



New Zealand House of Representatives
Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Petitions Committee

Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Petihana

54th Parliament
May 2025

Petition of Angela Clifford: Government facilitates development of a national food strategy for Aotearoa

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Greg O'Connor, Chairperson

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Petition of Angela Clifford

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petition of Angela Clifford—Government facilitates development of a national food strategy for Aotearoa—and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Request for a national food strategy

The petition was signed by 2,124 people, and was presented to the House by Ingrid Leary on 13 February 2024. It requests:

That the House of Representatives urgently direct the development of a government-facilitated, community-led, values-based national food strategy; the strategy to be holistic and create a better, fairer, more connected and delicious food system.

Comments from the petitioner

The petitioner, Angela Clifford, is CEO of Eat New Zealand, which describes itself as New Zealand’s food movement.¹ She told us her petition requesting a national food strategy is supported by Freedom Farms and Veterinarians for Animal Welfare Aotearoa, and endorsed by around 80 industry bodies and other organisations. We heard that the wording of the request, which asks for a “government-facilitated, community-led, values-based national food strategy”, was chosen carefully.

Ms Clifford said that while a national food strategy is still the long-term goal of the petition, she wanted to focus her oral submission to our committee on a new request to establish a food security council for Aotearoa New Zealand. She told us that this would be a first step towards a national food strategy.

Proposal for a national food strategy

The petitioner said that New Zealand’s food system is haphazard. She told us it has adverse outcomes for New Zealanders, animals, and the environment. Ms Clifford said this is because New Zealand has no food plan or framework. She believes that this leaves New Zealand food production and supply vulnerable to events such as climate change, the cost of living, and global instability.

Ms Clifford said a food systems approach is needed in New Zealand. She referred us to an explanation by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that a food system is:

The entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture,

¹ More information about Eat New Zealand is [available on its website](#).

forestry or fisheries, as well as parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.²

The petitioner drew our attention to the Global Food Security Index.³ In 2022, New Zealand ranked 14th out of 113 countries, with an overall score of 77.8 out of 100. However, New Zealand scored 0 in the category “Food security and access policy commitments” because it has no food strategy or food security agency.

We heard that many of New Zealand’s trading partners have national food strategies, including the European Union, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Singapore, and Brazil. The Australian Parliament’s standing committee on Agriculture recommended in 2023 that the Australian Government develop a comprehensive National Food Plan.⁴

The petitioner referred to other recent initiatives supporting a national food strategy for New Zealand:

- The Fenwick Forum, held in June 2020, called for the development of a national food strategy. This led to the creation of Mana Kai, an initiative of The Aotearoa Circle, which brought together community, industry, and government representatives to consider opportunities to build a food strategy.⁵
- The directors of six National Science Challenges called for a national food strategy for Aotearoa in July 2023.⁶
- The Public Health Communication Centre Aotearoa supported calls for a New Zealand food strategy in January 2024.⁷

Reasons for a national food strategy

Ms Clifford said there are silos in New Zealand’s responses to food issues, depending on which government agency has jurisdiction. For example, the Ministry for Primary Industries focuses on food safety, the Ministry of Health on nutrition, and the Ministry of Social Development on distribution and support to food-insecure households. The petitioner told us that the current Government has a cross-agency working party on food-related issues. She feels that this work would be enhanced if it included participation from community and industry representatives.

A national food strategy, according to the petitioner, would provide a vision of where New Zealand wants to go to as a food nation. She said it would be a plan, and told us that she did not think that any business in the world “ever thought that a plan was a bad idea”.

² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: *Sustainable food systems: Concept and framework*, 2018.

³ More information about the Global Food Security Index is [available on its website](#).

⁴ The full report of the Australian Parliament’s standing committee on Agriculture, *Australian Food Story: Feeding the Nation and Beyond*, November 2023 is available on the website of the Parliament of Australia.

⁵ The Aotearoa Circle: *Mana Kai Initiative*.

⁶ Healthier Lives | He Oranga Hauora National Science Challenges media release: *Directors of Six National Science Challenges Call for a National Food Strategy*, 11 July 2023.

⁷ The Public Health Communication Centre Aotearoa: *Strong public support for healthy food policies in Aotearoa: Briefing to the Incoming Government*, 15 January 2024.

We heard that, at present, responses about New Zealanders' access to affordable and healthy food can be limited. One example given was the creation of a Grocery Commissioner, who can consider issues of cost and supply in supermarkets. However, the petitioner said that the Commissioner's mandate is limited, and there are food system issues that cannot be addressed through this role. We were told that when specific food responses occur in silos, other aspects of the food system, such as animal welfare, can be forgotten.

Ms Clifford believes that bringing together stakeholders from across government, industry, and the community sector would be a first step towards providing more connected thinking and action about food policy. We asked whether the petitioner believes that New Zealand food production and delivery services would work better if centrally coordinated from Wellington. The petitioner replied that she did not. She was rather seeking a co-designed process which includes all stakeholders that need to be at the table. She told us she considered it would be "ridiculous" to establish a national food strategy or a national food council without government involvement.

We were told that conversations of this kind have been occurring in different ways but have not yet solved "the overarching problem". We asked what the petitioner considered to be the overarching problem. The answer we were given was that there are people in New Zealand "who cannot afford nutritious kai [food] while we export food and make more money". However, the petitioner acknowledged that export income is necessary for other food goals to be met.

We asked whether the request for government involvement in the process of establishing a national food strategy or national food council is because the wider community needs the Government to initiate the process, or because non-government stakeholders want the Government to fund it. The petitioner told us that she is looking for Government funding. However, she does not believe it would cost "a huge amount" as some work is already underway. She asked that current cross-agency work be extended to include community and industry organisations.

A recent initiative brought together a range of government, industry, and community organisations in North Canterbury to discuss food security for the region. The petitioner told us that these were people who might not usually find themselves at the same table, "but when they have all had the common goal of creating a food secure local community, then everybody was able to work together".

We asked how the petitioner understood input from Māori would fit into the tripartite model of dialogue between Government, industry, and community. She told us that te ao Māori perspectives are part of the community response, and that it is important that those perspectives are represented.

Proposal for a food security council

Following the hearing, we received additional information from the petitioner about her request to establish a food security council. She said that such a council would:

- coordinate and integrate government and civil society responses to food system shocks and tensions
- establish emergency frameworks

- facilitate knowledge sharing
- advocate for and implement long-term food security policies.

Ms Clifford told us that establishing a council would not take focus away from the Government's goal to double export value in 10 years. Nor would it increase compliance or red tape, according to the petitioner. She proposed that establishing a council would cost \$35,000 and would require additional support of \$40,000 per year to enable non-profit and community organisations to participate.

The petitioner said that Brazil and Toronto, Canada currently have food security councils, while one is being considered in Australia.⁸

Comments from government agencies

We received written and oral submissions from the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Ministry of Health. The ministries acknowledged that the food system is complex and is influenced by a range of central government agencies as well as private and not-for-profit stakeholders.

Responsibility for food sits across several different government agencies. We heard that the two ministries we heard from meet regularly to talk about areas in which their work intersects, and that both ministries consider they are well connected.

The two ministries confirmed that there is currently no national food strategy, as requested by the petitioner. We were told that there are several food-related strategies—such as a food safety action plan,⁹ a health strategy,¹⁰ and a trade strategy. However, we heard that there is no single overarching document that drives policy and action on food.

Comments from the Ministry for Primary Industries

The Ministry for Primary Industries said it is one of multiple agencies that have a role within the New Zealand food system. The ministry's role is to regulate the New Zealand food system, to ensure that food is safe and suitable to eat. The ministry also has responsibilities to support trade market access.

The ministry noted that New Zealand's food system is not isolated from the global food system, nor is it immune from global shocks. As well as being a food exporter, New Zealand also imports around 20 percent of the food consumed in this country. As one example, New Zealand imports almost all its sugar.

We heard that the New Zealand food system must meet many different needs and purposes, which include producing enough food for New Zealand citizens and exporting food. The ministry said food exports are the basis of New Zealand's prosperity and are also a way in

⁸ The media release about a proposed National Food Council and national food strategy is [available on the website of the Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry](#).

⁹ More information about the New Zealand Food Safety action plan is [available on the website of the Ministry for Primary Industries](#).

¹⁰ More information about the New Zealand Health Strategy is [available on the website of the Ministry of Health](#).

which New Zealand supports the global food system. One in five New Zealanders have income because they work in the food system, according to the ministry.

The ministry told us it works with Australia on the Joint Food Regulatory System to ensure that food is safe. This includes joint composition and labelling standards so consumers can make informed choices about food. The ministry also works closely with health agencies and local government.

Comments from the Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health told us its focus is on the health aspects of a nutritious diet. We heard that the food system is an important contributor to health outcomes.

Food insecurity is not having access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food, according to the ministry. It said food insecurity is a barrier to improving nutrition and overall health and wellbeing in New Zealand. It works alongside other agencies with the goal of ensuring that people in New Zealand who experience food insecurity are able to access healthy kai.

The ministry told us that the effects of poor nutrition contribute to increased government spending on health, particularly through diet-related illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers. Food insecurity also contributes to poor mental health outcomes and nutritional deficiencies. We were told that, in many parts of New Zealand, unhealthy food and drink is highly available, affordable, and marketed, while there is limited access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food.

The Public Health Advisory Committee, which is an independent advisory committee established under the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022, recently considered how the New Zealand food system might be strengthened to improve health and social outcomes. It recommended to the Minister of Health in May 2024 that the Minister work with colleagues in government, in partnership with communities, to develop a national food strategy.¹¹ We were told by the ministry that the Minister has not yet made a decision about whether to progress this recommendation.

Our response to the petition

We thank the petitioner for the work she and her networks are doing to bring people together for conversations about food security. We were interested to hear about the meeting in North Canterbury which brought together stakeholders from government, business, and not-for-profit organisations to discuss local solutions to food insecurity.

We agree that the food system is very complex, and that joined-up thinking is needed. We understand from our hearing that, of the many concerns raised about food production and supply, the petitioner's primary concern is to ensure that people who cannot afford food will have access to good nutrition.

From the information supplied by the petitioner, there appear to have been many initiatives in recent years aimed at overcoming silos and creating connections between different food

¹¹ The report of the Public Health Advisory Committee: *Rebalancing our food system*, 16 May 2024, is available on the website of the Ministry of Health.

stakeholders. We note that some of these, including the Mana Kai initiative of The Aotearoa Circle in which the petitioner participated, were initiated and funded by the community and philanthropic sectors. We welcome and encourage such initiatives.

We have reservations about the petitioner's proposal for a centralised national food security council. We recognise that she brought this suggestion to us as a possible first step towards developing a national strategy. We appreciate that she has put forward some ideas about possible costs of her proposal, and she clearly wants this to be affordable and achievable. However, the petitioner has not convinced us that a national food security council can solve the problem she has identified: that some New Zealanders cannot afford nutritious food.

The petitioner's request is for a "government-facilitated, community-led" approach to developing a national food strategy. In many areas of social and economic life in New Zealand, an industry body or community network takes the lead in bringing together government and non-government voices for a common goal. We agree that such initiatives should be community-led. We think it would be preferable for a food security council, such as proposed by the petitioner, to be initiated from the non-government sector, rather than from central government.

We acknowledge that there are currently other proposals for a national food strategy, such as that recommended by the Public Health Advisory Committee. We look forward to seeing a response to that recommendation from the Minister of Health. However, based on the information provided by the petitioner, we feel it would be premature at this time for us to propose a specific mechanism to increase connectivity across the many different work areas and stakeholder groups in the food sector. We would like to thank the petitioner for bringing this important issue to our attention.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was signed by 2,124 people. It was presented to the House by Ingrid Leary on 13 February 2024 and referred to us that day. We met between 9 May 2024 and 8 May 2025 to consider it. We received written submissions and heard oral evidence from the petitioner, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry for Primary Industries.

Committee members

Greg O'Connor (Chairperson)

Carl Bates (to 29 January 2025)

Kahurangi Carter (from 29 January 2025)

Greg Fleming

Paulo Garcia (from 29 January 2025)

Francisco Hernandez (to 29 January 2025)

Benjamin Doyle also participated in our consideration of this petition.

Related resources

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are [available on the Parliament website](#).

A recording of our hearing can be accessed online [on the Parliament website](#) (from 24:08).