



Ambitious for NZ's success

Kirk Hope

We've been talking to our members about the kinds of policies they'd like to see put in place after the election.

Our members are companies that belong to the BusinessNZ Network - large producers, manufacturers and exporters, medium-sized companies of all kinds, and small family-owned firms in cities and regions all over NZ.

They are a fantastic bunch. Kiwi businesspeople are ambitious, positive, down to earth, and they tell it like it is.

We asked them what sort of policies they'd vote for in this year's election, and got clear answers.

Their priorities are much as you would expect - they'd like a stronger economy, better employment policies, and improvement to the regulations that affect their ability to do business.

I have to report there's a feeling of urgency about those priorities - businesses are feeling quite hard hit by the economic environment (high inflation, high input costs and softening consumer demand), and there's disquiet about the overall environment for business.

Employment and staffing matters figure highly in the business wishlist.

Businesses have lived through a recent period when it was extremely difficult to fill job vacancies - hard to find skilled NZ staff, hard to recruit skilled staff from overseas, even hard to find people to take on lower-skilled and unskilled jobs.

Now that immigration settings are being freed up, it should prove easier to gain skilled staff from overseas, but it's still hard to find a Kiwi to fill a vacancy in many businesses.

So members are rightly asking questions about the education system. They want to see kids coming out of school with good literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and they'd like to see a vocational and higher education system that better suits the needs of the workforce.

Businesses are nervous about Fair Pay Agreements system set to happen next year, which from an employer perspective will take away their ability to negotiate directly with staff and allow for flexibility and the circumstances of the individual business and the individual

employee. "Fair Pay" Agreements, will require a business in Invercargill to meet the same standards as a business based in Auckland, and they may be very different sized businesses.

Other priorities relate to the environment businesses operate in and the regulations they must comply with.

Concerned about the increasing load of regulation - for example in resource management, environmental and climate change policies, businesses are concerned that they will be able to manage the changing regulatory environment.

Although some policy development is excellent, well thought through, and effectively consulted on, businesses say many ensuing regulations are poorly written and targeted, and simply add to the unnecessary compliance burden they shoulder.

Resource management is a particular obstacle. Businesses have been complaining for years about the Resource Management Act - the hoops that need to be jumped through, and the multiple council processes, fees and charges involved in getting resource consents or building consents fees are legendary. Their priority in this area would be to get a new law to replace the Resource Management Act that would actually facilitate development rather than holding it back, while maintaining rather than eroding their property rights.

Regulations that have been developed in response to climate change are another concern. Businesses are supportive of NZ's overall bipartisan approach to climate policy, but the many regulations developed in response to climate change appear to be causing unnecessary cost and confusion.

Businesses say they want a least-cost, market-based approach to lowering emissions, where the Emissions Trading Scheme is central, with a minimal number of additional policies. And they want help to achieve lower emissions, with access to affordable capital and training and tools to assist the transition.

Other priorities include policies on taxation, trade, infrastructure, iwi business and more.

Businesses' list of priorities for the 2023 election, are all designed to boost business confidence and investment, create more and better paying jobs, and allow New Zealand to invest in the infrastructure we need for the future; housing, roads, rail, and climate change adaptation. A thriving and growing economy buys us the social services and investments we need to make in health and education.

The overriding impression I got from our survey of businesses' election priorities was of a business community very positively focused on a better future, and ambitious both for their companies and for NZ's success.

I hope that the political parties contesting this year's election pay heed to the hopes and ambitions of NZ businesses.

[Election Priorities for a better future](http://www.businessnz.org.nz) is on www.businessnz.org.nz.

Kirk Hope is Chief Executive BusinessNZ
www.businessnz.org.nz