

Scenario 4: Staff commenting in the media on the current government's performance

Shortly before the election, a very senior staff member of an independent Crown entity writes an opinion editorial about the performance of the government during the previous 12 months. This is published on a news website.

Outcome

It is inappropriate for a public agency or for very senior staff to make political comments on the performance of the government, even where the agency has a statutory role to advocate for certain issues. The staff member should ensure any comments or advocacy focuses on the particular issues or rights for which they have a statutory role.

Principle that applies

Publicly commenting on the performance of the current government during the pre-election period is likely to be seen as political comment. This is potentially damaging to the relationship of trust and confidence between the public sector agency and the government, whether that is the current or a new government.

Practical guidance

Regardless of whether comments are favourable or unfavourable, maintaining political neutrality in serving the government of the day is important so that the public sector can serve both current and any future governments equally effectively.

Public servants who are very senior, have regular, direct contact with Ministers, represent their agency and provide advice to Ministers on an issue that is the subject of political activity need to exercise careful judgement when considering political involvement. Their profile and engagement with Ministers and the public, make it more likely that their political activity could affect public confidence, or the confidence of Ministers, in the political neutrality of their agency.

Whether a particular political interest or activity might impact on a work role or can be managed, depends on the seniority of the role; the nature of the role; and the scope and scale



of the political activity.

When corresponding with the media, agencies should ensure their comments focus on their statutory role (such as promoting human rights or climate action), rather than advocacy for political parties' policies or encouraging any political party to adopt the agency's policy as its own.

Personal opinions can be expressed but need to be very clear that any comments are not made on behalf of the agency or government.

For further guidance, see Section 5: [Public sector advertising, publicity and the media](#).

