

TOWARDS AN OPEN BUDGET

Qualitative report to understand stakeholders' views on how
New Zealand's Budget could be more accessible

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THE TREASURY
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**SUMMARY OF
INSIGHTS AND THE
WAY FORWARD**



INCREASED OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY FOR STAKEHOLDERS

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT



BUDGET COMMUNICATION



INSIGHTS

During the budget development stages, stakeholders feel engagement is perceived to be limited to a select few.

Timeframes lack visibility – stakeholders are never quite sure how or when they might be able to provide input into the development of the budget.

Even when stakeholders provide input, there is uncertainty about how the Government takes this into consideration, if at all.

Accessibility of budget information is two-pronged – availability of information and comprehension of information.

First, publications are accessible in that they are widely and publicly available. However, not all Budget data is fully available and stakeholders can find it difficult to locate specific information.

Second, stakeholders generally understand the publications they use. However, a lack of both historical information, and explanation of the social and environmental impacts, can hinder their ability to fully analyse and interpret the data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create more opportunities for stakeholders to engage in the development process. Increased participation will generate a greater sense of openness about the process and make them feel valued as partners in the co-design of the Budget.

Enhance visibility and awareness of the budget development process and timeframes to ensure stakeholders know how and when to provide input.

Demonstrate stakeholders' input is valued by responding to their submissions and conveying how their input is used.

Make additional data that is used in developing the Budget available online and visible for stakeholders.

Introduce clearer signposts throughout the Budget publications, such as:

- A roadmap on how to use the Budget publications and what each provides
- Page references, tabs, and hyperlinks within and across documents
- Table of contents and figures in all documents.

Provide historical data, and anticipated social and environmental outcomes so stakeholders can better understand the true impact of new government spending decisions.

GREATER OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY FOR STAKEHOLDERS

INCREASED OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY FOR CITIZENS

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT



BUDGET COMMUNICATION



INSIGHTS

Limited or no engagement with citizens during the early stages is a key barrier to transparency of the budget process.

Citizens rely on citizen and iwi groups to represent their views and advocate on their behalf during Budget development.

Many stakeholders agree it is a citizen right to participate in the development of government spending. However citizens do not fully understand how the Government makes spending decisions, which precludes their engagement in the development process.

While budget information is available to citizens, it lacks accessibility because it is often too complex for them to understand.

Citizens rely on intermediaries such as Media, Analysts, and Academics to understand the Budget information.

Budget at a Glance attempts to make the information user-friendly, but it lacks personal relevance (i.e. ‘what does this mean for me, my family, my community?’). It is too generic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenge is to understand how to encourage citizens to engage with the development process. Stakeholders provide some clues, such as educating citizens about the budget process and the implications for them as New Zealanders (e.g. a citizen’s guide to the Budget).

At the same time, provide more channels for citizen input such as:

- Allowing citizens to send Treasury their brief ideas on what should be in the Budget, similar to the South African National Treasury’s “Tips for Pravin” campaign*; and
- A visible public submissions process to provide detailed input on major spending decisions.

Budget publications need to better target citizens by making the information more personally relevant to them.

Consider targeted, bite size pieces of information (e.g. social media snippets), with links to more detail. For example, rather than \$1.6 billion for district health boards, \$xxxx for your hospital.

Provide interactive online tools that allow citizens to visualise government spending at a community and household level. For example, show the implications of government spending on key services like housing and health if New Zealand was a village of 100 people.

GREATER OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY FOR CITIZENS

* <https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/governance/services/government-services/send-your-budget-2017-tips-to-gordhan>

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH



The Treasury is responsible for producing the government's financial accountability documentation and ensuring fiscal reporting in New Zealand is open and accessible. Over recent years, New Zealand's fiscal reporting has been consistently ranked as one of the most transparent in the world by the Open Budget Initiative. As the Treasury builds on this to enhance public participation and confidence around government spending, there is still room for improvement as the New Zealand Budget can sometimes be perceived as a closed process between funding agencies and the Government.

Furthermore, in 2014 New Zealand joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP). As part of this, New Zealand has made concrete commitments to make a difference to openness, transparency and accountability, and help foster greater public participation in government.

The Treasury is seeking the views of its stakeholders about how to make the Budget more accessible in order to promote public discussion/debate and participation, and include relevant groups outside of government in the formative phase of the Budget so they are informed about the process and issues.

RESEARCH PURPOSE – EXPLORING STAKEHOLDERS’ VIEWS ABOUT MAKING THE BUDGET MORE OPEN

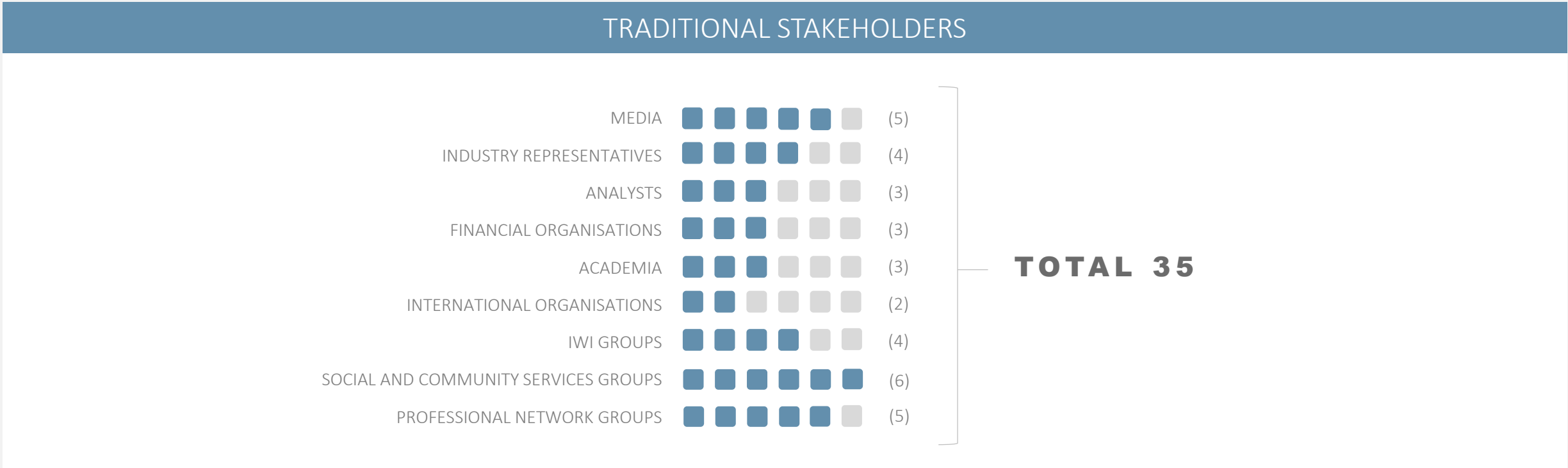
The key purpose of this research is to understand stakeholder perceptions about the accessibility of the Budget, including the Budget process and its publications. It also needs to explore potential areas to improve the Budget’s transparency and accessibility to enable Treasury to meet the Open Budget commitment, and enhance public participation and confidence in the Budget process.

Specifically, the research objectives are:

- **What are stakeholders’ perceptions of the Budget’s openness?**
 - In what ways is the current Budget accessible and open?
 - In what ways is the current Budget lacking transparency and accessibility?
 - In what ways is the information easy to understand and presented in an accessible, user-friendly format?
 - What is the impact of the language used on the accessibility of the Budget?
 - How satisfied are stakeholders with their level of engagement with the Budget’s processes and outcomes? What works well, and what doesn’t work well?
- **What improvements could be made to ensure the Budget is more open, transparent and accessible?**

UNDERTAKING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

As shown in the diagram below, we undertook 35 qualitative in-depth interviews with traditional stakeholders.



Of the 35 interviews, 17 were conducted face-to-face and 17 were conducted over the phone. Each interview lasted up to one hour. The interviews took place in April and May 2017.

**OVERALL
PERCEPTIONS OF
THE NEW ZEALAND
GOVERNMENT'S
FISCAL
TRANSPARENCY**



STAKEHOLDERS PERCEIVE GOVERNMENT SPENDING AS OPEN AND TRANSPARENT

Stakeholders consider government spending in New Zealand is open and transparent. This is particularly true relative to international governments.



“Compared to other countries, I’ve never felt like someone tries to pull a veil over my eyes. Treasury is very upfront with that, certainly compared to other governments [such as the UK and Australia] I’ve worked with where OIA requests are routinely denied, delayed, obfuscated, deleted.” [Media](#)

“We’re undoubtedly amongst the most transparent governments in the world... I think the IMF, the World Bank, the OECD recognise that New Zealand is right at the cutting edge, right from 1993 or so when we published the first set of full accrual financial statements of any government in the world. So, we set the benchmark back in the early 90s and we’ve done quite a lot since then as well, but that really was the thing that everybody really noticed” [International Organisation](#)

The key reason for perceived transparency is that the Budget information is publically available. Treasury is seen to make available a wide range of information about the Government’s spending and New Zealand’s fiscal and economic outlook.

In addition, stakeholders believe there is public accountability and transparency of government spending in New Zealand because:

- Facts and figures about New Zealand’s fiscal and economic outlook are considered well organised according to standard accounting and economic principles.
- Legislatives mechanisms (e.g. the Public Finance Act) exist.



“Not many countries have a mandated 40 year horizon statements akin to the long term fiscal statement....It’s refreshing to see that we are required through law to produce these documents which shows the Government will be held to account by the Treasury department by producing these assessments of their performance.” [Academic](#)

HOWEVER, A BARRIER TO FULL ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IS THE LACK OF CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION ON HISTORICAL SPENDING AND ANTICIPATED NON-FISCAL IMPACTS

Stakeholders feel the accessibility of the Government's fiscal information lacks historical spending data alongside new spending announcements.

This additional data would provide valuable contextual information to assist stakeholders in the analysis of Budget information.



"I'd just like to make a very strong point about the importance of history, and understanding trends." **Professional network Groups**

"The Estimates are very difficult to reconcile with previous year's estimates... I've talked to Treasury official about changes. They have a database they can access. It should just be a public document. There's no sensitivity about the information." **Social and community services Group**

In addition, some stakeholders feel fiscal transparency lacks disclosure about the social and environmental impacts of New Zealand fiscal policies. They believe Governments should communicate the non-fiscal outcomes, and not just focus on the fiscal outputs.



"I think in terms of information gaps, I think it's the non-financial data, the social and environmental impacts particularly. We have a wealth of financial data, world leading financial data... A glaring gap... is what impact is our fiscal policies having on the objectives we're setting." **Professional network Group**

FISCAL INFORMATION IS LESS ACCESSIBLE FOR NOVICE USERS, DESPITE THE USE OF MORE VISUAL MEDIUMS

While stakeholders agree that fiscal information is readily available, its usability is largely predicated on the users' accounting knowledge and understanding of established jargon. In essence, stakeholders believe users need to be financial experts to understand the information available.

There is a sense that this effectively makes expert users, such as Analysts, Academics, and Media, the gatekeepers of government spending information in New Zealand. Consequently, novice audiences, such as the public and frontline professionals in key sectors such as social services and health, find it difficult to directly engage with the Budget.



"I get the facts from the Government, but I have to rely on media comment and opinions from analysts to make sense of it." **Iwi Group**

"We often wait and get together with other agencies to pool our knowledge. We rely on analysts from other organisations to see how the money goes out from the departments to community organisations." **Social and community services Group**

A few stakeholders recognise and appreciate the recent strides Treasury has made to improve the accessibility of fiscal information, such as improving the design and layout of key Budget documents, and disseminating information via more interactive and graphic mediums.



"I recognise that in the last couple of years the Treasury has put effort into some new visualisations, interactive charts where you click on parts of the page and get further information, or varying elements and come up with different results...and that's very good from a technical point of view, and they visualised [key data with] fan charts, that's good practice internationally. New Zealand wasn't the first to do that but it's good that they've been doing that in the last few years." **International Organisation**

However, these strides need to continue as stakeholders believe they do not go far enough. They consider the lack of usability for non-experts is a key shortfall in the transparency of government spending. There is a clear perception that this information needs to be provided in more comprehensible ways for those people who are not used to engaging with financial data.

THERE ARE CONTRASTING VIEWS ABOUT WHETHER THE BUDGET'S AUDIENCE SHOULD INCLUDE THE PUBLIC

Stakeholders agree that as much information as possible about the Crown's finances should be available in the public domain.

They believe that the complexity of fiscal and economic data in the current Budget is not only appropriate, but essential for ensuring full accountability of government spending.

However, they are divided about whether the Budget process and its publications need to be accessible for novice audiences, including members of the public. These stakeholders believe professionals are equipped to work with financial data to analyse the Crown's fiscal and economic data in detail, and disseminate expert opinion and comment to broader audiences.



"I'm quite used to the way it is. It's my part of my job to be able to understand this data and transmit it to my audience. I don't think 'Joe Blogs' will care about understanding such complex financial information by himself." **Media**

Stakeholders who feel the complexity of current Budget information is appropriate include Media, Analysts, Financial Organisations, and Industry Representatives.

In contrast, while there is recognition of the inherent complexity of the government's financial data, some stakeholders feel that that full transparency of government spending cannot be achieved by only making data available publicly.

There is a sense that this information also needs to be easy to understand for the public and other stakeholders who do not necessarily possess the skills to analyse and interpret advanced financial data.

These stakeholders feel that presenting this information in a way for the public to easily engage with, without having to rely on expert commentators, is an essential foundation of an open fiscal system and a key civil right.



"You have to be an expert to really understand that... New Zealand is ahead of everybody in the world in terms of fiscal transparency, so there's no desire on the part of anyone from what I can tell, to deliberately obscure budget information from the public... we've got to be very clear that there is a high standard of fiscal transparency. The challenge really is that being transparent, and being accessible to people, are two different things, and in a way if you take a purest view of transparency, if you are publishing things openly but you're not thinking about the audience that you're publishing for, you haven't really met the highest level of transparency standards." **International Organisation**

Stakeholders who feel Budget information needs to be clearer include Academics, Iwi Groups, International Organisations, Professional network and Social and community services Groups.

THE GOVERNMENT'S FISCAL TRANSPARENCY CAN BE IMPROVED BY MAKING THE BUDGET MORE MEANINGFUL FOR CITIZENS, AND BY PROVIDING ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders perceive that by helping the public relate to key government spending decisions, Treasury can take an essential step towards fostering discussion and debate about the Budget.

They feel the key challenge for Treasury is to achieve the right balance between ensuring fidelity of complex fiscal data, while also making it accessible and relevant for novice audiences, including the public.

While some Budget publications and data can ensure depth and accuracy of information, there is a sense that key facts and figures need to be more understandable for the public. This will allow citizens to relate to, and engage with, the Budget at a more personal level.

Stakeholders see ease of use and relevance as essential for building public interest in the Budget. For example, stakeholders suggest this can be achieved by providing a breakdown of ministerial announcements and other information on big initiatives to show exactly how government spending affects citizens' communities and environment (e.g. showing real spend per head of population for crucial new and existing initiatives).

In addition, stakeholders feel the Government's fiscal transparency would be enhanced by the provision of historical data, and information about the social and environmental impact of its fiscal policies.



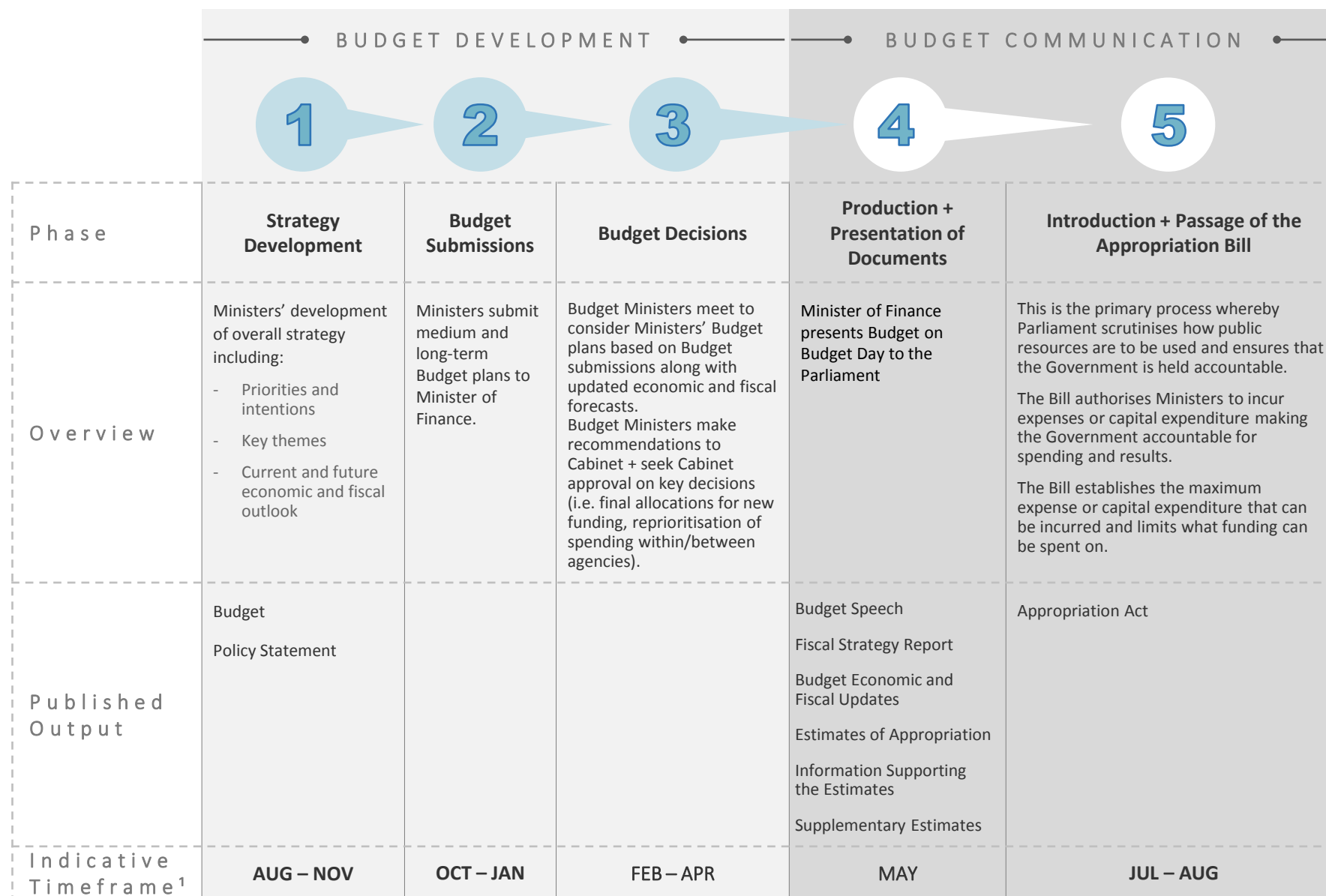
"There is a disconnect between the current Budget and the average citizen. [The public] can't see why any of it matters. They don't see themselves in what they read about the Budget and hence the entire thing remains opaque and distant." **Iwi Group**

"The complexity puts people off. Complexity also means it can be misleading. Big numbers don't necessarily mean what they say." **Social and community services Group**

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BUDGET PROCESS



KEY PHASES OF THE BUDGET PROCESS



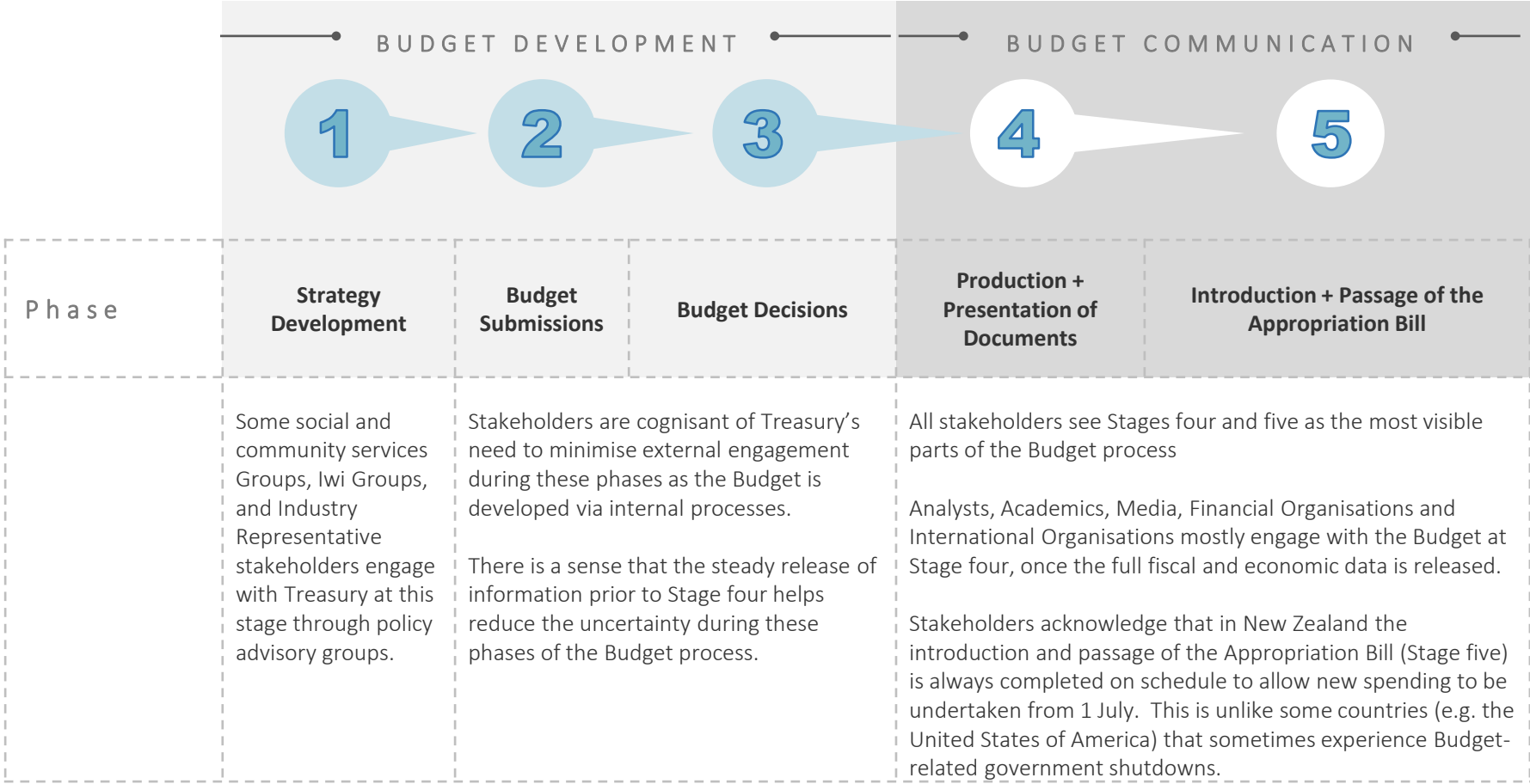
¹Assuming a May Budget day

MOST STAKEHOLDERS ARE BROADLY AWARE OF HOW THE BUDGET IS DEVELOPED AND COMMUNICATED



Most stakeholders are broadly aware of the key stages of the Budget development and communication process.

Engagement with each stage of the Budget process varies according to stakeholders’ specific roles and involvement with Treasury and their respective Ministries.



Proactive information released by Treasury is well received and seen as integral in promoting transparency of how key decisions are made for major initiatives.

KEY GAPS IN STAKEHOLDERS' KNOWLEDGE OF THE BUDGET PROCESS AND ITS TIMEFRAMES MOSTLY RELATE TO THE DEVELOPMENT STAGES

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT



STAKEHOLDERS WITH LEAST KNOWLEDGE

Analysts, Financial Organisations, and Industry Representative stakeholders tend to lack awareness of the distinct stages of the Budget process or the timeframes associated with stages one to three.



"I know there is some planning that takes place early in the year, after which the Ministers provide their justifications for new funding, and then there is a lot of political manoeuvring before Budget Day." **Analyst**

Academics, International Organisations, Iwi and Professional network and social and community services stakeholders are familiar with each stage of the Budget process, but lack clarity about the exact timeframes associated with Stages two and three.



"There's nothing surprising [in the Budget diagram]. But I didn't know that strategy development began so early. And that the Ministries submit their bids by January. That's the kind of information people need to know, so that they don't go banging on doors in March and April, because it's too late then isn't it."* **Professional network Group**

STAKEHOLDERS WITH BEST KNOWLEDGE

Media stakeholders are usually the most knowledgeable about the Budget process. They are fully aware of each stage and associated timeframe.



"People don't realise it, but the next Budget process starts pretty much as soon as the previous one is finished. It's a very large machine with a lot of wheels turning. And by the start of the year the major decisions have pretty much been made." **Media**

STAKEHOLDERS SEE SHORTFALLS WITH THE TRANSPARENCY OF, AND ENGAGEMENT WITH, THE BUDGET PROCESS

TRANSPARENCY

Stakeholders feel timeframes associated with the Budget process lack visibility. There is a sense that people often do not know how early in the year the strategy development for the next Budget begins. Consequently, they often miss the opportunity to engage with the Budget process before key government decisions are made.

Moreover, many stakeholders feel the Budget submissions stage and the Budget decisions stage (Stages two and three) are opaque. There is a perception that there needs to be more awareness and information about how stakeholder input is factored into the government's decision making processes about spending initiatives.

Increasing transparency of the Budget process is particularly important for Iwi and Social and community services Groups, and Industry Representatives who often provide input on behalf of sectors during Stage one.



"We present our business case late in the year, and then the lead agency goes away and from that point on we have no idea as to what happens. It's like a black box and it's really hard to do any strategic planning when you're stuck in that limbo. We're not looking for funding commitments, just clarity about what all of that effort and work means." **Social and community services Group**

ENGAGEMENT

While the Strategy Development stage (Stage one) is seen as an ideal time to engage with Treasury about Budget development, stakeholders consider it is currently limited to a small selection of advisory group meetings and open to a very limited selection of stakeholders.

Consequently, stakeholders believe that in the early stages of the process Treasury needs to encourage and respond to input from a wider range of stakeholders, including the public. They feel this will encourage debate and discussion by giving people an opportunity to be more actively involved in shaping key government decisions that affect them.

Increasing engagement with the Budget process is particularly important for Academics and International Organisations who perceive direct public engagement and input into Budget development a key part of making the process open and transparent.



"At the moment it's like banging on a closed door. You have to push and yell your way in, and even then you don't know what happened after you've made all the effort."

Iwi Group

"A more open process for everyone to have an opportunity to input." **Professional network Group**

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE BUDGET PROCESS CENTRE ON BOTH ENHANCING THE CLARITY, VISIBILITY AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION, AND GREATER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Many stakeholders want clearer information about the Budget process. Indeed, many comment how useful the Budget diagram* on page 17 was to assist with their awareness and understanding of the process.

More specifically, stakeholders suggest the following to make the process more transparent:

- Publish and increase the visibility of the Budget timeline so that the public and stakeholders are aware of the timings of key stages in the Budget development process.
- Develop a “Citizen’s guide to the Budget” that educates citizens and raises their awareness about the process.
- Increase visibility, and disseminate more widely, Treasury’s post-Budget proactive releases, as many stakeholders see value in clarifying how decisions are made about critical spending initiatives each year.

Most stakeholders also want further opportunities for greater engagement during the Budget process. For example:

- Treasury encourages and responds to stakeholder submissions during the early stages of the process.
- Treasury engages with key stakeholders during the Strategy Development stage (Stage one) so stakeholders are able to provide high-level input on national priority areas for the next Budget.
- Ministries undertake public submissions and engagement activities with their key stakeholder networks during the Strategy Development stage (Stage one), to discuss the priority areas within their specific sectors.



They [the Ministries] need more engagement with Industry Representatives and other stakeholders to understand what is truly going on their sector, to get an idea of where the heartbeat of the country is. You can’t just rely on opinion polls. We have a lot of knowledge of our sectors and we can pass that on.”

Industry Representative

“Engagement and discussion with us would be most welcome. We have excellent knowledge, on the ground, of where there are critical gaps. There are problems that go on year after year, and some government departments will never know what goes on in the field. They have the right to make their decisions and maybe ignore our advice, but that’s fine as long as they are exposed to that advice.” **Professional network Group**

PERCEPTIONS OF THE BUDGET PUBLICATIONS



GUIDE TO THE BUDGET DOCUMENTS

A number of documents are released on Budget day. The purpose of these documents is to provide information about the Government's spending intentions for the year ahead and the wider fiscal and economic picture. The documents released on Budget day are as follows:

[Budget at a Glance](#)

The *Budget at a Glance* is the overview of all the Budget information and contains the main points for the media and public. This summarises the Government's spending decisions and key issues raised in the *Budget Speech*, the *Fiscal Strategy Report*, and the *Budget Economic and Fiscal Update*.

[Budget Speech](#)

The *Budget Speech* is the Budget Statement the Minister of Finance delivers at the start of Parliament's Budget debate. The Budget Statement generally focuses on the overall fiscal and economic position, the Government's policy priorities and how those priorities will be funded.

[Summary of Budget Initiatives](#)

The *Summary of Budget Initiatives* lists and describes the new initiatives included in the latest Budget.

[Fiscal Strategy Report](#)

The *Fiscal Strategy Report* sets out the Government's fiscal strategy in areas such as the balance between operating revenues and expenses, and its debt objectives. The report includes the Government's long-term fiscal objectives and short-term fiscal intentions plus fiscal trends covering at least the next 10 years.

The Government must explain changes in the *Fiscal Strategy Report* from the *Budget Policy Statement* and the previous year's *Fiscal Strategy Report* and any inconsistencies between these documents.

[Budget Economic and Fiscal Update](#)

The *Update* includes Treasury's economic forecasts and the forecast financial statements of the Government incorporating the financial implications of Government decisions and other information relevant to the fiscal and economic outlook.

[The Estimates of Appropriations](#)

The *Estimates* outlines for the financial year about to start (the Budget year) expenses and capital expenditure the Government plans to incur on specified areas within each Vote, and capital injections it plans to make to individual departments. The *Estimates* summarises the new policy initiatives and trend information for each Vote and provides information on what is intended to be achieved with each appropriation in a Vote and how performance against each appropriation will be assessed and reported on after the end of the Budget year.

Also released on Budget day:

[The Supplementary Estimates of Appropriations](#)

The *Supplementary Estimates* outlines the additional expenses, capital expenditure and capital injections to departments required for the financial year about to end. Supporting information for each Vote provides reasons for the changes to appropriations during the year, related changes in performance information and full performance information for new appropriations.

STAKEHOLDERS USE VARIOUS CHANNELS TO ACCESS BUDGET PUBLICATIONS

HARD COPIES

During lock-up on
Budget Day

- Budget at a Glance
- Budget Speech
- Summary of Initiatives
- Financial Strategy Report (FSR)
- Budget Economic and Fiscal Update (BEFU)
- Estimates of Appropriations

HARD COPIES

As reference documents

- Summary of Initiatives
- FSR
- BEFU
- Estimates of Appropriations

ONLINE

Through Treasury website

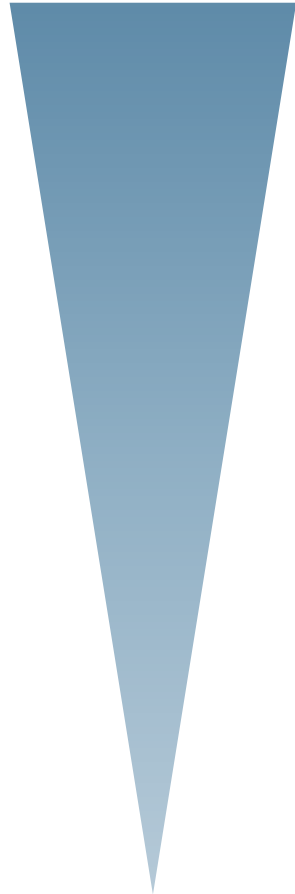
- Summary of Initiatives
- FSR
- BEFU
- Estimates of Appropriations

MEDIA

- News stories from analysts that provide key highlights from the Budget Speech and FSR
- Expert opinions on key highlights from the FSR, BEFU, and Estimates of Appropriations

THE RANGE OF PUBLICATIONS IS NEEDED TO CONVEY BOTH TOPLINE STRATEGIC INTENT AND MORE INDEPTH ANALYSIS

BROAD



Budget at a Glance
Budget Speech

Summary of Budget Initiatives

Fiscal Strategy Report (FSR)

Budget Economic and Fiscal Updates (BEFU)

Estimates of Appropriations

DETAILED

Stakeholders feel the Budget at a Glance, Budget Speech, and Summary of Initiatives are useful to provide a strategic roadmap for the Government's spending intentions and priority areas.

The FSR, BEFU, and Estimates of Appropriations are seen to provide greater depth of information for a detailed analysis of government accounts.

STAKEHOLDERS MAINLY USE THE BUDGET SPEECH AS A SIGNAL FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S SPENDING PRIORITIES

Stakeholders see the Budget Speech as an initial way to achieve a macro-level understanding of the Government's priorities and perceptions of the country's long-term fiscal and economic picture.

However, they also recognise it as a political communication that emphasises what the Government of day wants to highlight. They consider it has limitations as an objective source on spending initiatives.

For stakeholders, the purpose of the Budget Speech is to summarise major new spending initiatives and changes to the Government's fiscal and economic policy and outlook. It is primarily used in conjunction with other documents (e.g. the Summary of Initiatives, FSR and BEFU), to build context around major announcements.

The Budget Speech is perceived as user-friendly for all audiences, as it is:

- text only and uses non-technical language, which users find easy to read
- a verbatim copy of the Minister of Finance's speech, which means users can refer back to key announcements made on Budget Day without having to rely on press releases or other third party sources.

Stakeholders do not consider any improvements need to be made to the Budget Speech.



"Usually I listen to [the Minister of Finance's] speech on Budget Day. I refer back to the text afterwards. It's good to have it in writing, so even if you forget it's there to refer back to."

Analyst

"It's a really good signalling document; helps highlight the government's priorities and shows what they're focusing on and what to look for in the Budget documents. I usually lift quotes and key bits and pieces from [the Budget Speech]; it's good to have it in writing rather than relying on your memory or audio recordings." **Media**

THE BUDGET AT A GLANCE IS USED AS A HIGH-LEVEL INTRODUCTORY DOCUMENT, AND IS SUITABLE FOR MORE NOVICE AUDIENCES

Most stakeholders understand the purpose of the Budget at a Glance as a concise guiding document that provides key highlights from the latest Budget in a way that is accessible for novice audiences. Expert stakeholders have limited use for this document.

For stakeholders, the purpose of the Budget at a Glance is to provide concise, relevant information on important spending decisions across the Budget.

Stakeholders believe the document is accessible to a range of audiences, because it:

- is concise with easy to understand information
- uses minimal jargon or technical terminology.

The format and layout of the document means stakeholders feel:

- a mix of graphics and text allows key information to be quickly absorbed
- the available space is used efficiently, and information is organised around distinct areas of interest.



“It’s a very handy document and lay audience would find it somewhat interesting. But it’s headlines only and not much use apart from that. Just gives me a quick steer on things.”

Industry Representative

“The Budget at a Glance is good but very selective on what it shows. It’s based on a political agenda; sometimes it’s more interesting in what is not shown in there. I would need more information to make actual use of it; more granular detail about spending on initiatives in health and social services.”

Professional network Group

BUDGET AT A GLANCE IS CONSIDERED TOO NARROW AND SIMPLISTIC, AND NOT ENTIRELY OBJECTIVE

While stakeholders agree that Budget at a Glance provides Budget highlights, they are also wary about the information provided. The document is seen to provide selective highlights that portray the current Government favourably. Some stakeholders feel the information is not entirely objective or neutral.



“The Budget at Glance feels like a sales document put out by the current government rather than something produced by the Treasury.” **Analyst**

“It’s targeting the electorate. It’s entirely a political document that highlights the great things government is doing for people.” **Iwi Group**

While Budget at a Glance provides new spending information for specific initiatives, it does not indicate the funding need, or provide historical information about spending decisions for particular sectors. Many stakeholders feel this obfuscates the true scale and impact of new spending decisions, and how these affect the status quo.

Stakeholders recognise the audience for Budget at a Glance is likely to be novice readers.

However, they feel the lack of contextual information means that the document paints a narrow snapshot of the fiscal and economic picture. For these stakeholders, it is too simplistic.



“I never use this. I need much more depth. This is just more spin. I distrust simplistic summaries of things that can be complex.” **Professional network Group**

Stakeholders feel the Budget at a Glance makes little difference to the openness or transparency of government spending as it lacks information to enable readers to judge the true scope and impact of government spending.

Stakeholders who mainly use the Budget at a Glance:

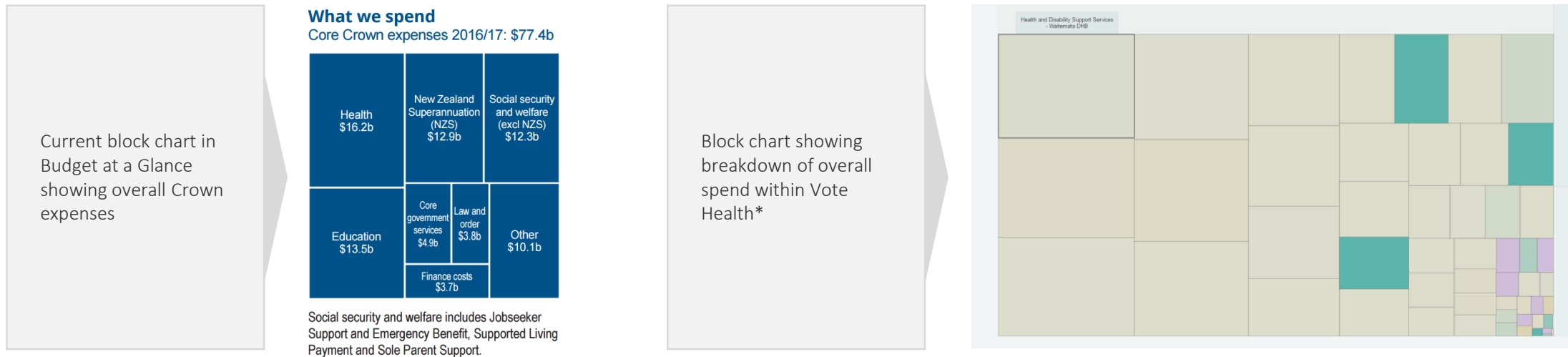
- Analysts
- Academics
- Financial Organisations
- Industry Representatives

These stakeholders’ focus is on the overall fiscal and economic picture of the country. They primarily use the Budget at Glance to get a high level idea of the Government’s key priorities in the Budget.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE CAN BE IMPROVED WITH TREND DATA, MORE INDEPTH VISUALISATION OF SPENDING, AND DIRECTING USERS TO OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

There is a sense that Budget at a Glance can be improved to make it relevant and reliable to use for both expert and novice users. Specifically, stakeholders suggest:

- Include year-on-year funding data across key initiatives so that users can track how funding has changed since the last Budget, and therefore, accurately contextualise new spending announcements.
- Build upon the current visualisation of Crown spending by breaking it down further to show spend by specific initiatives within each key Vote (e.g. Health, New Zealand Superannuation, and Social security and welfare).



*Source: NBR ONLINE Budget 2015 Data Visualisation

- Provide direct references (hyperlinks or page numbers) to relevant areas of other reports, so users who want more detail on a specific initiative can easily navigate to the relevant section of the Summary of Initiatives, FSR, BEFU or Estimates of Appropriations.

THE SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES IS A WELCOME ADDITION TO THE SUITE OF BUDGET PUBLICATIONS

Stakeholders view the purpose of the Summary of Initiatives is to provide a summary of key spending initiatives by Vote. They primarily use this document as reference to find specific information about the status of key initiatives and how new spending decisions will affect overall Votes.

Stakeholders consider the Summary of Initiatives as accessible because:

- The document strikes the right balance by providing technical detail in a simple way.
- Information about all the initiatives is provided in one document, which makes it easier to understand the status of critical initiatives within each Vote.
- It is easy to use for people who are not familiar with financial documents, as it provides a clear explanation of how the information is presented in the tables, key budget processes, and definitions of key terms.

Stakeholders view the format and layout of the document positively, because they feel the overall design of the document is intuitive with appropriate use of tables and text.

While some stakeholders were not aware of the Summary of Initiatives, their first impressions were very positive. For stakeholders who regularly use Budget publications, it provides a welcome breakdown of initiatives across all Votes that lessens their reliance on the Estimates of Appropriations.



“[The Summary of Initiatives] was new this last budget and was very useful. It was the first time they brought together all the initiatives in a complete form. Prior to that the only way you could find those initiatives was through the Ministerial Statement, which tends to highlight what the Minister wants to highlight. So, there was no feeling that they were complete or that it was not a biased sample.”

Professional network Group

Stakeholders who mainly use the Summary of Initiatives:

Iwi Groups

Professional network Groups

Social and community services Groups

Industry Representatives

The focus for these stakeholders is less on the Crown’s fiscal performance, and more on the new spending decisions within particular Votes. Therefore, they mostly use the Summary of Initiatives for detailed information about specific initiatives within their relevant sectors.

KEY IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES CENTRE ON BROADENING ITS SCOPE AND CROSS-REFERENCING

The Summary of Initiatives helps bring clarity to key changes in the Budget by providing a breakdown of new spending initiatives within each Vote.

While it complements the Budget Speech by giving an overview of the Government's spending intentions for the next four years, a lack of historical information limits its usefulness for stakeholders to effectively evaluate how new spending decisions fit within the existing fiscal and economic picture.

Improvements to the Summary of Initiatives involve broadening its scope. Specifically:

- Create a database that contains historical spending information across initiatives, so that users can track how new decisions fit into the current spending picture.
- Provide direct links from the Budget at a Glance to the Summary of Initiatives, so users can easily navigate to find additional detail on specific initiatives that they are interested in. This can be achieved by providing hyperlinks online and page referrals for hardcopies.

THE **FISCAL STRATEGY REPORT** IS A KEY DOCUMENT FOR STAKEHOLDERS TO BE ABLE TO ANALYSE, REUSE AND REPRODUCE BUDGET INFORMATION

The FSR is often the first port of call for many stakeholders when working with the Budget, and its tables and graphs are integral to convey key figures about the Government's fiscal and economic outlook.

Stakeholders view the purpose of the FSR is to provide information on the Government's fiscal performance and its long-term fiscal strategy. Some key areas that stakeholders engage with include:

- Operating allowance figures
- CPI forecasts
- Unemployment forecasts
- Current and projected expenditure on health and education; and
- Tax revenue.

Stakeholders feel that the FSR is accessible, as it uses appropriate levels of technical, politically neutral language. They consider the format and layout of the document easy to navigate with critical information clearly signposted.

There is a clear sense that the overall structure of the report is intuitive, with the most useful aspects being the graphs and tables. These effectively summarise important information and can be easily reproduced, or copied and pasted into other documents.

Stakeholders who mainly use the FSR:

Analysts
Academics
Financial Organisations
International Organisations
Media

These stakeholders primarily use the FSR to understand the Government's performance based on the previous year's FSR, BEFU and Half Year Economic and Fiscal Update, and its outlook for the economy and key fiscal forecasts.

THE **FISCAL STRATEGY REPORT** IS VALUED FOR ITS CLEAR AND SYSTEMATIC LAYOUT, ACCURACY, AND APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF DETAIL

Stakeholders appreciate the short and long-term fiscal objectives set out in the FSR because it enables them to undertake macro-level analysis of the Crown's fiscal policy.

Stakeholders who access this document feel the FSR has the right level of detail to allow them to effectively measure the Crown's long-term performance, the state of overall public finances, and projections of long-term fiscal and economic growth.

They consider the information is well set-out, systemically presented, and has been consistently accurate over an extended period of time.



"The publications allow me to act out my role as critic and conscience. To interpret for my audience the strengths and weaknesses of the current policy settings. .. To be honest it [my job] is made incredibly easy [by the FSR]; ... I have never had any issue accessing or utilising the materials speedily and efficiently to meet my needs." **Academic**

THE FISCAL STRATEGY REPORT CAN BE IMPROVED BY PROVIDING CLEARER EXPLANATIONS OF THE MEASURES USED IN THE FIGURES

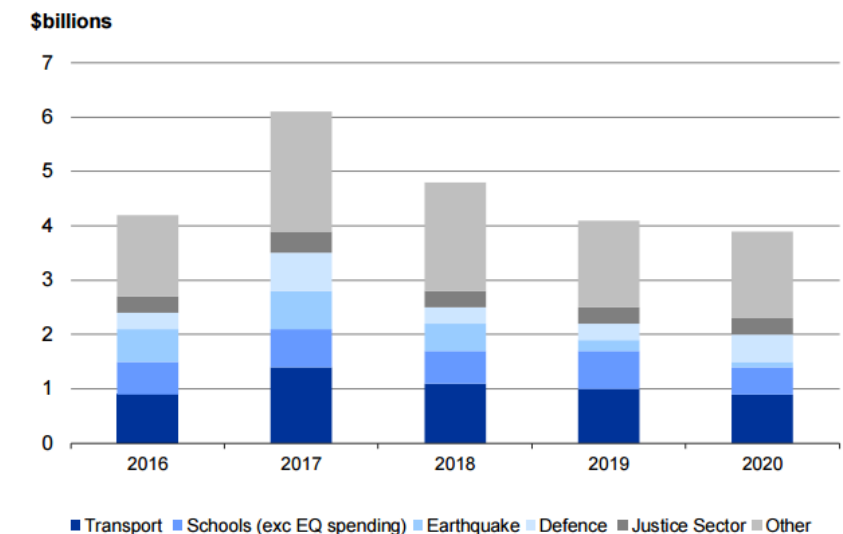
Stakeholders feel the FSR needs to display central government fiscal forecasts using an internationally recognised framework, such as the Government Finance Statistics (GFS) developed by the International Monetary Fund. There is a sense that while the government's GFS accounts are on the Treasury website, these also need to be in the FSR to make it more relevant for international audiences. This is seen as especially important given that some measures used in the FSR (e.g. the OBEGAL), are not used elsewhere in the world.

Stakeholders feel the FSR would benefit from clearer explanations of the display of certain fiscal measures - it is currently inconsistent in its use of both end-year and average annual year changes for key forecasts and time series measurements.

For example, Figure 13 – Total capital spending over the forecast period, does not clearly highlight that it shows annual average capital spending over the next four years, rather than year-end capital spending (as used in other figures).

Figure 13 - Total capital spending over the forecast period

Figure 13 – Total capital spending over the forecast period



Source: The Treasury

THE BUDGET AND ECONOMIC FISCAL UPDATE IS THE MAIN REFERENCE DOCUMENT FOR EXPERT USERS

Stakeholders view the purpose of the BEFU as providing detailed information on the Crown's overall financial position and specific fiscal risks.

Some key areas of the BEFU that stakeholders use include:

- Fiscal Outlook: Core Crown Tax Revenue
- Fiscal Outlook: Comparisons with the Half Year Update and Key Economic Assumptions
- Specific Fiscal Risks
- Core Crown Expense Tables

Stakeholders who primarily use the BEFU find it accessible as it uses appropriate technical language to complement large amounts of tabulated data. The glossary of terms provides helpful definitions for users who are not familiar with accounting language, and the headings within each chapter helps guide users to the salient points on each page.

Stakeholders consider the format and layout of the BEFU is well structured and feel that it achieves the right balance between text, tables and graphs to present complex financial data in a user-friendly way.

Stakeholders who mainly use the BEFU:

Analysts
Academics
Financial Organisations
International Organisations
Media

These stakeholders primarily use the BEFU to find more detailed information on key highlights from the FSR. Post Budget Day, they use the detailed data for modelling and in-depth analysis of the Government's forecast figures, and make comparisons to the previous and new half-year updates.



"We mainly use the FSR and BEFU. Our particular interest in the Budget is on the impact of the fiscal position on growth and its effects on inflation and particular things that might affect the consumer price index. And then to get a pulse regarding growth and things that might affect growth. We are interested in benchmarking our views relative to where Treasury sits, so details such as the scenarios and risks that are highlighted in the BEFU and things like the sensitivity analyses, those are what we mainly use."

Financial Organisation

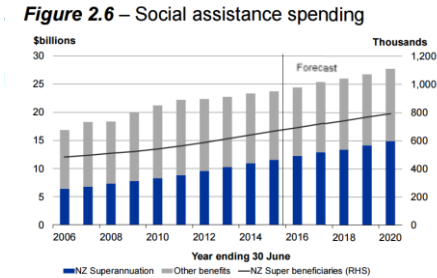
STAKEHOLDERS FIND THE BEFU A COMPREHENSIVE DOCUMENT, BUT DENSE AND SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE

Stakeholders who are experienced in handling financial information draw most of their information about the Budget from the FSR and BEFU.

Many of these stakeholders are familiar with BEFU from previous Budgets, which makes them comfortable with the structure of the document. However, stakeholders identify a few format and design issues that makes navigating the dense document difficult. Specifically:

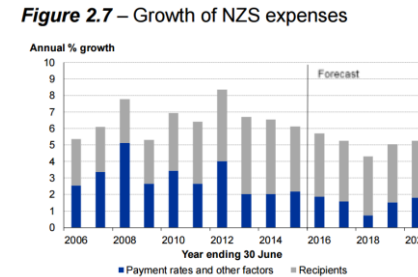
- The Table of Contents does not link directly to specific pages.
- There is no list of tables or figures, which makes it difficult for stakeholders to easily find the information they are looking for.
- The document uses graphs very well to present key bits of information. However, many graphs do not have within-document links to their corresponding tables. Stakeholders either have to “eyeball” the charts to obtain the exact figures, or search multiple pages to find the table that corresponds to the graph (e.g. Figure 2.6 – Social assistance spending, Figure 2.7 – Growth of NZS expenses).

Figure 2.6 – Social assistance spending



Source: The Treasury

Figure 2.7 – Growth of NZS expenses



Source: The Treasury

For novice stakeholders, there is a sense that unless the user knows from past experience or has external assistance, it is difficult to find specific information within the document.

Many stakeholders feel the BEFU proves difficult to navigate given the lack of signposting towards critical initiatives and spending areas.



“The document is quite user-friendly, I enjoy using it. It has the right language for me and I know where everything is so I can go straight to the right sections. But I can see how it could be hard for the general public to use. There is a lot of specialist information there. A lot technical jargon and ‘hard’ language.” **Media**

KEY IMPROVEMENTS TO THE BEFU CENTRE AROUND INCORPORATING NAVIGATION AIDS AND PROVIDING ACCESS TO ADDITIONAL DATA

Stakeholders suggest the BEFU could be improved by providing navigation aids within the document, which would allow users to find specific information quickly and easily. For example:

- Hyperlinks that allows users to navigate directly to chapters in the report from the Table of Contents, and a tab system that allows users to locate chapters without having to refer to the Table of Contents or scroll through the document.
- Direct links to spreadsheet data from the BEFU so users can directly navigate to the raw data behind a particular table or graph without having to manually search the full BEFU spreadsheet.

For novice stakeholders, the BEFU needs clearer labels for major initiatives and Votes. This can be achieved by including a Table of Figures (with hyperlinks) that lists all the tables and graphs in the report.

Finally, while the Treasury has made some of the BEFU data available in Excel spreadsheets, some stakeholders are not aware it is available. Other stakeholders think all of the BEFU data needs to be publicly available in Excel form.

This suggests Treasury could increase awareness about the availability of the BEFU data, and make the complete dataset available online.

MANY STAKEHOLDERS FEEL THE ESTIMATES OF APPROPRIATIONS CONTAINS VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION, BUT IS DIFFICULT TO USE

Stakeholders view the purpose of the Estimates of Appropriations is to provide a clear breakdown of spending initiatives within each Vote.

Stakeholders do not feel the Estimates of Appropriations are particularly accessible, even for expert users.

- The documents are considered extremely dense, and many stakeholders do not feel confident in their ability to interpret the figures accurately.
- There is a sense that critical information is often confused by extraneous detail, and the language used is too technical.

Stakeholders view the documents' format and layout as functional. They see the information in the Estimates of Appropriations as relatively well organised and presented in tables with clear definitions for key terms and specific design features.

Stakeholders who mainly use the Estimates of Appropriations:

Academics
Iwi Groups
Professional network Groups
Social and community services Groups
Industry Representatives

Stakeholders use the Estimates of Appropriations to understand changes to spending levels on specific initiatives within Votes. It is used in conjunction with the Budget Speech and Summary of Initiatives to find more detailed information about spending decisions that are highlighted in the summary documents.



"It's effective for giving you information that a very diligent investigative accountant would want for a detailed audit of the Government, but it's very frustrating [to use] for anything else. [The Summary of Initiatives] is somewhere you hope to go to find some detailed numbers to see what the Government is doing in an area, but then you have to go hunting through multiple lines of the statements to find bits and pieces. It's a lot of work aggregating numbers across multiple Votes and previous Budgets. And then every Vote has its own way of showing spending." **Academic**

THE **ESTIMATES OF APPROPRIATIONS** IS SEEN AS A CRITICAL DOCUMENT THAT PROVIDES IMPORTANT DETAILS ABOUT EVERY INITIATIVE WITHIN EACH VOTE

Stakeholders who mainly use the Estimates of Appropriations acknowledge that they contain essential information, but feel they lack transparency for a number of reasons. Specifically, stakeholders perceive that:

- Key initiatives are often spread across multiple Votes with little guidance. This means it is difficult to track their funding status without referring to multiple documents.
- Yearly changes are often poorly highlighted, which makes it difficult to ascertain how funding levels have changed from the previous years' Budget for on-going initiatives.

Many Industry Representative, and Iwi, Professional network, and Social and community services stakeholders rely on Financial Analysts and Media commentators to help them understand the information in the Estimates of Appropriations. This makes them dependent on third party interpretations and opinions of critical fiscal spending data.

“

“I would love to be able to use [the Estimates of Appropriations]. It's all in there, the information that I need. But we have no idea what to do with them; no in-house expertise. So we usually end waiting for bigger NGOs who have policy analysts on their team to come out with their findings, and then we go off of what they say.” **Social and community services Group**

“It's very easy for things to be moved around with little or no notice. So from one year to the next, the way spending for a specific initiative is shown can change and you may think that the initiative was discontinued, but it's only been moved to a different section of the Vote, or a different Vote.” **Iwi Group**

THE **ESTIMATES OF APPROPRIATIONS** CAN BE IMPROVED BY CLEARER ORGANISATION OF INFORMATION AND PROVISION OF HISTORICAL SPENDING INFORMATION

Stakeholders suggest improving the Estimates of Appropriations by providing:

- A consolidated Table of Contents for the entire Estimates of Appropriations that lists all spending initiatives above a certain funding threshold. This will allow users to quickly identify major initiatives and refer to the relevant sections of the Estimates without having to undertake a manual search of the documents.
- A database containing historic spending information on all initiatives so users can track how government spending has trended over past years. This will help bring clarity for users around how new government spending decisions actually affect the current status of ongoing initiatives.

MANY STAKEHOLDERS HAVE NOT SEEN THE BUDGET WEBSITE BEFORE

Link: <http://www.budget.govt.nz>



2016
BUDGET

Budget Overview Fiscal Strategy Forecasts Estimates

Investing in a Growing Economy

Budget at a Glance

Economic and Fiscal Outlook

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A \$2.1 billion package to support a stronger, more productive economy and deliver better public services.

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Social Investment

Social Investment is about improving the lives of our most vulnerable people by intervening early and tailoring public services to their needs.

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Health

A \$2.2 billion package to ensure all New Zealanders and their families have access to quality healthcare.

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WHILE THE BUDGET WEBSITE APPEALS, CONTENT IS DUPLICATED ELSEWHERE

Link: <http://www.budget.govt.nz>

Stakeholders' initial impressions of the Budget website are positive. In particular, they comment on:

- key documents are visible at the top and arranged by Votes;
- appealing user interface with quick summary information presented on landing page; and
- easy to navigate design and good interconnectivity between different sections of the website.

However, there is a sense that design and structural improvement to the website are needed because:

- the website feels like an expanded version of Budget at a Glance with no direct links from key headlines to Treasury data;
- the headlines on the landing page lead to press releases, which stakeholders consider to have limited use as they are already available on the Beehive website; and
- stakeholders feel a lot of information available on the Budget website is already available on the Treasury website, and in much more detail.

Stakeholders feel that while the Budget website is accessible and easy to use, it lacks a specific purpose due to the absence of any meaningful data and duplication of information that is available elsewhere.




“The interactive charts are really good. But then I was looking through the factsheet on tertiary education skills and employment, and there are surely background documents on what’s involved in the \$43 million spend on student international linkages or contingency funding for new initiatives. Why not have those documents linked here?” **Academic**

“I clicked on Social Investment which is highlighted on the front page, and it just took me to the Minister’s press release. Nothing further. I can just get that on the Beehive website, so what’s the point of having it here.” **Industry Representative**

MOST STAKEHOLDERS USE THE **TREASURY WEBSITE** TO ACCESS ALL BUDGET RELATED INFORMATION AND DATA

Link: <http://www.treasury.govt.nz>





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Half Year Economic and Fiscal update

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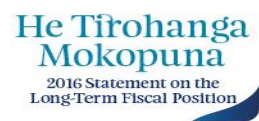
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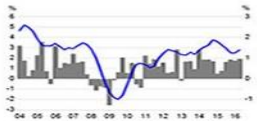
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05 May

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THE WEBSITES

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MOST STAKEHOLDERS ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE TREASURY WEBSITE AND TRUST ITS CONTENT

Link: <http://www.treasury.govt.nz>

The Treasury website is the main resource for most stakeholders when accessing information about the Budget. Many stakeholders are familiar with the layout and design of the website, and hence able to find the information they need.

Stakeholders perceive the Treasury website as a reliable source of information and repository for key fiscal data and economic data.

Some areas where stakeholders would like to see improvements are:

- The website's search engine, which does not provide precise results. This often forces users to rely on Google, memory, or trial and error to find specific datasets and documents.
- Interconnectivity with the Budget website. Most stakeholders sense that the Budget website does not have enough Treasury data to be of much use to their work.



"I just go direct to the Treasury website if I need anything on the Budget. But then if you want statistics or the data that lies behind anything, you have to go to sub-pages behind the landing page. A link straight to that Budget data on the front page is what I need." **Analyst**

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SUITE OF BUDGET INFORMATION REVOLVE AROUND MAKING IT EASIER FOR STAKEHOLDERS TO WORK WITH THE DATA

Overall improvements include:

- An online fiscal data portal with in built search and analytics tools that allow users to query the Treasury database and draw out customised datasets and visualisations.
- Better search functionality on the Treasury website and visibility of critical datasets such as the FSR and BEFU Excel spreadsheets.
- Easier navigation within and across publications.
- A more complete range of Excel datasets that include all of the data in the Summary of Initiatives, FSR, BEFU, and the Estimates of Appropriations.
- Provisions of additional information, such as further breakdown of specific initiatives, and historical spending information.
- Less duplication of information (e.g. ministerial announcements) between the Budget, Treasury, and Beehive websites and direct links from the Budget website to Treasury data about the Budget.



A person in a suit is working at a desk. Their hands are visible, typing on a laptop keyboard. A calculator and a pen are on the desk. A cup of coffee is in the foreground. The background is blurred, showing more of the desk and the person's arm.

**FOR FURTHER
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