

In Our Own Hands — a one-page summary for MPs

Who controls the AI New Zealand depends on · draft for
discussion, June 2026

In June 2026, a single overseas order disrupted access to a major AI tool for users worldwide. New Zealand’s public services and economy increasingly run on tools like it — built, hosted, and controlled offshore. The ability to change them, to mine what we feed them, or to switch them off sits with others. We are giving that control away by default, one contract at a time, without ever deciding to.

The issue. AI now runs through our economy, our public services and the decisions made about people — but the control sits offshore. Our compute and the leading models are foreign-owned and reachable under foreign law (the US CLOUD Act, FISA 702; China’s intelligence law), and access can be cut without our say, as a US order demonstrated on 12 June 2026. At the same time, sensitive New Zealand information leaves the country every day through ordinary AI use: in the largest cross-country study, **48% of employees had entered sensitive company or customer data into public AI tools**, and 56% had used AI at work unsure whether they were allowed to. New Zealand’s 2025 AI strategy covers adoption only. It is silent on who controls the AI we depend on, where it runs, under whose law, and where our data goes.

Why this should be cross-party. This is national-interest infrastructure, not a partisan contest. The change is on the scale of the climate transition — but unlike climate, we are still early enough to choose our path. A direction set in common will outlast any one government, and the commitments below are, at heart, rights New Zealanders already hold carried into the AI age. They are hard for any party to reject.

What we are asking you to do.

1. **Support a select committee inquiry** (Economic Development, Science and Innovation) into who controls the AI New Zealand depends on.
2. **Stand with other parties on seven common-ground commitments.**

The seven commitments. (1) Authority stays here. (2) People move up, not out. (3) Sensitive information stays home. (4) We respect Te Tiriti and Māori data sovereignty. (5) People decide, machines assist. (6) What public AI does is checkable. (7) We build our own capability, with others.

The plan — mostly using machinery we already have.

- **Phase 1 (now, low cost):** a procurement test on where AI runs and where data goes; a data-handling standard; and a public register and audit of significant government AI.
- **Phase 2 (the one real spend):** a national capability fund — compute access plus advice — so the small businesses, communities and agencies the market leaves behind can adopt AI they control. Indicatively in the low tens of millions over three to four years, benchmarked to Canada and Singapore, to be costed precisely by Treasury and MBIE.
- **Phase 3:** a cross-party home for the direction, public systems connected on open standards rather than one central database, and a built-in review.

The cost. Almost all of it is rules and standards — administrative, and able to begin now. There is one modest, phased, benchmarked fund, and one genuinely new institution (an AI oversight-and-register function). Everything else repurposes roles New Zealand already has.

New Zealand can still choose its own path on this — if we act while the window is open.

The one question we would value your answer to: will you support the inquiry, and back the seven commitments?

Read the full proposal: agenticgovernance.digital/papers/in-our-own-hands-policy-proposal.html

Put forward by John G. Stroh (My Digital Sovereignty Ltd), with a declared commercial interest in sovereign-AI infrastructure. Not a procurement — a contribution to a public decision.