

Hon Bill English

Deputy Prime Minister

Hon Dr Pita Sharples

Minister of Maori Affairs

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**Media
Statement**

Govt begins cross-party constitutional review

The Government will conduct a wide-ranging review of New Zealand's constitutional arrangements, Deputy Prime Minister Bill English and Maori Affairs Minister Pita Sharples announced today.

"This is the start of what will be a considered process over the next three years," Mr English says.

"The review is deliberately wide-ranging and will include matters such as the size of Parliament, the length of the electoral term, Maori representation, the role of the Treaty of Waitangi and whether New Zealand needs a written constitution.

"New Zealand has a long history of incremental constitutional change and we are keen to stimulate debate on these matters, hear the public's views and consider whether any aspects require change.

"Of course, we will keep in mind that enduring constitutional changes generally require a broad base of support. Significant change will not be undertaken lightly and will require either broad cross-party agreement or the majority support of voters at a referendum," Mr English says.

Mr English and Dr Sharples will lead the review in consultation with a cross-party reference group of MPs. They will write to all party leaders in the next few days and ask them to nominate a representative for the cross party reference group.

"Public consultation will guide the review, and information and education campaigns will be part of the review process," Dr Sharples says.

"I know Maori want to talk about the place of the Treaty of Waitangi in our constitution, and how our legal and political systems can reflect Tikanga Maori. Proper consideration of these issues cannot be rushed," he says.

An advisory panel will support the ministers, who will make a final report to Cabinet by the end of 2013. The Government will respond within six months.

The ministers' first report to Cabinet - expected by June 2011 - will seek agreement on the makeup of the advisory panel, a plan for public engagement and how the review will interact with other government projects with a constitutional dimension - such as the referendum on MMP.

The review, which is part of the confidence and supply agreement between the National and Maori Parties, will take a break in the second half of 2011 to allow for the general election, before resuming in 2012. The ministers will then provide six-monthly reports to Cabinet.

The review will be funded from departmental baselines in 2010/11. Funding after that will depend on the scope Cabinet agrees to after the first report.

Terms of reference

Electoral matters including:

- The size of Parliament.
- The length of terms of Parliament and whether or not the term should be fixed.
- The size and number of electorates, including the method for calculating size.
- Electoral integrity legislation.

Crown-Maori relationship matters including:

- Maori representation including the Maori Electoral Option, Maori electoral participation and Maori seats in Parliament and local government.
- The role of the Treaty of Waitangi within New Zealand's constitutional arrangements.

Other constitutional matters

- Whether New Zealand should have a written constitution.
- Bill of Rights issues.

The review will also be open to considering other issues and perspectives that are raised during public engagement. For example, this may include public interest in whether New Zealand should move to a republic, or the relationship between central and local government.