

Submission by



to the

Department of Internal Affairs

on

Te koke ki tētahi Rautaki Matihiko mō Aotearoa,

Towards a Digital Strategy for Aotearoa

10 November 2021

CONTACT

Megan Tapsell

Chair

Artificial Intelligence Forum of New Zealand

E | info@aiforum.org.nz P | +64 9 394 7693

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NZ AI Forum Submission

Te koke ki tētahi Rautaki Matihiko mō Aotearoa, Towards A Digital Strategy for Aotearoa.

Summary

1. The Artificial Intelligence Forum of New Zealand (AI Forum) thanks the Department of Internal Affairs for the opportunity to submit on the discussion document, *Te koke ki tētahi Rautaki Matihiko mō Aotearoa*, Towards A Digital Strategy for Aotearoa.
2. We support the intention of developing a Digital Strategy for Aotearoa (the Strategy). We would like to work with you through the development of the Strategy with a focus on the role of artificial intelligence (AI).
3. We recommend that the Strategy's vision and goals be amended to reflect the critical foundations, including AI, which enable the Government's proposed visions, and that these sit across the three themes of Mahi Ahe (Growth), Mahi Tika (Trust) and Mahi Tahi (Inclusion).

About the AI Forum of New Zealand

4. The AI Forum is a purpose-driven, not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO) that is funded by members. The association was founded in 2017.
5. The AI Forum brings together New Zealand's community of artificial intelligence technology innovators, end users, investor groups, regulators, researchers, educators, entrepreneurs and interested public to work together to find ways to use AI to help enable a prosperous, inclusive and thriving future for our nation.
6. The Forum advances New Zealand's AI ecosystem through connections, advocacy, growing talent and collaboration. The AI Forum promotes the economic opportunities raised by AI, supporting great applications of AI and emerging New Zealand AI firms, and works to ensure that society can adapt to the rapid and far-reaching changes that AI technology will bring.

Comment

7. In general, we support the intention of developing a Digital Strategy for Aotearoa (the Strategy). We would like to work with you through the development of the Strategy with a focus on the role of artificial intelligence (AI).
8. We recommend that the Strategy's framework be amended to include the critical foundations, such as AI, that enable the three themes (Mahi Ake, Mahi Tika, Mahi Tahī) outlined in the Government's Strategy. This reflects that AI is a rapidly emerging technology that has the ability to create great benefit and risk for our digital future. Further, the discussion document also discusses the role of AI under the Mahi Tika theme.
9. The AI Forum is working with the New Zealand Government on establishing an [AI Strategy](#) for Aotearoa New Zealand within the Digital ITP. AI currently sits within the Mahi Ake (Growth) and should be extracted and sit as a foundation for the Strategy.
10. The AI Strategy seeks to build a thriving AI ecosystem in New Zealand on a strong foundation of trust, equity and accessibility. The AI Strategy is organised around six key areas that together provide the framework for action and set out our priorities for AI in New Zealand. We have called them 'cornerstones' as they provide the foundations for the work that needs to occur.
11. We endorse NZTech's submission recommending the inclusion of further critical foundations sitting across all themes that will be needed to enable the Government's proposed vision and initiatives. These are:
 - 11.1. Digital Education – education, knowledge and skills are critical to enable trust, inclusion and growth. Building digital skills is captured in the Digital Technology Industry Transformation Plan (ITP), within the Mahi Ake (growth), however this only covers advanced digital skills. Other digital skills such as digital fluency and digital literacy will be required by all citizens to function in a digital world.
 - 11.2. Sustainability – as we aspire to a prosperous digital nation, we must ensure that it is done sustainably and enable digital to be at the forefront of climate change solutions. The Digital Strategy should reflect the critical importance of digital's role in supporting our climate change response and resilience, and in creating solutions to meet New Zealand's emissions reduction targets. The Sustainability foundation should include how digital must be used to help develop a more sustainable economy, and ensure our approach to digital is considered from a sustainability and climate change perspective. For example, leading in sustainable blockchain, a circular economy for digital devices, or enabling using data and artificial intelligence to reduce emissions.

- 11.3. Digital Finance – the financial system underpins the economic and social prosperity of all New Zealanders and it is becoming more digital. Open banking, open finance will be critical to achieve the Strategy’s vision. Connecting safely with the global financial system will be a critical foundation for trust, inclusion and growth.
 - 11.4. Artificial Intelligence (AI) – is a rapidly emerging technology that has the ability to create great benefit and risk for our digital future. There is work on an AI Strategy currently within the Digital ITP, which is in the Mahi Ake (Growth) pillar. This should be extracted and sit as a foundation for the Strategy.
 - 11.5. Data – a core foundation for all digital activity, which like AI can bring many benefits if used well and risks if it is not. There is a workstream on Data currently within the Digital ITP which is in Mahi Ake (Growth). This should be extracted and sit as a foundation for the Strategy.
 - 11.6. Innovation – The Strategy should recognise that research, science and innovation (RSI) are crucial to meeting our digital aspirations. The large Government investment in RSI should be aligned to support our digital aspirations and regulation in and around the tech sector should provide sufficient room for innovation and be an enabler, not a barrier.
 - 11.7. Investment – The Strategy would benefit from setting higher goals and stronger measures for public and private investment in digital products, services, research and development. Many governments, including Singapore¹, Australia² and Canada³, have allocated significant budget investment to accelerate digital adoption.
12. Comment on Mahi Tika (Trust)
 - 12.1. The AI Forum agrees with the following statement in the discussion document: *Trust and confidence in the way that data and digital technology are being used require: ... the responsible development of artificial intelligence (AI) to be fair, ethical and inclusive, reliable and safe, and transparent and accountable [page 11].*
 - 12.2. The AI Forum has published the Trustworthy AI in Aotearoa AI Principles, and has a working group on creating guidelines for trustworthy AI, which will detail how to put the principles into practice.
 - 12.3. The discussion document details the Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand as an example of work underway that supports Mahi Tika. The Algorithm Charter is focused on 26 public sector agencies who are signatories to the Charter. This work needs to be expanded to cover the private sector to really have an impact for NZ.

¹ <https://opengovasia.com/singapore-budget-2021-s1-billion-allocated-for-adoption-of-digital-solutions-and-technology/>

² <https://digitaleconomy.pmc.gov.au/fact-sheets/investment-incentives>

³ <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/152.nsf/eng/home>

13. **CONCLUSION**

13.1. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the discussion document. The AI Forum is happy to engage further to discuss our submission and provide any further assistance.

13.2. If you have any further queries do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Megan Tapsell

Chair

Artificial Intelligence Forum of New Zealand

E | info@aiforum.org.nz P | +64 9 394 7693