, messy data, collected before knowledge of its use was understood. The quality of data available will be one of the main challenges faced and will likely take years to improve at scale.

Implementation of the Algorithm Charter

5. We assume that:
 - (a) a process to beta test, operationalise and implement the Algorithm Charter within the public sector will follow once the Algorithm Charter has been finalised; and
 - (b) that process will include the preparation of any necessary guidelines, instructions, toolkits and methods to assist public sector agencies to implement the principles embodied in the Algorithm Charter.
6. The AI Forum comprises a neutral group of AI thought leaders, experts and practitioners, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss how we could support the government in its implementation/operationalisation of the Algorithm Charter. For example, the AI Forum could provide support to the government in the formulation of any theoretical or practical guidance,

particularly in relation to any technical guidance and/or any other area(s) where specialist AI expertise may be required. With our networks and large member community, the AI Forum is in an advantageous position to facilitate, connect, assist and promote government efforts and we welcome partnership and collaboration.

We would welcome any questions about any of the points raised above.

Executive Council, AI Forum

Contact:

Emma Naji

Executive Director, AI Forum

Email: emma.naji@aiforum.org.nz

Mobile: +64 (0)21 1460662