

Alliance Public Ownership and Economic Democracy Policy

Taking Control of Our Essential Infrastructure

The Alliance believes that the essential infrastructure of a modern nation should serve the people who depend on it, not private shareholders seeking to maximise profits.

The privatisation programme of the 1980s and 1990s transferred ownership and control of important New Zealand assets away from the public. It fragmented essential services, weakened democratic accountability, and allowed private and overseas interests to gain control over infrastructure fundamental to our economic and social wellbeing.

The Alliance will reverse this process.

We will protect the public assets that remain in public ownership, prevent further privatisation and progressively return strategically important infrastructure to public ownership.

Our objective is not state ownership for its own sake. It is to ensure that essential services are affordable, reliable, environmentally sustainable, democratically accountable, and operated in the public interest.

1. Public Ownership of Strategic Assets

The Alliance will establish a clear principle that **strategic national infrastructure should be publicly owned**.

The immediate priority will be to protect existing public assets from privatisation and identify assets that should be progressively returned to public ownership.

This will include consideration of:

- electricity generation, transmission, and distribution;
- ports and strategic transport infrastructure;
- water infrastructure;
- telecommunications infrastructure;
- other natural monopolies and essential services where private ownership is inconsistent with the public interest.

The Alliance will establish a programme of **reverse privatisation**, progressively purchasing strategic assets where necessary to restore democratic public ownership.

Assets sold below their underlying public value, and assets where private ownership has driven up the cost to consumers, will be the first priority for acquisition.

We will retain public ownership and ensure these assets operate as genuine public services; with their success measured by the benefits they provide to New Zealand rather than simply by commercial returns.

2. Stop Further Privatisation

There will be **no further sale of strategic state assets**.

The Alliance will prevent the sale, partial privatisation, or fragmentation of essential public infrastructure.

We will also oppose arrangements that achieve privatisation by other means, including:

- public-private partnerships where they transfer public assets or excessive returns to private interests;
- contracting out essential public functions where this undermines accountability;
- long-term concessions that effectively transfer public control;
- joint ventures designed primarily to introduce private ownership into strategic infrastructure.

Public ownership must mean **genuine public control**, not simply government retaining a minority share while private interests control the operation.

3. Electricity: Public Ownership and Affordable Power

Electricity is an essential service and a foundation of the modern economy.

The Alliance will re-integrate electricity generation, transmission, distribution, and retail under public ownership and democratic control.

Our objectives will be:

- affordable electricity for households;
- reliable supply for businesses;
- secure national energy infrastructure;
- investment in renewable generation;
- improved energy efficiency;
- reduced energy poverty;
- long-term protection of New Zealand's energy security.

Electricity infrastructure should not be managed primarily as a vehicle for extracting dividends from consumers.

Public ownership will allow investment decisions to be based on **long-term national need rather than short-term shareholder returns**.

4. Ports and Strategic Transport Infrastructure

New Zealand's ports are critical national infrastructure.

The Alliance will progressively restore public ownership of strategically important ports where they have been privatised or corporatised in ways that undermine public control.

Ports should operate as part of an integrated national transport and economic development strategy.

Public ownership will allow us to coordinate:

- ports;
- rail;
- coastal shipping;
- roads;
- regional development.

As a single system rather than allowing each part of the system to operate primarily according to separate commercial interests.

The objective is an efficient national freight system that supports exporters, workers, regional economies and consumers.

5. KiwiRail and Air New Zealand

Rail is in full public ownership. Air New Zealand is majority Crown-owned.

The Alliance will retain rail in full public ownership and will move Air New Zealand from majority Crown control to full public ownership.

These assets should be operated in the national interest and integrated into wider economic, transport, and regional development strategies.

Rail will play a central role in moving freight and passengers, while Air New Zealand will provide an essential national and international transport connection.

Public ownership gives New Zealand the opportunity to make long-term decisions about these services, without the requirement to maximise returns to private shareholders.

6. Water Belongs to the People

Water is a fundamental public resource and must remain under public and community control.

The Alliance will ensure that water services cannot be converted into private profit-making utilities.

We will oppose:

- privatisation;
- commercialisation that places profit ahead of public need;
- contracting out essential water services;
- private control of strategic water infrastructure.

Water services will be managed through accountable public and community institutions, with local communities having a meaningful role in decisions affecting them.

Water is a **public good, not a commodity**.

7. Public Telecommunications and the Digital Commons

Modern telecommunications infrastructure is as important to New Zealand's economy as roads, rail, and electricity.

The Alliance will return strategically important telecommunications infrastructure to public ownership.

Particular priority will be given to infrastructure that functions as a **natural monopoly**, including the essential “last mile” connecting households and businesses.

The objective will be universal access to:

- affordable internet;
- reliable telecommunications;
- modern digital infrastructure;
- high-quality services regardless of geographic location.

No New Zealander should be excluded from full participation in society because they live in a rural community or cannot afford essential communications services.

8. Public Ownership Must Be Democratic

Public ownership alone does not guarantee public control.

The Alliance will establish strong democratic accountability over publicly owned enterprises.

Public enterprises will be required to:

- operate transparently;
- publish meaningful information about their operations;
- engage with workers and their unions;
- consult affected communities;
- be accountable to parliament and the public;
- pursue social and environmental as well as economic objectives.

State-owned enterprises are already subject to the Official Information Act. We will extend it to publicly listed companies in which the Crown holds a controlling stake, which currently sit outside it, and narrow the grounds for withholding access to information across the entities already covered.

Community and regional representation will be strengthened in decisions affecting essential services.

9. Workers Should Have a Voice in Public Enterprises

The people who work in public enterprises have an important role in ensuring those enterprises operate effectively.

The Alliance will introduce stronger forms of **workplace democracy**, including:

- work councils in larger enterprises;
- worker representation on the boards of major public enterprises;
- meaningful consultation with unions;
- access to relevant information about the operation of public enterprises.

Workers should not be treated simply as a cost to be minimised.

They are participants in the operation of the enterprise and should have a genuine voice in its future.

10. Public Ownership and the Environment

Public ownership provides an opportunity to make long-term environmental decisions that private markets may not adequately recognise.

All publicly owned infrastructure will be required to operate within strong environmental standards.

Investment decisions will take account of:

- climate change;
- biodiversity;
- resource conservation;
- energy efficiency;
- pollution;
- long-term sustainability.

The Alliance's economic policy will be guided by the principle that **economic activity must operate within the ecological limits of the natural world.**

Strategic public ownership will therefore be used not only to improve affordability and accountability, but also to support New Zealand's transition to a sustainable economy.

11. Public Ownership and Regional Development

Strategic infrastructure should support every part of New Zealand, not simply the areas offering the highest immediate commercial return. Our new ministry of works, KiwiWorks, will be the vehicle for delivery of infrastructure in our country.

Public enterprises will be required to consider regional development as part of their responsibilities.

Government will coordinate investment in:

- transport;
- energy;
- telecommunications;
- water;
- ports;
- regional infrastructure.

This will support employment, local businesses, and regional economic development.

Economic development should ensure that **the costs and benefits of development are shared across all regions of New Zealand.**

12. A Development Bank and National Development Strategy

Public ownership should form part of a wider economic strategy.

The Alliance will establish a **Ministry of Development** responsible for coordinating national, regional, and community development.

The Ministry will develop a long-term **New Zealand Development Strategy** focused on:

- full employment;
- productive investment;

- regional development;
- technological development;
- infrastructure;
- environmental sustainability;
- economic resilience.

A publicly owned **Development Bank** will provide concessional finance and venture capital for productive investment, including cooperatives, young farmers, and small-scale, appropriate technology projects.

This will ensure public ownership is complemented by public investment in the productive economy.

13. Economic Democracy Rather Than Market Dominance

The Alliance believes the market should be a tool of economic policy, **not the master of it**.

Where markets operate effectively and competitively, they can have a role.

But essential services and natural monopolies are different.

Where the public depends upon an infrastructure network for basic needs – electricity, water, transport or communications – the overriding consideration must be **public benefit**.

The Alliance will therefore reject the idea that everything should be bought, sold, and managed according to commercial returns.

Economic policy should instead pursue:

- full employment;
- social wellbeing;
- regional development;
- environmental sustainability;
- democratic ownership.

14. A Fair Approach to Restoring Public Ownership

Returning assets to public ownership will require significant investment.

The Alliance will therefore develop a **long-term public ownership programme**, prioritising assets according to:

- their strategic importance;
- their role as natural monopolies;
- their importance to essential services;
- the extent of private market failure;
- the cost to consumers;

- their importance to national security and resilience;
- their environmental significance;
- the feasibility and cost of acquisition.

Public ownership will be pursued progressively and responsibly rather than through an arbitrary programme of acquisitions.

Where appropriate, the Crown will purchase assets at fair value, use existing public investment vehicles, or establish new public entities to bring infrastructure under public control.

15. Economic Resilience and the Protection of Critical Industries

The Alliance will develop a process by which the government identifies industries and firms considered critical for reasons of national security, economic resilience, local employment, and environmental stewardship.

In order to retain economic sovereignty, the government will have the ability to enact a “first right of refusal” on the sale or liquidation of identified firms for the reasons mentioned above, depending on fiscal viability. From there, the government may facilitate transition to workers’ cooperatives or operate those businesses as a public enterprise.

International markets operate in cycles of boom and bust, but as a small and relatively isolated island nation, maintaining our strategic manufacturing and industrial base at a level that can serve the domestic market in times of uncertainty is critical.

Our Vision

The Alliance believes that **the wealth and infrastructure of New Zealand should work for New Zealanders.**

We will protect the public ownership we have retained, including rail and the Crown's majority holding in Air New Zealand, and progressively restore public ownership of other strategic assets that were sold.

We will return to public ownership of:

- electricity generation and distribution;
- ports;
- water and telecommunications infrastructure.

We will build a system in which public enterprises are not simply government-owned corporations operating according to private-sector principles, but democratically accountable public institutions with social, economic, and environmental responsibilities.

The Alliance's vision is an economy in which:

- essential services are publicly owned;
- strategic infrastructure is democratically controlled;
- workers have a voice;
- communities have a say;
- profits do not determine access to basic necessities;
- investment serves long-term national interests;
- and economic development operates within environmental limits.

Public ownership is not an end in itself. It is the means by which New Zealanders can regain democratic control over the infrastructure on which our collective future depends.