

Submission

People and place: Ensuring the wellbeing of every generation Consultation on the topic for the Ministry for the Environment's Long-term Insights Briefing 2022.

23 May 2022

About the Institute

The McGuinness Institute was founded in 2004 as a non-partisan think tank working towards a sustainable future for Aotearoa New Zealand. *Project 2058* is the Institute's flagship project focusing on Aotearoa New Zealand's long-term future. Because of our observation that foresight drives strategy, strategy requires reporting, and reporting shapes foresight, the Institute developed three interlinking policy projects: *ForesightNZ*, *StrategyNZ* and *ReportingNZ*. Each of these tools must align if we want Aotearoa New Zealand to develop durable, robust and forward-looking public policies. The policy projects frame and feed into our research projects, which address a range of significant issues facing Aotearoa New Zealand. The six research projects are: *CivicsNZ*, *ClimateChangeNZ*, *OneOceanNZ*, *PublicScienceNZ*, *TacklingPovertyNZ* and *TalentNZ*.

About the cover

We are facing three crises at once – a pandemic crisis, a biodiversity crisis and a climate crisis. Futurists often explore trends and wild cards in terms of noise, in much the same way as an experienced triage doctor will be worried about the quiet pale person rather than the person screaming for help. Noise can be described in terms of pitch and pattern. In futures speak, the pandemic crisis delivers an 'intermittent noise'. It, therefore, attracts lots of attention and any response is relatively immediate (in that any action taken today has a direct impact tomorrow). In contrast, the biodiversity crisis delivers a 'low-frequency noise' and therefore gathers little attention and minimal action. Another example of a low frequency noise might be our vulnerable communities; history reminds us that those challenged by poverty often carry an uneven distribution of the burden during times of disruption. However, the climate crisis is far more nuanced. Climate change delivers a 'continuous noise' but it is deafening – we hear the noise, we get alarmed, we get fearful, but any action taken today will not be felt until 2040 (and then of course it is too late).

What we face today are three types of noises, but all at once. This means we need to design our systems to:

- prepare and rebuild between the 'intermittent noise'
- seek out the 'low-frequency noise'
- be proactive and informed so as not to be overwhelmed by the 'continuous noise'.

1.0 Introduction

The Institute welcomes the opportunity to offer feedback on *People and place: Ensuring the wellbeing of every generation: Consultation on the topic for the Ministry for the Environment's Long-term Insights Briefing 2022*.

The submission has been broken down into two sections: 2.0 General observations (regarding LTIBs from existing work) and 3.0 Answers to specific consultation questions.

2.0 General observations

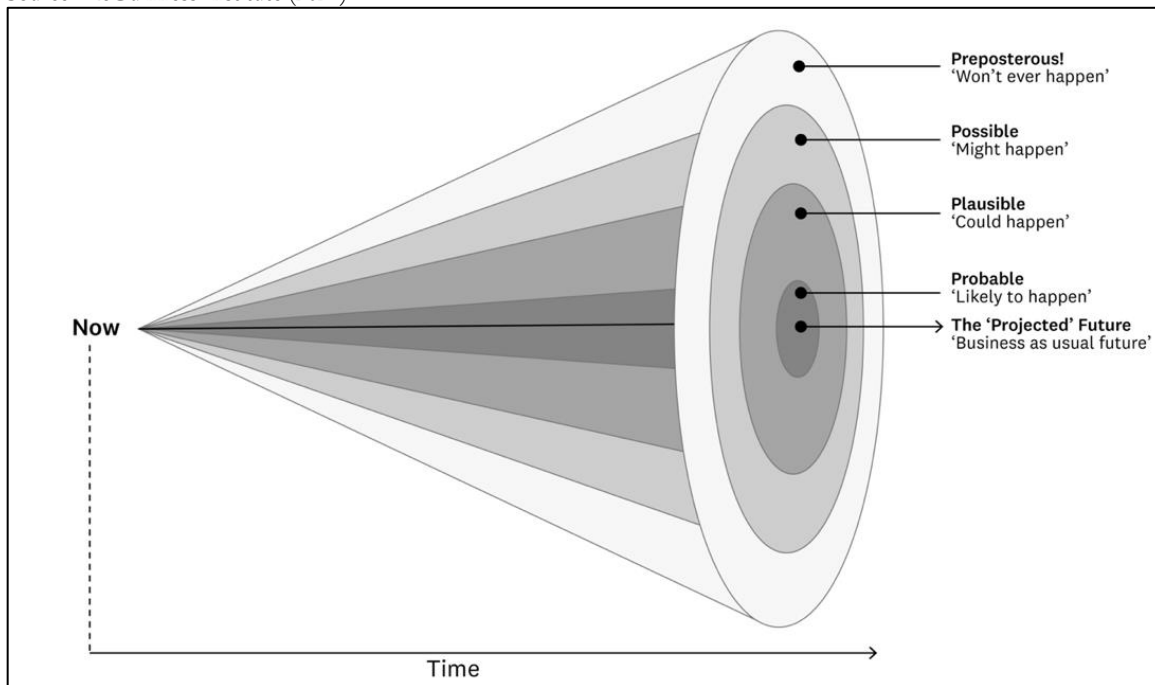
The following section outlines any key observations and concerns resulting from previous work that the Institute has undertaken in this space.

(i) The difference between 'probable futures', 'preferred futures' and 'possible futures'

The Cone of Plausibility makes the distinctions clear. The Institute observes that the narrative quickly goes to the preferred future and not enough time is spent on the possible futures. A trick that futurists talk about is the trap of talking yourself into a preferred future. Some futurists refuse to go into the preferred future space due to the way it creates bias and blind spots. Basically, it can trap you into thinking only about the goal (and how to get there) and you fail to seek out new conflicting information that might make you change your goal or allow you to pivot to find an optimal position and in some cases better position from where you started. The risk, especially in the climate space, is that many people and communities have (or are in the process of) developing a preferred future (e.g. the status quo or a green utopia), when in practice we need to keep a very open and curious mind. The Government will need to work hard to focus the debate on probable and possible futures, particularly with LTIBs.

Figure 1: The cone of plausibility

Source: McGuinness Institute (2021)¹

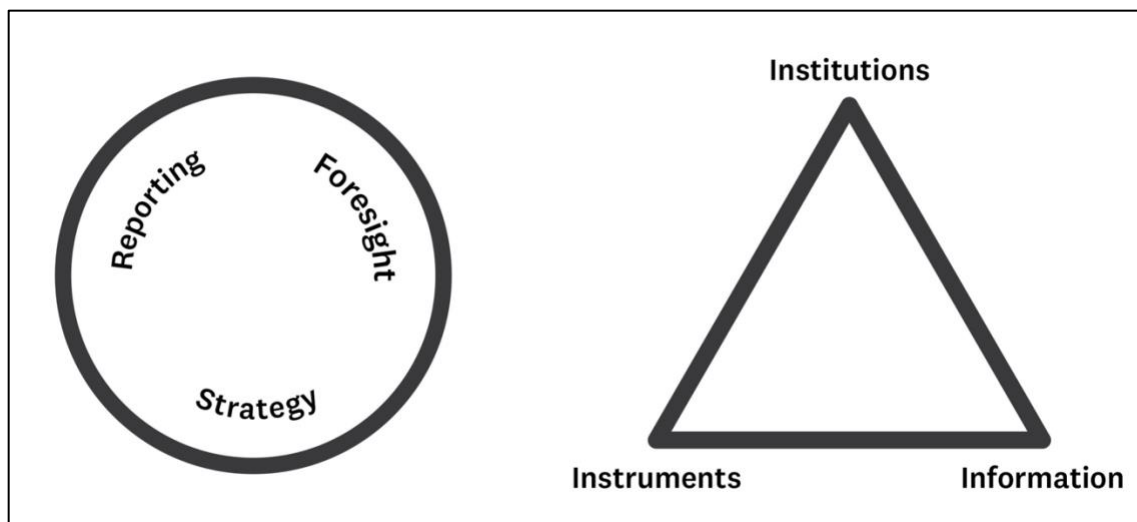


(ii) The difference between 'strategy' and 'foresight'

The methodology that drives the Institute's work is shaped by the need to have an integrated, whole-system approach (See Figure 2). The Institute believes that policy requires equal amounts of focus on foresight,

strategy, and reporting. Foresight drives strategy but is shaped by reporting. Strategy drives reporting but is shaped by foresight. Lastly, reporting drives foresight, but is shaped by strategy. Strategy deals with the means to an end; it is hard work. It focuses on ‘how’ and the ‘goal’ – in particular how to reach the goal. Foresight is creative, playful and explorative and focuses on ‘what if’. The Institute finds that, in public policy, not enough effort is put into foresight. We consider the LTIB is in fact a foresight briefing.

Figure 2: The Institute’s approach



The Institute often analyses systems using the three I's: Institutions, Instruments, and Information. This ensures questions are asked not only about each of the three components or the effectiveness of the linkages between them, but whether there are gaps, conflicts, or even double ups in the system. There is often a mismatch between policy design and implementation (e.g., KiwiBuild). Policy agencies and teams often lack the tools, skills, or mandate to effectively administer complex and expensive programmes, particularly those requiring collaboration with the private sector. Being aware of these relationships raises the question of what new institutions, instruments and information are required and what are no longer needed.

(iii) Event: Long-term Insights Briefings webinar

On 1 September 2021, the Institute hosted a webinar that covered; the role of LTIBs and the need for future thinking in government; highlighted how corporations and countries apply foresight; and suggested a range of ways chief executives might prepare briefings. The webinar can be viewed [here](#).

Following on from the webinar, the Institute then developed a survey that aimed to shed more light on LTIBs as an innovative foresight instrument. The survey asked experts and other interested parties to share their thoughts on how LTIBs might best be designed to deliver value and how to help ensure they are widely seen and well understood.

Reasons for conducting the survey include:

- The LTIBs are a novel instrument and deserve special attention. Early engagement with novel instruments is critical; without care, new instruments often fail to deliver the benefits sought.
- Taking a long-term view, this survey aims to improve Aotearoa New Zealand’s foresight ecosystem so that it is better able to inform decision-makers today to deliver better outcomes in the future.
- Given the range of crises we are facing, time is of the essence.

- There is a lot of expertise in the public service, and this was an excellent opportunity to collect and collate insights quickly, almost in real-time. The survey took place from 3 to 15 September 2021.
- The goal was to collect insights after hosting the 1 September 2021 public webinar and present those insights to the chairs and deputy chairs of select committees in Parliament on 21 September.
- The survey aims to provide some insights for chief executives on how they might go about consulting and preparing LTIBs, and to inform users, including Members of Parliament, on the existence of LTIBs and how to use them.

The goal of LTIBs must be to empower decision-makers and policy analysts with foresight to help navigate Aotearoa New Zealand's future. These must not be projections about our probable future but narratives about our possible futures. A successful foresight tool is not one that can be measured in terms of whether a desired future was achieved – that is strategy. Instead, success is measured in terms of how foresight helped shape our thinking and actions so that we did not realise a future we did not want. By looking boldly and courageously at dystopic futures and analysing a wide range of possible futures, we learn how to optimise the future by recognising and engaging with tensions and trade-offs early (before they become too big or difficult to manage) and building contingency and capabilities in advance so that we are less fragile when unintended outcomes eventuate. That is foresight.

Responses to this survey helped inform a presentation on LTIBs held by Roger Dennis, David Shilling and Wendy McGuinness to the Select Committee Chairpersons and Deputies in Parliament. View the slideshow that accompanied the presentation [here](#).

Results and commentary on the survey can be read in *Survey Insights: An analysis of the 2021 Long-term Insights Briefings Survey (21 September 2021)*². An excerpt (see Appendix 1) of the survey paper outlines the background behind LTIBs and highlights the areas of interest and concern for the Institute.

(iv) Stress-testing LTIBs – why might they fail?

The Institute is concerned that government departments may need to invest and build their strategic capability to deliver LTIBs. Our analysis of government department strategies (GDSs) found low levels of discussion and action against complex issues within existing strategies. Although this year's research is still in progress, it is clear there is very little discourse on trade-offs between generations or possible impacts on current or future New Zealanders, or a coordinated approach toward complex issues.

This highlights that sound levels of capability and capacity of government departments are not always guaranteed – this is especially true when implementing a new novel policy instrument – LTIBs. The quality of LTIBs could also be impeded by the performance of Chief executives.

Chief executives might not deliver for the following reasons:

- Busy; overworked and suffering policy burnout (it has been a long 2 years).
- Introverted; does not like being in the public arena.
- Humble; does not think they have anything to offer.
- Uncertain; lacks a clear understanding of what success looks like.
- Lack foresight skills; do not have the necessary tools or skills to confidently write the briefings.
- Risk adverse; does not want to show faults in their systems/management or selects less controversial topics.
- Political safety; does not want to tarnish their existing working relationship with ministers and therefore, does not cover topics that might go against current government policy.

Symptoms:

- Delegates down, postpones and rushes it out, becomes operational, follows the checklist, and fails to think strategically, does not consult, fails to seek out a diverse range of views or to ask difficult questions of staff/collaborators, does not collaborate/discuss Briefings with other CEs, and key collaborators do not know the Briefings exist.

Later in 2022, we hope to build on our LTIBs work to date. See our earlier table of LTIBs [here](#).

3.0 Answers to specific consultations questions

These specific answers required a personal response. For this reason we asked Rueben Brady our Head of Research, to provide his personal observations.

(i) The importance of land in your everyday life today

Q1. How important, or not, is the land in supporting the following aspects of your wellbeing?

- A. My physical wellbeing (for example, being outdoors for physical exercise or sports)
- B. My mental wellbeing (for example, as a place to recharge or relax)
- C. My cultural wellbeing (for example, retaining links to ancestors or traditional practices)
- D. My spiritual wellbeing (for example, meditation or worshipping in nature)
- E. My social wellbeing (for example, going for a walk with others, picnicking)
- F. My material wellbeing (for example, relying on the land to generate income or grow food for my family)

Scale: 1. Not at all important 2. Not very important 3. Fairly important 4. Very important 5. Extremely important 6. Prefer not to say

A. 5; B. 5; C. 4; D. 5; E. 4; F. 2.

(ii) The importance of land for the wellbeing of tomorrow's generations

Q2. What do you think is the most important change that today's generations of New Zealanders should make to how we care for the land, as stewards for the environment?

In the Institute's opinion, the most important change will be realised when the perspectives, assumptions and expectations that we have of (and on) land are uprooted. In practice, this is when existing land uses, land models and land practices are all underpinned by the concept of environmental limits (eg natural carrying capacity) instead of traditional economic ideologies.

Q2B. What should be the legacy of today's generations?

That we *properly* practiced kaitiakitanga and actively prioritised the conservation and protection of nature, allowing it and all life to flourish.

Q3. How important, or not, is it to you that the Briefing explores the following land uses and activities, when considering the wellbeing of tomorrow's generations?

- A. To provide spaces to live (for example, land for housing and communities)
- B. To support work and livelihoods (for example, farming, nature-based tourism, forestry, energy and resource production)
- C. To grow and gather food and resources for personal use (for example, hunting, foraging, gardening)
- D. To foster cultural value and a sense of belonging (for example, places of tradition and connection to ancestors, tapu land, historic sites)

- E. To nurture spiritual connection to places (for example, preserving holy or sacred sites and natural landscapes that generate a sense of awe and wonder)
- F. To conserve and protect land, biodiversity and species (for example, national parks)
- G. To provide spaces for play, relaxation and recreation (for example, bush tracks, swimmable beaches, mountain climbing)
- H. Other (if you consider a land use, activity or connection to place that is not covered above to be very or extremely important, please let us know)

Scale: 1. Not at all important 2. Not very important 3. Fairly important 4. Very important 5. Extremely important 6. Prefer not to say

A. 4; B. 3; C. 3; D. 3; E. 3; F. 5; G. 5; H. n/a

(iii) Understanding place through case studies

Q4. How interested, or not, would you be in knowing more about the following types of case studies?

- A. Access to forests and mountains for biking, walking and exploring
- B. Forest and bush available to support native plant and bird species
- C. Greenspaces, such as parks and community gardens, within towns and cities
- D. Housing developments and subdivisions
- E. Wetlands, along with the plants and birds they support
- F. Local food production, to support households and communities
- G. Household waste and the journey to landfill

Scale: 1. Not at all interested 2. Not very interested 3. Fairly interested 4. Very interested 5. Extremely interested 6. Prefer not to say

A. 3; B. 5; C. 5; D. 3; E. 5; F. 4; G. 4.

Q5. Are there any other case studies, not listed in Q4, that you would find it valuable for the Ministry to look at?

The Institute suggests that case studies should focus on the current and future land impacts. In our opinion, the underlying outcome of these case studies (and, ultimately the LTIB) should be to deliver a strategic observation and position on the future of land, and thus, detailed case studies focussing on the factors that are most degrading/impactful to land are critical.

(iv) What is holding people back?

Q6. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- A. Information: I don't have the right or clear information about what I can do to reduce my environmental impact.
- B. Cost: The cost of more sustainable products and services is too high (for example, organic fruit and vegetables versus conventional foods).
- C. Availability: More environmentally sustainable products and services are not readily available where I live or where I go to buy what I need.
- D. Technology: Technology and infrastructure to support environmentally sustainable choices are not good enough (for example, public transport or electric-vehicle charging options do not meet my needs).
- E. Quality: Sustainable or environmentally friendly products and alternatives are not as good as standard products.
- F. Time: I don't have time to be able to focus on the environment.

Scale: 1. Strongly agree 2. Slightly agree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Slightly disagree 5. Strongly disagree 6. Prefer not to say

A. 2; B. 1; C. 3; D. 4; E. 5; F. 5

Q7. Which barrier or set of barriers do you think is most important to address to encourage uptake of environmentally sustainable choices?

The Institute suggests to first address barriers associated with information, communication and education as this is arguably where the largest opportunity lies to develop momentum and encourage behavioural change. This includes developing information that is timely, accurate, robust and flows smoothly between users, which in turn enables for more effective communication and education to occur.

Although outside of the scope of this consultation, the Institute suggests that a new institution, independent of government, should be set up to bring all the current foresight work together and manage new and emerging instruments and information. The institution terms of reference could include, to:

- Co-ordinate the Long-term Insights Briefings,
- Prepare a generational plan,
- Support the long-term aspects of the existing resource management reform,
- Facilitate and/or create reference climate scenarios,
- Produce a risk assessment for New Zealand, and
- Facilitate foresight education and tools across the public service.

Q8. What is likely to inspire you and enable you to reach your aspirations for how the land is cared for?

Q9. Are there any final comments you would like to share before completing your submission?

The Institute acknowledges that a lot of land-related policies and instruments already exist, and question whether a LTIB (in this form) is most effective. As mentioned above, expanding the scope of this topic to cover the sectors, industries and economic factors that have the worst impact on land, would deliver a more useful strategic observation and position on the future of land.

Appendix 1: Excerpt from *Survey Insights: An analysis of the 2021 Long-term Insights Briefings Survey*

Preface

On 6 August 2020, the Public Service Act 2020 became law. Within the legislation was a schedule that introduced the first foresight instrument in Aotearoa New Zealand since the establishment of the Commission for the Future in 1976. The new law (outlined in Box 1) created a requirement for each chief executive of a government department to prepare a Long-term Insight Briefing (LTIB, often called briefings) at least every three years on a topic of their choice.

Aotearoa New Zealand's previous foray into foresight ended quickly. The Commission for the Future was disestablished within six years. Many, including Hon Hugh Templeton, the responsible minister at the time, considered the reason for its demise was that not enough care had been put into embedding the novel institution into the parliamentary system (watch Hon Hugh Templeton on YouTube, see link on page 43). That lesson should not be forgotten. Foresight institutions and instruments are not only rare, but very different from institutions and instruments that focus on delivering strategic or operational advice. If they are not understood and used correctly, they will fail. At a time when the world is changing swiftly and chaotically, foresight tools are needed more than ever – we need LTIBs to work for us, and we need them to work for us now.

This survey aims to shed more light on this innovative foresight instrument; it asks experts and other interested parties to share their thoughts on how LTIBs might best be designed to deliver value and how to help ensure they are widely seen and well understood. The goal must be to empower decision-makers and policy analysts with foresight to help navigate our country's future. These must not be projections about our probable future but narratives about our possible futures. A successful foresight tool is not one that can be measured in terms of whether a desired future was achieved – that is strategy. Instead, success is measured in terms of how foresight helped shape our thinking and actions so that we did not realise a future we did not want. By looking boldly and courageously at dystopic futures and analysing a wide range of possible futures, we learn how to optimise the future by recognising and engaging with tensions and trade-offs early (before they become too big or difficult to manage) and building contingency and capabilities in advance so that we are less fragile when unintended outcomes eventuate. That is foresight.

Thank you to the 41 respondents who completed the survey; we appreciate this is both a novel instrument and a niche topic. Your responses were detailed, comprehensive and diverse. For this reason, we have included your anonymised responses in the appendices, and summarised them in the main survey. This enables you and others to review and reread the responses and reflect on the wide range of ideas and observations.

If Aotearoa New Zealand wants to survive in this new environment and manage the wellbeing of our people over the long-term, we will need new institutions and instruments. We applaud those who designed and nurtured the idea of the LTIBs and worked hard to embed them into law. The next stage is to take this instrument and embed it into policy, so that ministers, Members of Parliament, officials, iwi, business people and the general public are provided with decision-useful information. We hope this survey contributes to that.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey and read the survey results.
Ngā mihi aroha ki a koutou.



Wendy McGuinness
Chief Executive
McGuinness Institute

Part 1: Purpose and Process

1.0 Introduction

LTIBs are designed to improve the quality of debate in the House, in government and in the public domain. To be useful, briefings should aim to test our thinking, make us curious, challenge myths, identify and reassess assumptions, apply non-linear approaches to the future, explore scenarios and, most importantly, make us think beyond our general understanding of a topic and consider long-term horizons. For example, 'if not this, then what?', 'what happens if ...?', 'what am I not thinking about?' and 'how does this impact ...?'

In summary, LTIBs:

- are prepared by government departments' chief executives, independent of ministers, at least every three years
- are not government policy

- focus on future medium- and long-term trends, risks and opportunities and may include policy options, although they are more think-pieces than policy papers
- should contain relatively unique subject matter, not a repetition of existing work streams that are already in the public arena
- are managed by the Head of the Policy Profession (Brook Barrington), who convened an LTIB reference group of 12 chief executives to oversee the overall process and the quality of briefings (see Figure 1). See Appendix 3
- are developed using a two-stage public consultation process, and any feedback received must be considered (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Roles and responsibilities for the governance of Long-term Insights Briefings

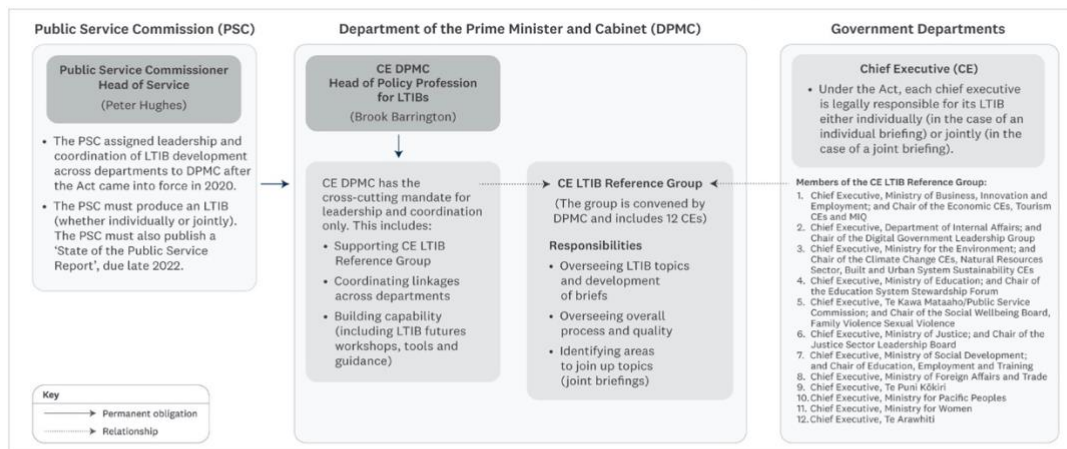


Figure 2: The public consultation process



Part 1: Purpose and Process

LTIBs are a unique instrument as they ask a chief executive to share their thinking on a topic with all members of the House (not just their minister), as well as officials and the general public. Previously, their responsibility was only to their minister. The relationship between ministers and chief executives operates under a 'no surprises' principle. The *Cabinet Manual*, para 3.22 (a) states:

In their relationship with Ministers, officials should be guided by the 'no surprises' principle. As a general rule, they should inform Ministers promptly of matters of significance within their portfolio responsibilities, particularly where these matters may be controversial or may become the subject of public debate.

This 'no surprises' principle will still operate for LTIBs, but the important distinction is the audience. At least once every three years, chief executives must focus on informing all Members of Parliament, officials and the wider general public – the onus is on the chief executive to do this, not the minister.

Once completed, the LTIB is given to the appropriate minister, who must then present a copy of it to the House.

Immediately after being presented to the House, each briefing will be referred to the Governance and Administration Committee, who may decide to examine the briefing or send it to another committee for examination. In either case, it will be the chief executive who will be required to answer any questions on the briefing from committee members (not the minister).

The select committee is required to report their findings to the House within 90 working days. Standing Orders allows for the House to hold a three-hour debate. The House will decide when to hold the debate; it may wait for all the committees to report or it could start the debate while LTIBs are still before the committees. The chief executive will not be required to attend the debate.

Chief executives are expected to present their briefings approximately halfway through each parliamentary term. (For the first round, this means before 30 June 2022.) This enables long-term issues to be brought to the fore during each parliamentary term. It also gives select committees enough time before the election to conduct any additional tasks arising from their examination of the briefing and enables political parties to reflect on any insights gained from the briefing (i.e., in preparation for the next general election).

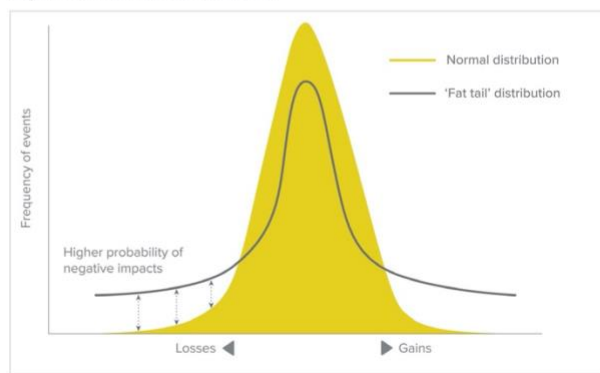
The chief executive and/or Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) are also likely to review the briefing process, what is being referred to as a 'conduct review activity', in order to learn lessons for the next briefing.

The biggest risk right now is that we continue to focus on the status quo and use all our resources and capabilities to solve specific problems in a reactive and isolated manner. In times of uncertainty we should focus on timely and effective ways to deliver more transformational and anti-fragile change. In graphic terms, an increase in uncertainty is often illustrated by the lifting of the 'fat tail' (see Figure 3). This means we need to focus on redesigning our governance and risk management systems to manage the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

2.0 Background

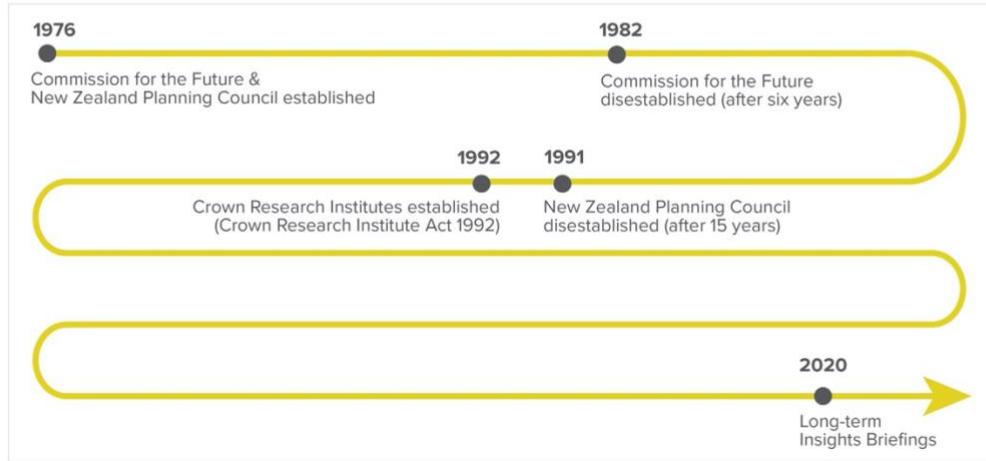
The previous foresight institution or instrument was the Commission for the Future. See Figure 4. It lasted only six years (although it was formally established under the New Zealand Planning Act 1977, the Commission was actually formed in 1976). It was accompanied by the establishment of the New Zealand Planning Council, which lasted only nine years before being superseded by Crown Research Institutes (CRIs). CRIs were meant to take up the foresight role.

Figure 3: The 'fat tail' problem



Part 1: Purpose and Process

Figure 4: Foresight institutions and instruments in Aotearoa New Zealand since 1976



There are several obstacles that might get in the way of LTIBs being successful. For example, a chief executive might be:

- lacking foresight skills; they do not have the necessary tools or skills to confidently write the briefings
- risk averse; they do not want to show faults in their systems/management or they select less controversial topics due to the authorising environment being untested
- concerned about political safety; they do not want to tarnish their existing working relationship with ministers and, therefore, do not explore topics that might be seen to go against current government policy
- overworked; they are busy and suffering policy burnout (it has been a long 20 months)
- humble; they do not think they have anything to offer
- unsure; they lack a clear understanding of what success looks like.

Situations that might prevent success include situations where a chief executive might:

- delegate LTIBs too far down the department
- postpone or rush them out
- focus on operational or strategic issues
- replicate or retrofit existing workstreams (repurposing so they are compliant but not following the spirit of the Act)

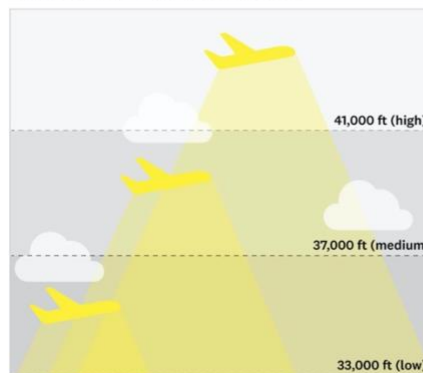
- fail to seek out a diverse range of views or to ask difficult questions of staff/collaborators
- fail to collaborate/discuss briefings with other chief executives and/or key collaborators.

Most importantly, a key failure is likely to occur if Members of Parliament or the public were not aware that briefings exist.

3.0 Progress to date

There are seven briefings in the public arena. See analysis of the list in Table 1 overleaf. Figure 5 illustrates how the subject matter might be high level (general) or low level (specific). There is no right or wrong answer, but briefings should make clear the appropriate level of altitude for the subject matter, as it helps set the scope.

Figure 5: The concept of altitude



Endnotes

¹ <https://www.mcguinnessinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/20210924-11.54am-LTIB-presentation-21-Sep.pdf>

² <https://www.mcguinnessinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/20210929-2pm-LTIB-Survey-.pdf>