

Blog August 2025

On the Cusp of Change – From Dictation Back to Delivery

New Zealand's primary industries are staring at the crossroads of the future. We're on the cusp of change but stuck with a public service that wants to dictate, not enable. What we need is space to get on with it.

Let's start with climate resilience. The biggest risk isn't the weather – it's a bureaucracy more interested in writing rules than funding solutions. We're telling our farmers to meet tighter emissions targets than their Aussie neighbours – set by the same banks – while expecting them to do it with less finance, broken infrastructure, and red tape at every turn. If we're serious about climate, let's back farmer-led tools and long-term funding. A Rural Investment Fund through Kiwibank would be a Kiwi solution for Kiwi land and succession. Fair, affordable, future focused.

Infrastructure's no better. Roads, power, water, and cell coverage are crumbling in places and increasingly unfit for purpose. Cyclones, floods, and fire risks have already given us the wake-up call. But the rebuild is bogged down in endless planning and consultant-driven paralysis. The public service no longer builds – it contracts and delays. Vocational training has collapsed. Te Pūkenga is still "transitioning" while the Government quietly removes the funding for on-the-job learning. Meanwhile, immigration policy is a clunky, slow-motion disaster. Employers need people now – not after 18 months of bureaucratic pass-the-parcel. If Wellington can't fix it, it should get out of the way. Let local communities and industry lead.

Our premium market edge – trusted, traceable, ethical – is now at risk. Social licence can't be bought with PR. It's earned through real-world standards like those of NZ Ethical Employers. But instead of building our brand, we're over-regulating the farm gate and underfunding the brand story. Our export success depends on showing – not just saying – that we're world-class. And that story must be industry-led, not filtered through a government press release.

The compliance regime has become a full-time job. Rules now overlap, contradict, and duplicate. Death by process. Government and industry working side by side used to be the gold standard. Now it's rule by spreadsheet. Immigration rules aren't fixed, training is in limbo, and fear of failure has paralysed decision-making.

Capital and innovation are drying up. Rural lending is a battleground. Aussie banks are imposing climate targets on NZ farmers that don't apply to their own Aussie clients. Meanwhile, Wellington keeps pumping R&D funding into pet pilot projects that never scale. The idea that the private sector can "just innovate" while being regulated to death is pure fantasy. What we need is green capital, fair finance, and policy that enables – not suffocates – industry-led collaboration.

So where to from here?

We've got to stop pretending we're heading back to pre-Covid. That world's gone. What we need now is a restructured economy, a local-first approach, and a public service that supports rather than controls. Trust must be rebuilt through delivery, not spin. Through results, not reshuffles.

This country has the people, tools, and ideas to get back on track. But we can't do that if the public service keeps pulling the handbrake. It's time to move from managed decline to deliberate delivery. That means letting those who grow, build, and export lead the way.

We are on the cusp of change. But if we don't act, we'll stay trapped in a Wellington-led spiral of policy paralysis, where compliance wins and productivity dies.

The choice is clear: more Wellington dictation – or finally, industry-led delivery. It's time to release the shackles.