

Guide to completing a science Policy Brief

What is Policy Brief?

Policymakers rely on concise briefs to learn about a topic quickly. A science Policy Brief is a succinct summary of research and what it means. It is written specifically for policymakers and policy audiences. The goal of the Policy Brief is to inform policymakers of the science.

There are many considerations and factors at play within policy making.ⁱ Science is one factor that informs policy. It is important that public policy decisions are informed by what we know and do not know from evidence.ⁱⁱ

There are legal obligations policy makers must consider when drafting policy. One area of particular importance in Aotearoa is our founding document Te Tiriti o Waitangi.ⁱⁱⁱ Under Te Tiriti the Crown has obligations and constitutional responsibilities that are implicit to the science-policy interface. The principles of the Te Tiriti are recognised in law^{iv} and the Public Service Act 2020 requires the public service to support the Crown in its relationships with Māori under Te Tiriti.^v Providing policy makers with information that helps support the Crown to meet its obligations is valuable. This will include evidence from Aotearoa's two rich knowledge systems, Western science and Mātauranga Māori.^{vi,vii} Both inform policy. It also includes Te Tiriti led projects and evidence drawn from and a Te Ao Māori approach to science-policy advice. When you are writing a Policy Brief, try to consider the surrounding legal and other aspects as best you can.

How to translate science?

Information is easily understood when framed within a story and science is no exception. Describing the science and what it means to a non-scientist, who is an expert in another field, doesn't change the science, just the delivery method. There is no need to talk down to your audience, but you do need to be clear and explain some things that you, perhaps, take for granted.

Translating scientific findings means clearly conveying the science and what it means so the reader it not left thinking 'so what'?

The attached template aims to help Researchers prepare a Policy Brief. It helps to translate work to a policymaker audience in a time-friendly way. It provides information to initiate an open dialogue and stimulate questions from the reader.

Structure of Policy Brief

The document is broken down into an Overview then five questions to help structure the information:

1. Overview that outlines the key points of the briefing.
2. What is the context of the issue?
3. What did you do?
4. What did you find?
5. How does the research support the Crown's relationships with Māori?
6. What does the science mean?

Headings and sub-headings are used to break up large blocks of text and make the document easy to scan. Bullet points are preferred over paragraphs where it makes sense to do so. The information should be organised so that it is easy to skim read.

It is designed to be an A3 size document (landscape) including references. A PowerPoint example with a breakdown of the template and a Word document example accompanies this guide.

Tips

Identify your audience before you start writing and target information towards a policy audience.

The content of the brief can be based on one study or include multiple studies representing a body of research.

Avoid emotive language and let the science speak for itself.

Define specialty terms, avoid jargon and spell out acronyms.

Use visuals. Charts, graphs, boxes or an icon can help break up your document and convey important information in an easy-to-read format. Create an account and search/download icons from [NounProject.com](https://www.nounproject.com) to represent key takeaways.

When describing what the science means focus on appropriateness, transparency, accountability and contestability of the research as principles.

Make uncertainty understandable. Be clear about where there is uncertainty and what the nature of that uncertainty is. Is there no research in that area or is the system intrinsically uncertain? Being clear helps to communicate that uncertainty does not equate to flawed science.

Don't say 'We need to do more research', while it may be needed, it is better to be clear about the uncertainties and define the scope of the research.

Tone is important, the document should convey an openness to exchange information in an unbiased way and a willingness to help.

Explain the timescales, what are they and why now.

Critically assess the work. Highlight consensus and ongoing debate. Be clear about how you are building on existing knowledge or whether there is conflicting science.

It is a 'Template' not a 'Form', consider what you need to put in and use the template to remind you, but if the material is not relevant to your case – leave it out.

Creating a dissemination plan

A good place to start a dissemination plan is asking who you need to reach and how your institution and existing contacts can help you? While you may not have a direct line of communication to policy, someone in your network or institution may have, or have connections that have. Seek them out and ask if they know who may be interested in the issue.

Other routes of dissemination can be through Chief Science Advisors, directly to general managers of a policy area *via* a ministerial website or to the general ministerial enquiries.

Template Policy Brief

Title: Brief, descriptive and understandable title, can contain abbreviations where appropriate, avoid academic jargon, don't over promise.

1 Overview: Highlighted bullet points (4 – 6) that outlines key points of the Brief, for example bullet points should give the context, current state of play, key findings, impacts, strategies to address problem, challenges.

2 What is the context of the issue? (Background): One short paragraph providing the context required to understand the topic. It can contain references and abbreviations where appropriate. Final sentence stating what the Policy Brief summarises.

The paragraph can be broken down as follows:

- i. Who/what is affected and how many people/things.
- ii. What is the current status.
- iii. What is the problem and the impacts?
- iv. This Briefing Document summaries....

3 What did you do? (Description of research): One – two brief sentences.

A brief description of research giving scope of study. It can contain high-level details on the methods which are important to understand the research. Avoid in-depth descriptions of methods.

4 What did you find? (Key takeaways):

Give the main finding of study in one sentence. Then provide the scope of the study and additional detail of findings in bullet points. It should clearly explain the unique/novel/key findings or takeaways from the research and how they fit the existing knowledge in the area. You can incorporate data, research findings and survey findings. Charts, graphs, maps and icons can be used to help explain information. If multiple studies are covered, ascribe finding to the Researcher so the reader can contact that person if interested in a particular point. At the end critically assess the study and explain if it is supported or contradicts other work. International research can and should be considered in the summary.

5 How does the research support the Crown's relationships with Māori under Te Tiriti?

Each research project will generate different answers to this section, and it can be answered in different ways. For some projects, the answer to this question will be implicit in the nature of the research and be apparent across the document, for others the answer will be much narrower, or there may be no information to provide.

Describing how the research relates to Māori, whether Māori were involved, what the engagement looked like, whether it was a Māori led project and how the research considers mātauranga Māori knowledge is all salient information.

6 What does the science mean? (Potential applications)

This section gives examples of what the study means, it showcases real-world applications. Remember that research is just one type of information that gets considered when making policy decisions. Focus on the impact to people as well as the science. Who is affected? What regions are affected? What are the cost implications? When might the impact be felt? What do stake holders say? It is important to suggest a range of applications.

Definition section: Included as appropriate, typically one or two and can contain a graphic illustration

Publication supporting research: Use open access when available, include doi number(s) and hyperlinks.

Contact information: Clearly list at least two people that can be contacted, hyperlink to email addresses, and include Twitter or LinkedIn handle. List all contributors and specify organisations especially when a body of research is used. Include orcid numbers and hyperlink names to their research organisation profiles that include bibliographies.

Link to get more information on research and educational material: Use open access sources as much as possible.

Key words: List key words here that may help searching for this document if it was to be kept in a repository or database. Avoid technical terms.

Disclosure: Include conflicts of interest, relationships or interest with any industry or lobby groups.

References: Include your sources of information so that readers can see where the information is coming from.

Date: document and give research timeline.

Date any subsequent updates. If document is updated with new findings, highlight additions with different coloured text or boarder so it is easier for reader to scan for new information.

ⁱ "Enhancing evidence-informed policy making" Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Professor Sir Peter Gluckman, July 2017 at 3.

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ⁱⁱⁱ "On the Constitution of New Zealand: An Introduction to the Foundations of the Current Form of Government" Sir Kenneth Keith 1990 (updated 2008 and 2017) in Cabinet Office *Cabinet Manual* 2017 at 1.

^{iv} See, for example, the following Acts of Parliament: Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975, the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986 (s 9), the Conservation Act 1987 (s 4), the Resource Management Act 1991 (s 8), the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 (s 8) and the Climate Change Response Act 2002 (s 3A). See also, for example, the following court decisions concerning the principles of Te Tiriti: *New Zealand Māori Council v Attorney-General* (the *Lands* case) [1987] 1 NZLR 641 (New Zealand Court of Appeal), *New Zealand Māori Council v Attorney-General* (the *Broadcasting Assets* case) [1994] 1 NZLR 513 (Privy Council) and *Trans-Tasman Resources Ltd v Taranaki-Whanganui Conservation Board* [2021] NZSC 127 (New Zealand Supreme Court).

^v Public Services Act 2020, s 14.

^{vi} Mātauranga Māori is Māori knowledge ecosystem underpinned by kaupapa and tikanga Māori. *Mātauranga Māori is a body of knowledge that seeks to explain phenomena by drawing on concepts handed from one generation of Māori to another. Accordingly, mātauranga Māori has no beginning and is without end. It is constantly being enhanced and refined. Each passing generation of Māori make their own contribution to mātauranga Māori. The theory, or collection of theories, with associated values and practices, has accumulated mai i te Ao Māori/from Māori beginnings and will continue to accumulate providing the whakapapa of mātauranga Māori is unbroken.* Moko Mead, H. (2003). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori values*. Huia Publishers, with the assistance of Creative New Zealand

^{vii} Te Pūtahitanga: A Tiriti-led science-policy approach for Aotearoa New Zealand, February 2022, at 11.