

Events that have shaped New Zealand and the Public Service.

“Over the course of New Zealand’s history there have been some major milestones and events that have shaped the way New Zealand operates and informed the way we live our lives today.

Those same events have also shaped the way the Public Service operates, so that we are continuously improving our services to meet the needs of all New Zealanders.”

Below are some key events in the history of our country and the Public Service.



1840

A Frontier Bureaucracy

The Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand’s founding document is signed on 6 February.

As public servants, we have a responsibility to support the Crown in its relationships with Māori under the Treaty

1852

Self-Government for New Zealand

The New Zealand Constitution Act was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that granted self-government to the Colony of New Zealand. New Zealand’s first election was held in 1853. To be able to vote in it people had to be male, aged 21 or over, and British subjects who either owned or rented property worth a moderate amount of money.

1893

Women’s Suffrage

On 19 September, Governor Lord Glasgow signed a new Electoral Act into law, and New Zealand became the first self-governing country in the world to enshrine in law the right for women to vote in parliamentary elections.

1912

Public Service Act

The first act that provided a legal framework for the public service as a whole. The legislation set up a professional career public service and created the role of the Public Service Commissioner. Departments, which had long been controlled by individual ministers, were gathered together in a unified public service.

1936

The 40-hour Working Week

The 40-hour week became a focus, and eventually this was brought into legislation by the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Amendment Act.

1949

First NZ Passport was Introduced

The British Nationality and New Zealand Citizenship Act created a separate New Zealand citizenship (though the words 'British subject' remained on New Zealand passports until 1973, along with 'New Zealand citizen').

New Zealand passports are now issued by the Department of Internal Affairs.

1960

Equal Pay

The Government Service Equal Pay Act introduced equal pay legislation in the public service ensuring women in the public sector were to be paid the same as men for doing the same work under the same conditions.

1967

New Zealand Currency Changed

Pounds, shillings and pence were replaced by dollars and cents – 27 million new banknotes and 165 million new coins. The new money was valued at \$120 million (more than \$2.2 billion in today's money) and weighed more than 700 tonnes.

1972

Te Petihana Reo Māori — The Māori Language Petition

On 14 September, a call for the recognition and revitalisation of te reo Māori was presented by representatives of Ngā Tamatoa, Victoria University's Te Reo Māori Society, and the New Zealand Māori Students Association in the form of a petition with over 30,000 signatures.

1977

Opening of the Beehive

On 28 February, Queen Elizabeth II stood before the 'Forest in the sun' tapestry to officially open New Zealand's new government building – the Beehive.

1982

The Official Information Act

This legislation aimed to improve the transparency and accountability of government activities, and to provide opportunities for New Zealanders to participate in the making of administrative laws and policies. This is an important milestone for open government.

1984

Rogernomics

Rogernomics were the neoliberal economic reforms promoted by Roger Douglas, the Minister of Finance between 1984 and 1988 in the Fourth Labour Government of New Zealand. A result of Rogernomics was the creation of a number of State Owned Enterprises following legislation passed in 1986.

1988

Treaty Settlements

The Treaty of Waitangi Policy Unit was originally formed within the Department of Justice. It was set up to advise on policy and assist in negotiations and litigation of Māori treaty claims and at the Waitangi Tribunal.

1988

The State Sector Act

The State Sector Act made government department heads directly accountable to their Ministers through a system of annual 'purchase agreements' delivering outputs. The chief executives gained greater autonomy to manage their departments as they saw fit, hiring their own staff and negotiating pay and conditions.

1993

Introduction of MMP

New Zealand introduced the mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) electoral system. This would be much fairer to minor parties, allow for greater representation, and enhance the legitimacy of the political system. A referendum was held in 1993 and it came into practice in 1996.

2004

The Crown Entities Act

The term Crown Entities dates to the Public Finance Act 1989. The Crown Entities Act created a consistent framework for the governance, management and operation of Crown Entities. It clarified the accountability relationships between entities, their board members, responsible ministers and the House of Representatives. The majority of public sector employees work for Crown entities and other different types of government organisations, not for government departments.

2019

Introduction of the Spirit of Service Awards

Te Hāpai Hapori | the Spirit of Service Awards were introduced to recognise public servants and initiatives that exemplify the spirit of service and demonstrate an outstanding commitment to New Zealand.

2020

The Public Service Act

The Public Service Act was revised.

The Public Service Act supported changes already underway and aimed to ensure a modern, more joined-up and more citizen-focused public service.

2020

The COVID 19 pandemic

The COVID 19 pandemic hit the shores of New Zealand resulting in the Public Service having to completely change the way it worked and delivered services for New Zealanders.

COVID-19 showed how agencies can join forces and move with agility to solve complex challenges facing New Zealanders in a crisis.