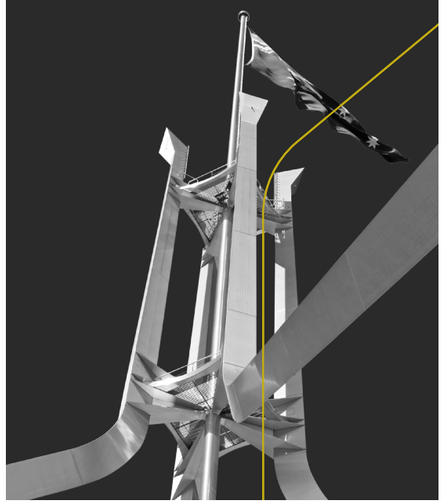
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THE DIPR FRAMEWORK – GUIDANCE FOR MINISTERIAL PRIORITY SETTING

The Framework is intended to assist ministers, their senior staff and departmental leaders set priorities after considering a balanced suite of evidence and information. It is intended as guidance and can form part of a wider set of approaches and management frameworks for a minister. The Framework is provided for better decisions – more timely, more effective, better aligned with partners, better informed and more transparent.

The timing of such a process will never be perfect. A new minister needs some time to understand the portfolio, and have a sense of the department and stakeholders. Three months in a new role is a good time for a minister to hold the initial workshop (step P-1).

Developed by Ben Hubbard for McKinnon Institute



	D STEP 1 Decision	I STEP 2 Input	P STEP 3 Prioritise – P-1 Workshop to develop	P STEP 3 Prioritise – P-2 Development Sprint	P STEP 3 Prioritise – P-3 Workshop to finalise	R STEP 4 Review & Renew
Description	This is the deliberate decision of the minister to undertake the process, seek a mandate from the political centre and engagement with the department. *(Allow 3 weeks)*	This second step involves the formal commissioning of the key input, the "Compass Pack", with the department. *(Allow 2–3 weeks)*	Hold an initial workshop (6-8 hours). Consider the inputs, other context and discuss potential priorities. Develop draft Priorities and related content. *(Allow 1 week of reading for the pack; set aside a whole day for workshop)*	Offline sprint involving office and key departmental officers to develop detailed Priorities. *(Allow 3 weeks)*	Settle Priorities and the related actions in a second, shorter workshop *(2–4 hours)*. *(Set aside half a day)*	The routine of regular reporting and discussion to track progress commences, with quarterly deep dives and an annual revisiting and amendment of Priorities. *(Allow 2 weeks to start routines)*
The Minister and their Office	▪ The minister and senior staff agree to develop a Priorities Plan using the Framework. ▪ A specific staffer is given responsibility for coordination for the initial steps. ▪ A decision is made relating to the group/process to be used including whether an internal or external facilitator is to be used. ▪ Diary time is allocated for the two workshops (if that is the model), and notice is given to the secretary and their senior staff. ▪ The appropriate authorising environment is identified. A mandate is sought from the political centre to undertake the process, and where appropriate, seek permission to submit the plan to the appropriate Cabinet Committee. ▪ Identify and confirm linkages to the relevant WoG process and other critical guidance, eg Charter Letters and election policy commitments.	▪ The specific workshop agenda is agreed upon with the minister, including the line-by-line process for developing and confirming the priorities. ▪ The Compass Pack and specific inclusions are then discussed across the four elements: – Obligations – Performance to date – Context – Prospective view	Depending on the agreed form of the process, a workshop will include: ▪ The Compass Pack is provided at least one week in advance for consideration. ▪ Secretary plus 1–2 other officers to attend initial part of workshop. ▪ Discuss the Input Pack and note both the interesting and the important content. ▪ Discuss other related considerations and identify key issues. ▪ Identify priorities for medium term (e.g. 3 years), including viability, risk and return. ▪ Agree 3–4 draft priorities including potential actions for each. Ensure there is a mixed portfolio of risk, likely resource and effort requirements, and impact. (**see overleaf**) ▪ The actions are developed as a small group activity. ▪ The second part of the workshop will focus on the general political and electoral issues and consider further potential priorities/actions. ▪ Draft priorities and actions are revised further based on the political discussion.	▪ Over a two-week period, the minister's office works with the department to fully develop the Priorities and actions. This includes: ▪ The issue that is being responded to by a potential Priority is well defined, and what success looks like is understood. ▪ Key assumptions are tested, including stakeholder positions and challenges. ▪ Confirming action responsibilities across the office and the department. ▪ Confirming milestones and key metrics. ▪ Reviewing the draft content and discussing it directly with the minister. ▪ The required resourcing is identified, and (where relevant) the department providing a resourcing plan that may include reprioritisation. ▪ Engaging with the political and public service centres where appropriate. ▪ Engaging with ministers and departments with a shared interest in the proposed Priorities.	Key steps in the workshop include: ▪ Review and finalise the draft Policy Plan, consistent with any Cabinet Committee requirements. ▪ Participants will have had at least three working days to consider the revised draft Priority Plan prior to the workshop. ▪ Test the assumptions – developments since initial workshop; potential opponents; what would the critic say? ▪ Delineating between shared interests with the department (hallmarks, policy priorities, stewardship) and the political content. The latter requires actions and reporting from within the office. ▪ Confirm the responsibilities, implementation steps, reporting and review routines. ▪ Agree the routine for reporting, including meeting cadence and subsequent reviews. ▪ Confirm minister's approval. ▪ A second part of the workshop will focus on the political and electoral aspects. Specific party political content should be managed and discussed separately to core material.	▪ The Priorities and related Actions are communicated to all staff in the minister's office, the political centre and the senior leadership of the department. ▪ Settle the final form and timing of written reports. The reports should include: – a visual prompt of progress (eg traffic lights), – progress since the previous report, – enough text to explain actions/ circumstances, and – key Department and Office contacts. ▪ New Priority Plan related meetings need to be established within a wider, structured set of routines. (See overleaf for example schedule). Those specific diary entries are for only discussing the Priority Plan. These meetings must be kept ▪ Confirm the meeting arrangements and the intersection with existing meetings ▪ Update the political centre on the process, including final form of the Priorities. ▪ Schedule an annual full revisit.
Department	▪ Minister to hold a strategic discussion with the secretary (or lead deputy secretary) on potential priorities, key constraints and key inputs.	▪ The Compass Pack is commissioned with department; it is informed by the office discussion (above) complemented by the initial discussion held between minister and secretary.	▪ The first part of the workshop will include the secretary plus 1–2 other senior officers. ▪ The secretary needs to be updated following the workshop conclusion on the final output and progress in developing the Priorities.	▪ Working in collaboration with senior staff in the minister's office. ▪ Liaison with the public service centre (DPC/DPMC/Treasury etc).	▪ The first part of the workshop will include the secretary plus 1-2 other senior officers. ▪ There is a subsequent debrief between the minister and the secretary.	▪ Production of reports to meet timelines aligned with minister and office meetings. ▪ Secretary to meet monthly with the minister on the Priority Plan.
What else?	▪ Allow time for the political centre to consider the request and respond. ▪ Manage the complexities of multiple department ministers. ▪ Identify an appropriate facilitator who is not the minister.	▪ The Input Pack should be received by workshop attendees in a timely manner – at least one week prior to the first workshop. ▪ A checklist for the Compass Pack is provided **overleaf**.	▪ A draft workshop agenda is provided **overleaf** – it is a default option. Experienced ministers may wish to vary the format and content.	▪ An iterative process can be used in engaging directly with the minister during this period, particularly if there are key assumptions that need to be revised or the resourcing requirements are significantly more than anticipated.	▪ Experienced ministers may wish to vary the format and content.	▪ Ministers may wish to take the opportunity to allocate routine time in their diary for pursuing priorities, for policy workshops, stakeholder engagement and/or background reading.

Choices for the Workshop format

The workshop format can be varied depending on the style and experience of the minister. Newer ministers should always use a formal process. Options include:

i. "Experienced" – the minister develops the priorities and presents them to senior staff.
ii. "Discussion" – the minister works with a small group of senior staff with an informal process.
iii. "Small meeting" – the minister and senior staff meet for one or two formal sessions to develop and settle priorities.
iv. "Office meeting" – the minister and all private office staff meet for two sessions session to develop and settle priorities.
v. "Office facilitated meeting" – the minister and all private office.

What makes a good priority?

Three questions to be asked of the draft Priorities are:

1. Ask if it creates a sense of ambition. Pursuing an easily achieved priority defeats the purpose of setting priorities. It needs to be ambitious for the minister, staff and internal stakeholders. It should be of high impact in an output, outcome and societal impact sense.
2. Ask whether or not you'll know whether you have achieved it or not. Like a train arriving at a station, the priority can be measured so that everyone involved understands what success will look like – or not.
3. Ask whether it is understandable and achievable – The priority should be appropriately general but not banal. Conversely, it shouldn't be so narrow that it can be completed in one project in a short amount of time.

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KEY GUIDANCE FOR THE DIPR PROCESS

I — The key input – the Compass Pack

Checklist for inputs across the four elements:

Obligations

Options for inclusion include:

- ☐ Election policy delivery
- ☐ Delivery of other major initiatives
- ☐ Directions and frameworks from the centre, including Charter Letters or specific correspondence on guidance relating to strategic policy directions
- ☐ Specific internal and external reporting obligations
- ☐ Budget process requirements including critical paths
- ☐ Central political guidance*
- ☐ .....
- ☐ .....

Performance assessment

Options for inclusion include:

- ☐ Departmental stocktake – key projects underway, critical and emerging issues, strategic risks for department
- ☐ Reflections on previous strategic planning activities
- ☐ Key indicators on program delivery – supply and demand sides
- ☐ Key datasets external to the portfolio
- ☐ Emerging issues and related community attitudes
- ☐ Strategic and operational risks including fiscal and other constraints
- ☐ .....

Operating context

Options for inclusion include:

- ☐ Departmental observations on like jurisdictions
- ☐ Key readings and articles relevant to the portfolio
- ☐ What works resources
- ☐ Views and priorities of key stakeholders
- ☐ Public opinion
- ☐ What others are doing – comparative – and Intergovernmental and related portfolio considerations
- ☐ PESTLE Analysis
- ☐ Electoral overlay*
- ☐ .....

Prospective view

Options for inclusion include:

- ☐ Department priority suggestions (1 page each)
- ☐ Known dates and events in future
- ☐ Megatrends, as prepared by trusted source
- ☐ Content from key references, in particular the Incoming Government Brief (or Incoming Minister Brief) along with other relevant Government reports
- ☐ Scenarios / Futures
- ☐ Foresight projects – eg UK and UK2 and NZ LTIs
- ☐ Other stewardship considerations
- ☐ Election cycle insights*
- ☐ .....

** denotes political content for office and minister provision only. This content would be developed in the office rather than by the department.*

P-1 — Workshop 1 draft agenda

The below draft workshop agenda and run sheet is provided as guidance.

Minutes Allocation/ total	Agenda item	Description / process
5/5	*Opening*	Review agenda for the day.
45/50	*Review of Compass Pack*	Discuss the content of the Input Compass pack, with the participants requested to identify the issues they found either "interesting" and the "important", with a running list of both being recorded. The discussion is based on discussing the four elements in order.
10/60	*Capacity and capability restraints*	Discuss any capacity and capability restraints in the office and the department. Note the key restraints.
10/70	*Administrivia*	Discuss, list and then put aside the lesser administrative issues participants wish to raise for off-line resolution. Chief of Staff to take carriage.
15/85	*Minister's positioning*	Discuss the minister's own role, their policy ambition and overall positioning. Have the minister initially speak to this.
15/100	*Narrow the key issues*	Narrow the issues on the "interesting" and "important" lists based on the discussion above; narrow to a key set of issues (4–8 in total).
30/130	*Long list of potential priorities*	Discuss potential priorities based on direct responses to each of the issues on the narrowed list, and bring together a working list of options. Focus on a multi-year horizon of 2 to 4 years. Identify any positioning or overarching positioning or approach of the minister/office that should be pursued as an overarching aspect of the Priorities Plan.
45/175	*Narrow the field of potential priorities*	Discuss the viability of each long-listed priority on the basis of: ▪ The bandwidth of office staff and of the department and the subsequent capacity to pursue it, ▪ Alignment with other efforts and activities, including Budget process, ▪ The overall risk/difficulty associated with the proposed priority, ▪ Potential enemies and opponents for each, ▪ The effort, time and resources required, including the required political capital, and ▪ The potential impact for the community.
15/200	*Break*	Department staff leave at this time.
30/230	*Political context discussion*	Consider the wider political context for the period ahead, including the electoral cycle. Is there an overarching sense of "where do we want to go" to bring clarity and consistency to the priorities. Discuss the minister's own political positioning.
20/250	*Agree initial draft set of Priorities.*	Agree to an initial three to six priorities and the time horizon(s) for each. Ensure there is a mixed portfolio of risk, likely resource and effort requirements, and potential impact. (see to the left)
120/370	*Build out each draft Priority* – small group *activity*	For each of the shortlisted priorities, undertake the initial development of potential actions and/or projects for the initial period (12–18 months). Articulate the sequencing and resource requirement of the actions. Confirm staff and departmental potential responsibilities so they are clear, and related milestones are also identified. This initial activity is best done over 2 hours in small groups of 2–4 people for each priority. A refreshment break is built into this activity.
40/410	*Report back and next steps*	A report back of the draft actions is undertaken with the larger group. Minister provides feedback and confirms their comfort with the overall priorities. A draft document is produced to record the content for the next stage.
10/420	*Close*	

P-2 — Guidance – Mixed portfolio of priorities

In settling the initial draft of the Priorities, a mixed portfolio is recommended to ensure there is a balance of associated risk and resource demands – with an understanding that there will also variability in impact. An example scenario is provided below.

	Risk	Intensity of Resource Requirements	Potential Impact
	Incl stakeholder risk, internal political risk, implementation risk, & reputation risk.	Includes where there is a **significant** demand on financial resources, the minister's time, staff time, and/or departmental focus.	Includes narrow portfolio metrics and wider societal and economic metrics.
Priority 1 – ...	High	Medium (minister's time, staff time)	High
Priority 2 – ...	Medium	High (minister's time, financial)	High
Priority 3 – ...	Medium	High (departmental focus)	High
Priority 4 – ...	Low	Medium (staff time)	Medium
Priority 5 – ...	Low	Medium (financial)	Medium

R — Potential meeting routines to pursue priorities – and balance with the day to day demands.

Meeting name	Who	When	What
Secretary's Update	Minister, secretary, CoS, key senior staff	Weekly / 30m	Current and emerging high priority meetings
Secretary's Priorities Update	Minister, secretary, CoS, key senior staff	Monthly / 60m	Discuss progress of Strategic Priorities
Priorities – Quarterly Deep Dive	Minister, secretary, CoS, all senior staff, departmental execs as required.	Quarterly / 3 hr	In depth discussion of Strategic Priorities; extended session on one Priority.
Daily staff update	All staff	Daily / 10m	Update on the day/following day
Minister – Senior staff	Minister, CoS, all senior staff	Weekly / 30m	Week ahead, key issues
Minister – Senior staff on Priorities	Minister, CoS, all senior staff	Monthly / 60m	Week prior to Secretary's Priorities update
Staff meeting	All staff	Weekly / 60m	Week ahead and Priorities update

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