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Hon Dr David Clark
Minister for the Digital Economy and Communications
Minister of Commerce and Consumer Affairs
Parliament Buildings
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internetcz

CC **Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern,** Prime Minister
Hon Dr Megan Woods, Minister of Housing
Hon Peeni Henare, Associate Minister of Housing
Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister of Social Development and Employment
Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health
Hon Willie Jackson, Minister of Māori Development
Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education,
Minister of COVID-19 Response

Re: InternetNZ briefing to incoming Minister for the Digital Economy and Communications

Dear Minister

1. Congratulations on your recent appointment to the new portfolio of Minister of Digital Economy and Communications. In this letter we share our thoughts on the priorities for the portfolio. We would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these.

A little bit about us

2. InternetNZ is the home and guardian of the .nz domain name space providing the infrastructure, security and support to keep it running. In addition to providing this critical infrastructure, we help New Zealanders harness the power of the Internet through community grants and research. We also work with government agencies to provide an Internet perspective on government policy and law reform.
3. We can support you as Minister by providing expertise on Internet issues, an independent perspective from civil society and the ability to engage across the digital ecosystem.

Three really important things: COVID-19, digital economy, engaging communities

4. As the newly appointed Minister we understand you will be establishing your priorities for the next three years. In this briefing we talk about the three areas where you can make a big difference. These are:
 - a) **Investing in digital inclusion to support New Zealand's COVID-19 response and economic recovery**
 - b) **Coordinating digital economy work across government through the new digital ministers group**
 - c) **Engaging with New Zealanders (and internationally) on digital technology issues.**

**Helping New Zealanders
harness the power
of the Internet.**

COVID-19 and digital inclusion

You can make a difference on affordable connectivity and digital skills

5. Digital inclusion is a key aspect of the Digital Economy and Communications portfolio. As the Minister responsible for digital inclusion you have a critical role to play in New Zealand's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and in our economic recovery.
6. Fifty-six organisations have signed on to our five point plan for digital inclusion: COVID-19 and beyond (attached).¹ Of the five points, we think the biggest opportunities for you to make a difference are in affordable connectivity and foundational digital skills.

Affordable connectivity

7. Successive governments have been working on connectivity. And while there is still more work to do in this area, we think affordability is the next challenge. Having fibre come down your street doesn't help if you can't afford a plan that meets the needs of your family.
8. We were really pleased to receive correspondence from the previous Minister of Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media letting us know that action will be taken to address barriers to digital inclusion for those living in social housing. We hope this work will be one of your priorities. Providing affordable (quality) connectivity through social housing is something we have been advocating and we are committed to assisting MBIE with this work. This work, done alongside a review of the Ministry of Education COVID programme with a view to a permanent solution, would get connectivity into the homes of in need New Zealanders who don't currently have access.

Foundational digital skills

9. When it comes to making progress on ensuring New Zealanders have the foundational skills they need to get online and participate in the digital world, we recommend government investment focus on supporting communities to build the digital capability of their people.
10. While we were pleased to hear about the recent allocation of \$10 million to DIA to increase the digital skills of individuals and whanau, the approach being taken is unlikely to be sustainable. The current approach of piecemeal and one off contestable funding has resulted in a fractured ecosystem of digital skills programmes across New Zealand that is not efficient or effective.
11. We have a detailed proposal on a networked and community based approach to digital inclusion that can reach many more people and be more effective than funding one size fits all programmes. We would be very happy to work with you and your officials on this.
12. This work on foundational digital skills will need to be lined up with the work on digital skills for small businesses and the tech sector, which is being led by Minister Nash. We think MBIE can play a coordinating role here.

¹ <https://internetnz.nz/policy/the-five-point-plan-for-digital-inclusion-covid-19-and-beyond>

Cross government coordination has been a barrier to progress on digital inclusion

13. Cross government coordination is vital to your success in the digital inclusion area (and the broader Digital Economy Portfolio). This has not been well handled in recent times. We recommend that one agency be tasked and properly resourced to coordinate government work on digital inclusion.
14. It will also be important to have a Cabinet mandate setting out the Government's digital inclusion priorities, which will ensure cross agency buy in and resourcing. The Government's Digital Inclusion Blueprint, and associated action plans, don't do this.

The digital ministers group

15. We understand you will be forming a ministerial group to bring together ministers with responsibility for various aspects of the digital economy. We think this will bring some much needed and long awaited cross government coordination on digital economy issues.
16. No doubt the group will consider whether it needs a strategy to guide its work. Our recommendation is that any such strategy be relatively light touch. It should be just enough to signal priorities and focus areas, and line up with the Government's overarching goals. It is important that strategy setting not get in the way of work that is underway and making progress on issues we already know are a problem.
17. Digital inclusion is one of these problem areas. Because it is so foundational to other aspects of the digital economy (e.g. the tech sector and small businesses need connectivity and digital skills), we recommend it be one of the first cabs off the rank for the ministerial group. To achieve this we would also recommend the ministers responsible for housing, social development, health and education be asked to join the group while this work is being done. This will help provide the necessary cross-government buy in. As a group these ministers could also coordinate on budget bids for big ticket items such as affordable connectivity, and digital skills, which otherwise fall between the cracks of departmental responsibility.
18. InternetNZ would very much welcome the opportunity to assist the ministerial group. We could arrange events where you could seek the views of the Internet community. You might also consider a quarterly event where a range of digital economy stakeholders could offer views on particular topics. This would have the advantage of bringing a range of views into the room at once.

Government engagement on technology

19. As the minister responsible for government digital services you have a key role to play in ensuring that the government's own use of the Internet and other digital technologies is based on a balanced understanding of the technological realities, trust from the community, and respect for human rights.
20. New Zealand also has an important role to play in setting the international standards and policies that govern and interface with the Internet. The borderless nature of the Internet means these issues cannot be solved domestically, or through actions by governments alone. New Zealand needs to ensure the international solutions are the right ones for us. You can help officials prioritise this international engagement.

Review of the Copyright Act 1994

21. We support the ongoing review of our 26-year-old copyright law, particularly the opportunity to update the law so it is fit for purpose in a more digital world. While the Internet has opened new ways for people in New Zealand to distribute creative works and participate in cultural life, currently copyright law can present barriers to people participating in this way. These barriers become more of a problem as digital ways of communicating become more integrated into people's lives, a challenge highlighted when work and classrooms urgently shifted online during the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that people like teachers suddenly needed permission to do things online that they would freely do in person, like reading aloud to students.
22. We support the approach your officials are taking to the review. We look forward to working constructively to find an approach to copyright that works for a more digital world, and meets the need of all New Zealanders to participate in cultural life online.

Next steps

23. Thank you for the time you have taken to read this letter. We look forward to meeting you to discuss these issues further.

Ngā mihi nui,



Jordan Carter

Chief Executive



Kim Connolly-Stone

Policy Director