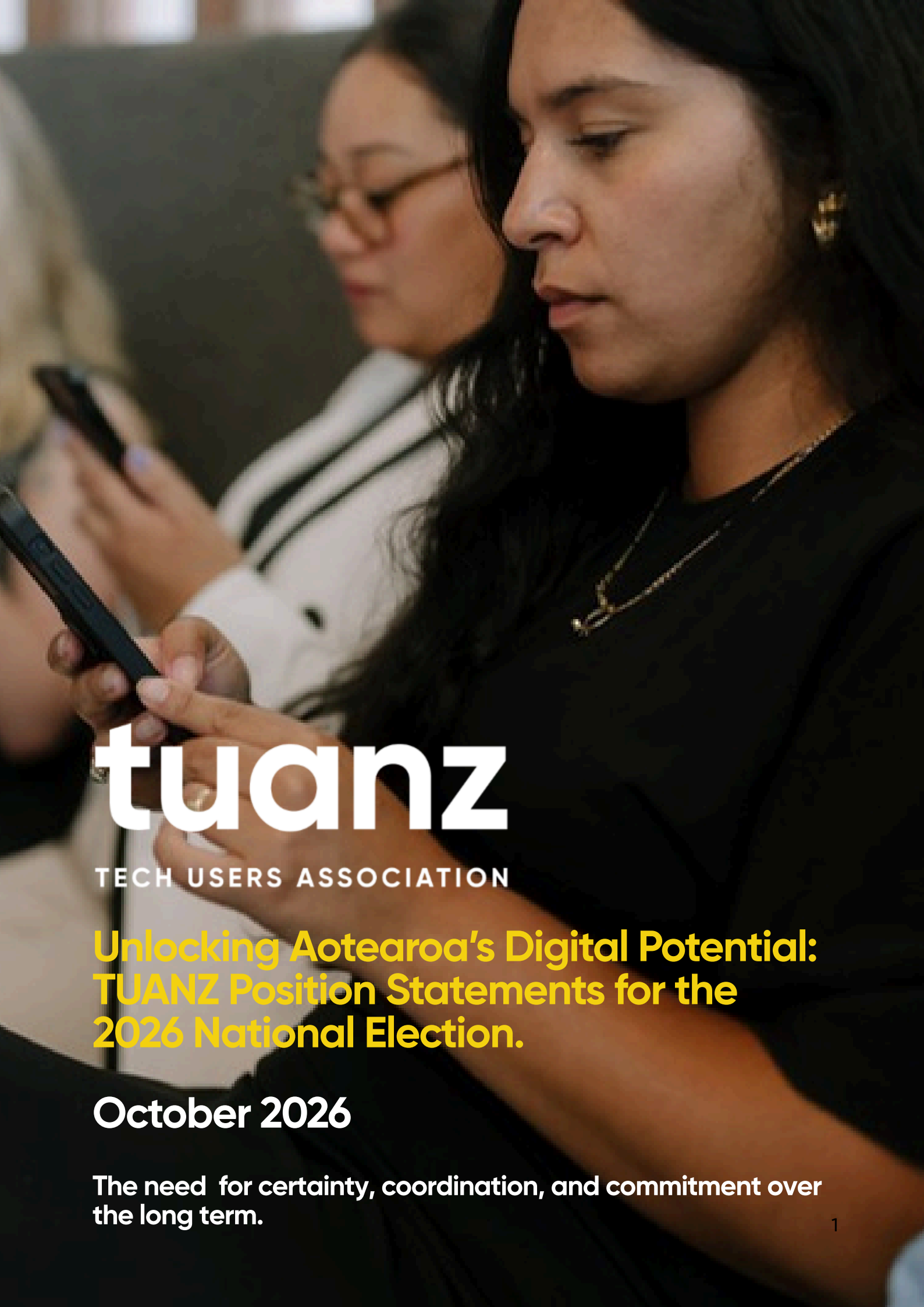




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TECH USERS ASSOCIATION

Unlocking Aotearoa's Digital Potential: TUANZ Position Statements for the 2026 National Election.

October 2026

The need for certainty, coordination, and commitment over
the long term.



Our call to Government and political leaders is clear: Work across party lines to deliver a long-term strategy that matches the scale of the opportunity. Provide the certainty New Zealand needs to invest, innovate, and compete.

Forty Years Strong: Championing a Brighter Digital Future for every New Zealander

The Technology Users Association of New Zealand (TUANZ) is the voice of technology users in Aotearoa New Zealand. Established as a not-forprofit organisation, TUANZ acts as the independent group representing the interests and needs of individuals, businesses, and organizations as they navigate the evolving technology landscape.

Our membership encompasses a diverse range of technology users, from small businesses and innovative startups to large enterprises and public sector entities. This broad network connects those who utilise technology to achieve their goals, fostering a community dedicated to understanding, adopting, and maximising the benefits of digital tools and services.

TUANZ plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between technology providers and end-users. We work collaboratively across sectors, engaging with government, industry, and the wider community to ensure that technology deployment and policy decisions are user-centric and contribute to a thriving digital ecosystem for all New Zealanders.

Our focus is on empowering technology users through education, advocacy, and the facilitation of meaningful connections. We strive to ensure that New Zealanders can confidently and effectively leverage technology to enhance productivity, innovation, and overall quality of life. We provide a platform for an informed and influential user voice, advocating for policies and practices that support positive technology outcomes for our members and the nation.



Unlocking Aotearoa's Digital Potential

We know technology can make Aotearoa New Zealand a better place. When we get it right, digital innovation grows our economy, strengthens our communities, and improves everyday life for all New Zealanders. We already have strong foundations – from world-class connectivity to an increasingly renewable energy system.

But we are not yet realising our full potential.

New Zealand is at a crossroads. We have the capability, talent, and infrastructure to be a leading digital nation – but progress is constrained by short-term thinking and fragmented direction. Technology investment and transformation do not operate on three-year political cycles, and neither should our national approach.

Our members are clear: what's needed now is certainty, coordination, and commitment over the long term.

TUANZ is calling for a cohesive, cross-party national technology strategy – one that endures beyond election cycles, provides confidence for investment, and builds trust with New Zealanders.

These Position Papers reflect the priorities of our members and set out five areas where action is required.

Education to Employment – building the skills for a digital future

Trust and Safety – creating a secure, resilient digital environment

Transparent Data Use – strengthening trust through clarity and control

Responsible Generative AI – enabling safe, trusted adoption of emerging technologies

Access and Inclusion – ensuring equitable connectivity and opportunity

Together, these priorities provide a practical pathway to lift New Zealand back into the top tier of digital nations.

TUANZ will continue to represent the voice of digital users – advocating for outcomes that ensure every New Zealander can participate in, and benefit from, our digital future.

Recommended Actions Summary

Education to Employment: Empowering Our Future Workforce

- Mandate Technology Upskilling in the Core Curriculum.
- Incentivise "Home-Grown" Capability and Digital Apprenticeships.
- Encourage the development of diverse leadership.
- Close the SME Digitalisation Gap.

Trust and Safety: Securing Aotearoa's Digital Prosperity

- Develop an Enforceable National Cyber Security approach.
- Close the SME Gap with "Cyber Health Incentives".
- Mandate Platform and Provider Accountability.
- Embed Cyber Safety as a Core Life Skill.

Championing Transparent Data Use and Active Agency

- Mandate "Algorithmic Clarity" for High-Stakes Decisions.
- Adopt Standardised "Data Nutrition Labels".
- True Individual Control (Self-Sovereignty).
- Uphold Māori Data Sovereignty.

Championing Responsible and Inclusive Generative AI

- Invest in our own AI capabilities.
- Mandate "Algorithmic Explainability" for High-Stakes Uses.
- Establish a National "Human-in-the-Loop" Standard.
- Launch an "AI Readiness" Resource Hub for SMEs.

Access and Inclusion: Connecting Every New Zealander by 2030

- Formally recognise that connectivity is core infrastructure equal to electricity or water.
- Establish a National Connectivity and Resilience Register.
- Co-design "Affordable Connectivity" solutions.
- Mandate "Inclusive by Design" for Digital Public Services.

Education to Employment: Empowering Our Future Workforce

We stand at the threshold of a massive economic opportunity. Our technology sector is already a powerhouse, serving as the nation's second-largest export earner. To maintain this momentum we must ensure our people are equipped to lead. TUANZ advocates for a robust "Education to Employment" pipeline that treats talent as critical national infrastructure. We celebrate the foundational progress made through world-class connectivity and record tertiary funding, but we must now bridge the "capability gap". By investing in home-grown talent, embedding digital literacy in our schools, and dismantling cultural barriers for rangatahi, we will ensure every New Zealander has a place in our thriving digital economy.

The Current Landscape

New Zealand's digital workforce is characterised by high ambition and a rapidly evolving relationship with technology.

- A Foundation of Success: Aotearoa ranks 20th globally for government digital engagement, and our businesses are slowly adopting AI, with 93% of early adopters reporting increased worker efficiency.
- The AI Paradox: While AI tools allow staff to work faster, they have created a "reverse multiplier" effect where senior experts must spend more time quality-assuring the work of juniors who may not yet spot "AI hallucinations".
- The Global Talent War: Despite an easing in the general labour market, there remains a very real scarcity of "deep tech" skills in areas like data architecture and cybersecurity, compounded by a persistent "brain drain" to Australia.
- Cultural Insights: Our Te Ara Hihiko programme has revealed that for many Māori and Pasifika rangatahi, the barrier to tech careers isn't a lack of interest, but a perceived lack of psychological safety in traditional corporate environments.

Our Position

We assert that a prosperous Aotearoa is built on a foundation of inclusive, high-value employment. Our position is that New Zealand must shift from just "buying" talent offshore to "building" it at home. We believe that education must be a lifelong journey of upskilling that starts in primary school and continues through the workplace. When we get this right, we don't just grow the economy; we provide every citizen with the tools to live and thrive in a digital future.

Recommendations for Action

To secure our future talent pipeline and unlock the benefits of a skilled digital nation, TUANZ recommends the following four actions:

- **Mandate Technology Upskilling in the Core Curriculum:** The Government must elevate digital literacy to the same status as reading and mathematics. This includes embedding essential digital skills from primary school through secondary levels to ensure every student enters the workforce "digital-ready".
- **Incentivise "Home-Grown" Capability and Digital Apprenticeships:** We call for the expansion of industry-led reskilling programmes and digital apprenticeships. The Government should provide tax credits or subsidies for businesses that invest in internal academies to train junior talent, specifically targeting regional New Zealand as well as roles in "deep tech" areas where shortages are most acute.
- **Encourage the development of diverse leadership:** The Government needs to take the lead in developing career pathways that attract diverse talent, specifically supporting programmes that encourage Māori, Pasifika, and Wahine into tech education and roles to ensure our workforce represents our population.
- **Close the SME Digitalisation Gap:** SMEs are the backbone of our economy but are slow to digitise and are the weakest link in our cyber defence. We must lower the barrier to entry for SMEs to improve their use of digital services and cyber security. We want to see government-backed financial incentives for SMEs.

Trust and Safety: Securing Aotearoa's Digital Prosperity

New Zealand is making progress building a resilient digital foundation for our country. The successful integration of CERT NZ into the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the success of initiatives like Malware Free Networks (which disrupted over 10.3 million malicious events last year) demonstrate that we are on a journey to improve our national capability to defend our digital borders. TUANZ believes that Trust and Safety are the bedrock of our digital future. We advocate for a shift from "user beware" to a proactive national strategy where safety is built-in, and the "cyber equity gap" for small businesses is finally closed.

The Current Landscape

New Zealand's digital environment is currently at a crossroads of significant achievement and evolving complexity.

- **Defensive Capability:** Our lead agencies are delivering results, with the NCSC preventing an estimated \$38.8 million in harm to nationally significant organisations in the 2023/24 year.
- **The AI "Double-Edged Sword":** While AI offers enormous productivity gains, it has also lowered the barrier for entry for bad actors. Scammers now use Generative AI to craft realistic, personalised phishing attacks that are increasingly difficult for users to distinguish from legitimate communications.
- **The Widening Equity Gap:** A dangerous disparity has emerged; while large organisations are fortifying their defences, 35% of small organisations believe their cyber resilience is now insufficient and this figure has increased sevenfold since 2022.

Our Position

We assert that Cyber Security and Online Safety are essential national infrastructure. Just as the government ensures the safety of our physical roads, it must lead the coordination of a safe digital environment. Our position is that Aotearoa must move toward a "Security by Design" philosophy. We believe that trust is earned when safety is an inherent feature of digital services, not an optional extra. We advocate for a whole-of-ecosystem approach where government leadership provides regulatory certainty, platforms are held accountable for the content they host, and every New Zealander is empowered with the skills to remain safe online.

Recommendations for Action

To secure Aotearoa's digital prosperity and ensure a safe environment for all, TUANZ recommends the following four actionable steps:

- **Develop an Enforceable National Cyber Security approach:** The Government should transition from voluntary guidelines to enforceable legislation. This must include mandatory reporting for major cyber-attacks and enhanced capabilities for agencies to investigate and prosecute global cybercriminals targeting New Zealanders.
- **Close the SME Gap with "Cyber Health Incentives":** To bridge the equity gap, the Government should introduce incentives for Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This could include tax rebates or direct grants for adopting essential security "hygiene" such as multi-factor authentication (MFA) and secure cloud backups.
- **Mandate Platform and Provider Accountability:** We call for regulation that requires telecommunications and social media platforms to proactively detect and block fraudulent activity and deepfakes. The burden of identifying sophisticated AI-generated scams need to shift from the individual user to the providers of these networks.
- **Embed Cyber Safety as a Core Life Skill:** We must treat digital literacy as being as important as reading and mathematics. The Government should mandate technology upskilling in the school curriculum, ensuring the next generation enters the workforce with the critical thinking skills to identify AI-driven misinformation and protect their digital identities.

Championing Transparent Data Use and Active Agency

With the recent implementation of IPP 3A of the Privacy Act in May 2026, our nation has transitioned from "passive disclosure" to active transparency. We want to see the embedding of this concept to ensure individuals have true control over their information by being actively and clearly informed about its purpose. By mastering this transparency, we unlock a massive competitive advantage: building the social licence required to harness the \$76 billion economic potential of Generative AI while protecting the \$17 billion tech export sector that drives our prosperity.

The Current Landscape

New Zealand has established a world-leading foundation for digital trust through bold legislative and strategic actions.

- **The Age of Active Notification:** The arrival of IPP 3A on 1 May 2026 has closed a critical transparency gap, requiring agencies to notify individuals when their data is collected from third parties.
- **Sector-Specific Progress:** The Customer and Product Data Act 2025 has successfully launched the Consumer Data Right (CDR) in the banking and electricity sectors, empowering Kiwis to "vote with their data" to find better deals.
- **The AI Trust Mandate:** While 77% of New Zealanders now knowingly interact with AI, trust remains the primary barrier to deeper adoption. Research shows that 87% of Kiwis view strong data privacy as essential, and 62% would stop using a company if they had concerns about its AI data practices.
- **Cultural Leadership:** New Zealand is unique in our need to commit to Māori Data Sovereignty, framing data as Taonga (a treasure) and integrating Ngā Tikanga Paihere into ethical data frameworks to ensure data use respects the mana and dignity of all.

Our Position

We assert that trust is the currency of the digital economy. We advocate for a shift from "notice and consent" to "active and informed agency". We believe that organisations must act as Kaitiaki (stewards) rather than owners of information, adopting a "no surprises" approach where users are never shocked by how their data is utilised. Transparent data use is not just a compliance checkbox; it is a national benefit that fosters innovation, protects human rights, and ensures Aotearoa remains a trusted digital partner on the global stage.

Recommendations for Action

To build on our progress and ensure every New Zealander is an empowered participant in the digital economy, TUANZ recommends the following four actions:

- **Mandate "Algorithmic Clarity" for High-Stakes Decisions:** The Government and industry should adopt a standard for "Explainable AI". If an algorithm makes a decision impacting a citizen's life (e.g., credit, insurance, or services), the organisation must provide a clear, non-technical explanation of the logic used, moving away from "black box" systems.
- **Adopt Standardised "Data Nutrition Labels":** To combat "wall of text" privacy policies, we call for the development of visual, standardised "Data Nutrition Labels". These labels should allow consumers to compare data practices between providers at a glance, highlighting what is collected, why it's used, and who it's shared with in a simple, accessible format. As part of this approach, we want to see the adoption of "Just-in-Time" notices. Privacy information should be presented at the moment it is relevant (e.g., a pop-up when location data is requested), rather than buried in a static policy.
- **True Individual Control (Self-Sovereignty):** Transparency is the first step, but individual control is the goal. We want to see the expansion of the Consumer Data Right (CDR) beyond the banking and electricity sectors. We support a framework where users can safely share their data with third parties to get better deals, effectively allowing them to "vote with their data." We also want to see universal "Opt-Out" signals that allow users to easily withdraw consent for data tracking across platforms.
- **Uphold Māori Data Sovereignty:** We must ensure that our data landscape honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We want to see the implementation of Ngā Tikanga Paihere (guidelines for ethical data use) with data use respecting the mana and dignity of the individuals and groups it represents. We support the principle that Māori data is subject to Māori governance, with governance structures that recognise collective ownership and the right of Māori to derive benefit from their own data.

Championing Responsible and Inclusive Generative AI

The adoption of Generative AI (GenAI) is no longer a future possibility but a current reality, with the potential to add \$76 billion to our economy by 2038. While we appreciate the Government's July 2025 Strategy, Investing with Confidence, we believe that the true "innovation edge" for our nation lies in becoming the world's most trusted adopters of AI. We want to see a future where GenAI is used responsibly, inclusively, and ethically. By building a robust social licence through transparency and fairness, we can ensure that every New Zealander benefits from increased productivity, better services, and enhanced creativity.

The Current Landscape

New Zealand has made significant strides in its AI journey, moving from early experimentation to widespread interaction.

- **High Public Exposure:** 77% of New Zealanders have knowingly interacted with AI-powered services in the last year, particularly through customer service chatbots and virtual assistants.
- **A Strategic Foundation:** The release of the National AI Strategy in July 2025 signaled strong government support for private sector investment and a commitment to the OECD AI Principles.
- **The Trust Gap:** Despite high usage, a significant "trust deficit" remains; 62% of Kiwis say they would stop using a company if they had concerns about how AI was being used, citing misuse of personal data and unfair decision-making as top worries.
- **The SME Lag:** While large enterprises are accelerating, 68% of New Zealand SMEs still have no plans to invest in AI, often due to perceived complexity and a lack of clear ROI.
- **Emerging Risks:** AI is a "double-edged sword," providing defensive tools while also powering more sophisticated, personalised cyber-attacks and deepfakes.

Our Position

We assert that trust is the currency of the AI economy and that Aotearoa must lead the world in Responsible Generative AI. We believe that for AI to be truly inclusive, it must be fair, unbiased, and culturally responsive, including respect for the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori Data Sovereignty. We advocate for a "human-centred" approach where technology amplifies rather than replaces human connection, ensuring that no New Zealander is left behind by an "AI divide".

Recommendations for Action

To unlock the full national benefits of AI while protecting user safety, TUANZ recommends the following four actions:

- **Invest in our own AI capabilities:** The Government, while supporting the global tech companies who invest in NZ, must "be brave" and invest in our own AI capabilities, including providing state-backed AI services to ensure the domestic research sector remains globally competitive.
- **Mandate "Algorithmic Explainability" for High-Stakes Uses:** The Government should transition from "soft law" principles to targeted regulatory interventions for high-risk AI. Organisations using AI for life-impacting decisions (e.g., in banking, health, or government services) must be required to provide a clear, non-technical explanation of the logic used, ensuring no decision is a "black box".
- **Establish a National "Human-in-the-Loop" Standard:** Research shows that 74% of Kiwis feel more comfortable with AI when they know a human can step in. We want to see an industry standard that guarantees seamless escalation pathways to human support, ensuring that automated systems always have human oversight to correct "hallucinations" or biased outputs.
- **Launch an "AI Readiness" Resource Hub for SMEs:** To bridge the adoption gap, TUANZ offers to work with Government and others to compile a practical toolset and webinar series specifically for SMEs. This work should focus on demystifying GenAI, providing ethical usage templates, and helping smaller businesses move from hesitation to responsible implementation. Enforce collective ownership and the right of Māori to derive benefit from their own data.

Access and Inclusion: Connecting Every New Zealander by 2030

We stand at a pivotal moment in our nation's digital journey. We have successfully built one of the world's most advanced fibre foundations, with 87% of the population now having access to ultra-fast broadband. However, our vision has evolved from simple infrastructure to meaningful inclusion, ensuring that every New Zealander, regardless of location, income, or ability can live and thrive in the shared digital future by 2030. This statement outlines how we can bridge the final divide by treating connectivity as core infrastructure and ensuring no community is left behind.

The Current Landscape

New Zealand's digital environment is a story of significant achievement paired with an urgent need for the "final mile" of inclusion.

- **Infrastructure Success vs. Rural Reality:** The Ultra-Fast Broadband (UFB) programme has been a world-leading success. Yet, the remaining 13% of premises are in rural or hard-to-reach areas where costs increase progressively with remoteness, especially when you get beyond the level of 95% coverage. Rural users currently face a "mixed experience," often paying 29% more for broadband and 40% more for mobile plans than their urban counterparts.
- **The Fragility of Lifelines:** Recent severe weather events served as a wake-up call, with a large number of rural users experiencing weather-related outages. It is now clear that we must "build back better" with infrastructure that can withstand climate-driven threats.
- **The Inclusion Gap:** Despite our progress, 1 in 10 households still lack internet access at home. This exclusion disproportionately impacts Māori, Pasifika, and disabled people, the latter of whom are twice as likely to be unconnected.
- **The Skills Threshold:** Connectivity is only half the battle; 20% of New Zealanders lack the essential digital skills to use the internet safely, and only 31% of Kiwis say they understand the AI tools they are already using.

Our Position

We assert that connectivity is an essential public good, equal in importance to electricity and water. Our position is that Aotearoa must transition from a technology-led strategy to an outcomes-based framework. We advocate for "meaningful connectivity" that includes not just "bars on a phone", but affordable devices, reliable speeds, and the capability to use them. We believe in a technology-neutral approach that utilises a mix of fibre, wireless, and satellite solutions to reach every Kiwi cost-effectively. Above all, we believe that an inclusive digital nation is a more prosperous and equitable nation for all.

Recommendations for Action

To achieve universal inclusion and close the digital divide, TUANZ recommends the following four specific actions:

- Formally recognise that connectivity is core infrastructure equal to electricity or water: This requires a dual focus on hard infrastructure and human capability to ensure meaningful technology for all of New Zealand. To close the rural-urban gap and ensure geography, income, or technical confidence do not dictate opportunity, we must prioritise resilience, equity, and broader socio-economic benefits over simple commercial ROI. Achieving this demands continued Government investment and improved collaboration among WISPs, satellite providers, marae, and community groups to deliver targeted, inclusive solutions for the final remaining unserved populations.
- Establish a National Connectivity and Resilience Register: Collaborate with the industry to develop a register linking every address to its connection type and resilience profile. This tool could be built on the current Broadband Map and will ensure emergency aid is directed to the right people during crises and identify "not-spots" for targeted infrastructure investment.
- Co-design "Affordable Connectivity" solutions : The Government, industry, and community should co-design approaches to providing meaningful digital access for low-income households. This could include subsidised home and mobile data, alongside a "bulk funding" model for devices and wrap-around skills support.
- Mandate "Inclusive by Design" for Digital Public Services: All new government digital implementations, such as Digital Identity, must address the concerns of those hesitant to trust technology. This includes adopting a "Code of Practice for Inclusive Use" and ensuring alternative, non-digital pathways remain available for the most vulnerable.



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2026