

EVERYONE IN

Lead it. Learn it. Use it. Teach it. Own it.

A draft AI policy for New Zealand. Free for any party to take.

AI is starting to touch every job, every classroom and every household in this country. Right now, as a nation we are not doing enough to make sure that will benefit all New Zealanders maximally, and equally.

WHY THIS EXISTS

New Zealand has a productivity problem that has been stuck for a generation. I'm making the argument that AI is the biggest productivity lever we'll see in our working lifetimes, and probably for a couple of generations after us. It's here now, and it's ours if we choose it. A lever only works if people can reach it though.

New Zealanders are being told to use a technology they have not yet been enabled to learn. The market reaches the firms big enough to have someone whose job AI is. It isn't reaching the sole trader, or the ward supervisor, or the 58-year-old who's just been told their role is changing. Nobody is incentivised to teach those people AI, so nobody does.

This document is not owned by anyone. That's purposefully the point. Any party, group or members of New Zealand society may take any part of it, put their name on it, and call it their own.

FIVE THINGS WE ARE ASKING FOR

i	Lead it. One AI office at the centre of government, and a public service that can use AI well.	\$8m to \$12m a year
ii	Learn it. Free AI literacy for every adult who wants it.	\$37m to \$61m / 3 yrs
iii	Use it. Split-cost help for small businesses and their leaders to learn AI hands-on.	\$30m to \$45m / 3 yrs
iv	Teach it. Fund teacher training first, before adding AI to any curriculum.	\$83m to \$124m / 3 yrs
v	Own it. Our language, knowledge, data and natural resources used on our terms.	\$5m to \$8m a year

Together these five pillars come to roughly \$200 million to \$310 million over three years.

WHICH MONEY, RATHER THAN WHETHER THERE IS ANY

The government's own AI strategy leans on a Microsoft estimate that AI could add \$76 billion to our GDP by 2038. So we are asking for well under half a per cent of the opportunity our own national AI strategy has already put a number on. In Budget 2025 the government reprioritised \$613.5 million from within the education vote alone. At the lower end, what we are asking for comes to \$66 million a year. Less than half of what the government already moved inside the education budget alone, without anybody calling it "new spending".

Lead it · *an Office of AI, and a government that goes first*

Someone has to own AI in our country. Right now nobody does cleanly. An Office of AI inside DPMC, the way Australia did in July, with an independent review point five years in. Twenty hours of hands-on AI training for every minister and public service chief executive, and an AI capability programme for the public service itself: about 65,000 people, \$10m to \$20m over three years. No-one can lead a societal evolution of this scale that they have only been briefed on.

Learn it · *free AI literacy for every adult New Zealander*

Free foundation AI literacy for any adult who wants it. Online for most people, and in person for the people online will never reach. We have done this before: Digital Boost, about \$57 million set aside across its life, independently evaluated, and it worked. The costing assumes a million adults take it up over three years, providers funded on results, and a published number every year for how many are actually using AI at work afterwards.

Use it · *back small businesses to actually use AI properly*

Split-cost vouchers so a small business can get proper help getting started with AI. 97 per cent of New Zealand businesses have fewer than twenty employees, and they're who this is for. Then a national AI capability target that means something: a business can name a meaningful process AI has changed, show you before and after, and tell you who is accountable for it. Three questions, answerable in a minute, and you can't pass them by buying a licence.

Teach it · *teachers first, and properly*

Fund every teacher to learn AI properly, with release time so it happens in work hours: \$400 to \$600 per teacher per year, next to the \$138 million of professional learning New Zealand funded in 2024/25. ERO's own recommendations ask for a national framework, teacher capability building, and centrally provided tools. Then an age-appropriate AI strand in the curriculum: learning about AI lightly up to Year 6, safe AI tutor access from Year 7, and assistive technology protected at every age. The thinking habits come first.

Own it · *our language, knowledge, data, water and power, on our terms*

Adopt the Māori Data Governance Model and the Māori AI Governance Framework as the standard for how public sector AI handles Māori data, rather than commissioning something similar three years later. And a national interest test before any data centre at the Makarewa scale is consented, with the criteria published, iwi and the local community at the table, and conditions on operators along the lines Australia has set. I want data centres built here. This settles who pays the bills.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOTHING

This is the biggest risk of all. AI is here. It's not going away. The choice in front of us is whether New Zealand and New Zealanders will be equipped for it, or surprised and steamrolled by it. *Please take any part of this, put your name on it, and pass it on.*

WHERE I STAND

This document was written by Mark Laurence, on my own time. I run an AI training business, so I have a commercial interest in some of what it asks for, and I'm not going to pretend otherwise. If any of what it proposes gets funded, it should go to open, contestable process, and my company can compete for it and be judged on the same terms as everyone else, or not at all.