

# Report



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**  
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA



**Date:** 11 February 2026      **Security Level:** IN CONFIDENCE  
**To:** Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Social Development and  
Employment  
**File Reference:** REP/26/2/083

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## Proposed shortlist for the role of Children's Commissioner

### Purpose of the report

- 1 This report proposes an initial shortlist of candidates for the role of Children's Commissioner (the Commissioner) for any feedback you wish to provide.
- 2 Applications must be reviewed by a statutory nomination panel, which will make a recommendation for your consideration as part of determining a candidate to recommend to the Governor-General for appointment.

### Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **note** that following an open recruitment period 10 applications for the role of Commissioner have been received, with the full candidate list set out in Appendix 1
- 2 **note** an initial shortlist of four candidates is being proposed for the nomination panel's focus: Dr Claire Achmad (the incumbent Commissioner), s 9(2)(a) and Jane Searle
- 3 **agree** to provide any feedback on the initial shortlist to the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) via your office as promptly as practicable, to support the review of candidates by the nomination panel

 **Agree / Disagree**

- 4 **note** that, subject to receipt of your feedback and the subsequent review of applications by the nomination panel, we expect advice on a recommended candidate to be provided to you in late March 2026.



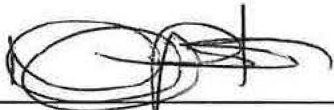
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Sacha O'Dea  
Deputy Chief Executive  
Strategy and Insights

11/2/26

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Date



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Hon Louise Upston  
Minister for Social Development and  
Employment

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Date

## Background to the Children's Commissioner appointment process

- 3 The term of the current Commissioner expires on 31 July 2026. As an independent Crown entity, the Commissioner is appointed by the Governor-General on your recommendation as responsible Minister.
- 4 The Children's Commissioner Act 2022 (the Act) imposes specific elements into the overall appointment process. In summary, the elements are:
  - a. applications must include an endorsement from a relevant organisation specified in the Children's Commissioner (Relevant Agencies) Regulations 2023
  - b. applications must be reviewed by a nomination panel (convened by MSD's Chief Executive), who will then make a recommendation to you
  - c. in reaching a decision on who to recommend to the Governor-General for appointment, you must then have regard to candidates' knowledge and experience, the required skills and leadership experience to carry out the role, and the panel's recommendation.
- 5 Following your agreement to the appointment process for the Commissioner [REP/25/11/917 refers], candidates were sought via advertising and a nomination call to your ministerial colleagues and the Coalition partners. A copy of the position description used in advertising and the nomination call is attached as Appendix 2.
- 6 A total of 10 applications were received with the required endorsement. The list of applicants is set out in Appendix 1.

## Proposed candidate shortlist for the nomination panel to focus on

- 7 The nomination panel is in the process of being convened. To assist the panel in its consideration of the applications, we have prepared an initial shortlist of candidates to focus on. The panel would be provided with all applications for context.
- 8 The following table lists, in alphabetical order, those we are proposing the nominations panel focuses on for review and interview.

| Candidate        | Current and immediate past roles                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dr Claire ACHMAD | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children's Commissioner (2025–present)</li><li>• Chief Children's Commissioner, Children and Young People's Commission (2023–2025)</li></ul> |

| Candidate   | Current and immediate past roles                                                                                                                                |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| s 9(2)(a)   |                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Jane SEARLE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Executive Officer, Child Matters (2017–present)</li> <li>• General Manager, Child Matters (2015–2017)</li> </ul> |

- 9 Given the requirement under the Act that, in reaching a candidate decision, you must have regard to candidates' knowledge and experience, it would be helpful to have your feedback on the initial shortlist above. For example, whether there are any key considerations or areas of expertise you would like the nomination panel to focus on.
- 10 Feedback can be provided via your office. Alternatively, officials are available if you wish to discuss the proposed shortlist and provide any feedback directly.
- 11 We have not included candidates' full applications with this report. However, we can provide application materials to your office if that would be helpful.

## Next steps

- 12 Subject to receipt of any feedback you wish to provide, we will prepare the candidate review pack to support the nomination panel. The pack will include application materials, the position description and information on the process and any key considerations.
- 13 We expect advice on a recommended candidate to be provided to you in late March 2026. We will keep your office updated on the nomination panel's progress and the expected delivery of the candidate advice.

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of all applicants for the role of Children's Commissioner

Appendix 2: Children's Commissioner 2026 position description

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## Appendix 1: Summary of applicants for role of Children's Commissioner

| Candidate        | Current and recent roles (last five years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dr Claire ACHMAD | <p><b>Employment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children's Commissioner (2025–present)</li><li>• Chief Children's Commissioner, Children and Young People's Commission (2023–2025)</li><li>• Chief Executive Officer, Social Service Providers Aotearoa (2021–2023)</li></ul> <p><b>Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Special Advisor, Child Identity Protection (2021–present)</li><li>• Member, Gymnastics New Zealand Steering Committee (2021–2023)</li></ul> |
| s 9(2)(a)        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

| Candidate   | Current and recent roles (last five years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Jane SEARLE | <p><b>Employment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Executive Officer, Child Matters (2017–present), previously General Manager (2015–2017)</li> </ul> <p><b>Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member, Whānau Fund (2023–2024)</li> <li>• Deputy Presiding Member, Sacred Heart Girls’ College, Hamilton (2022–present)</li> <li>• Member, Tautoko Tane Male Survivors Aotearoa (2022–present)</li> <li>• Member, Tautoko Tane Male Support Services Waikato (2021–present)</li> </ul> |

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# Children's Commissioner

## Position Description, 2026

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### The Commissioner role

The Children's Commissioner (the Commissioner) is a highly visible and significant advocate and champion for the children and young people of New Zealand.

The Commissioner's role is set out in the [Children's Commissioner Act 2022](#) and can be grouped into three areas:

- promoting the interests and well-being of children and young people
- promoting and advancing the rights of children and young people
- encouraging children and young people's participation and voices.

The Commissioner is also a 'National Preventative Mechanism' under the [Crimes of Torture Act 1989](#). This means the Commissioner has responsibilities under the Optional Protocol to the United National Convention Against Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) to examine places where children are detained and make any recommendations it considers appropriate.

The Commissioner is a corporation sole and an independent Crown entity for the purposes of the [Crown Entities Act 2004](#). Being a corporation sole means the Commissioner holds the responsibilities of a crown entity board under that Act as well as being its administrative head.

### Workload and remuneration

The Commissioner is a full-time role. As a corporation sole, the Commissioner cannot, without the prior approval of the responsible Minister, hold any office of trust or profit or engage in any occupation for reward outside their responsibilities as a member of the corporation sole.

The [Remuneration Authority](#) is responsible for determining and reviewing the remuneration for the Commissioner. The level of remuneration will reflect the nature of the role, and the skills and experience of the appointee.

Actual and reasonable travel and other expenses incurred in carrying out the Commissioner role are paid in accordance with the [Cabinet Fees Framework](#).

### Term of office

As an independent Crown entity, under the Crown Entities Act the Commissioner is appointed for a term of up to five years by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Minister for Social Development and Employment (the Minister).

## Appointment process

In reaching a decision on who to recommend to the Governor-General, the Children's Commissioner Act requires the Minister to have regard to:

- candidates' knowledge and experience in children's and young people's rights and issues, knowledge and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori knowledge, and experience in tikanga Māori
- the skills and leadership experience needed to carry out the role
- the recommendation from a nominations panel.

The nominations panel is convened by the Ministry of Social Development's Chief Executive to assess candidates and make a recommendation to the Minister. The panel must consist of persons who collectively have expertise and experience in working with children and young people, governance, appointment and recruitment, and Māori leadership.

The Children's Commissioner Act requires candidates to have, as part of their application, the endorsement of one of the relevant agencies specified in the [Children's Commissioner \(Relevant Agencies\) Regulations 2023](#), namely:

- a national organisation that represents Māori, particularly Māori welfare
- an organisation that has the mandate to represent an iwi
- an organisation that works with or for children and young people, including (without limitation) any organisation focused on advocacy for children and young people, and their rights
- an organisation focused on services or support of children and young people, including (without limitation) any organisation focused on their health and well-being, and disability services or support
- an organisation led by children or young people
- an organisation that represents the views and ideas of children and young people, including (without limitation) the views and ideas of children or young people with experience of care.

## The Children's Commissioner office, Mana Mokopuna

Under the Crown Entities Act and the Children's Commissioner Act, the 'Children's Commissioner' refers to both the Commissioner role and the entity they lead. However, the entity is generally referred to as the Children's Commissioner office, [Mana Mokopuna](#), to help avoid confusion.

An Executive Director provides the day-to-day management of the office, which is based in Wellington and has approximately 40 staff providing monitoring, advocacy, policy, corporate and communications expertise to support the Commissioner in fulfilling their statutory functions and duties. Funding is through a dedicated appropriation in Vote Social Development.

## Oversight of the Oranga Tamariki system

Under the [Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Act 2022](#), the Commissioner has common duties with the [Independent Children's Monitor](#) and [Ombudsman](#) duties when carrying out work relating to children and young people in the Oranga Tamariki system.

The three entities work together closely to provide oversight of the Oranga Tamariki system, through three core functions:

- system-level advocacy for all children and young people – provided by the Commissioner
- strong, independent monitoring – provided by the Independent Children's Monitor
- an independent complaints and investigation function – provided by the Ombudsman.

## Guidance and induction

The Public Service Commission has general guidance for [Crown entity board members](#) on the frameworks, duties and expectations that apply (noting that the Commissioner is a board of one). A specific induction programme is provided for an appointee to the role of Commissioner.

Information on the person appointed as Commissioner is collected and securely held by the Public Service Commission in a specialist system, 'AppointNet'. For more details, please see the [AppointNet privacy statement](#).

## Disqualification

Certain people are disqualified from being the Commissioner under section 30 of the Crown Entities Act 2004.

- A person who is an undischarged bankrupt.
- A person who is prohibited from being a director or promoter of, or being concerned or taking part in the management of, an incorporated or unincorporated body under the Companies Act 1993, or the Financial Markets Conduct Act 2013, or the Takeovers Act 1993.
- A person who is subject to a property order under the Protection of Personal and Property Rights Act 1988 or a personal order under that Act that reflects adversely on the person's competence to manage their affairs in relation to their property or capacity to make or communicate decisions relation to their personal care and welfare.
- A person who has been convicted of an offence punishable by imprisonment for a term of 2 years or more, or who has been sentenced to imprisonment for any other offence, unless that person has obtained a pardon, served the sentence, or otherwise suffered the penalty imposed on the person.
- A member of Parliament.

## Person profile

The Commissioner must have senior-level experience in advocacy and leadership and be able to build relationships with children and young people, Ministers, iwi, Māori organisations, government agencies, national and international organisations, and a range of experts and advocates.

### Advocacy

- A commitment to championing children's interests.
- The ability to positively influence opinions and behaviours of stakeholders and the public.
- The ability to understand and engage with complex issues and situations and use research and data to reach informed decisions.
- Outstanding communication skills, including the ability to speak on sensitive and nuanced topics with the media, public and senior leaders.
- Knowledge of, and experience in, children's and young people's rights and issues, including knowledge of New Zealand and international law on children's rights
- Knowledge and understanding of the Oranga Tamariki system.
- An understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi and knowledge of, and experience in, tikanga Māori.
- Knowledge and recognition of the social, cultural, and religious values of different cultural and ethnic groups in New Zealand.
- The ability to exercise sound judgement at all times while remaining both politically neutral and being an independent advocate.

### Leadership

- Experience in providing strategic leadership, engaging others in a common vision, and setting clear policies and priorities.
- The ability to develop, lead and maintain effective relationships with Ministers, other senior public service officials, and stakeholders.
- Knowledge of public sector accountability processes and an understanding of the relationship between Ministers, Crown entities and Parliament.
- The ability to lead and communicate in a clear, persuasive, and impactful way, to convince others to embrace change and take action.
- Being able to connect with and inspire people, to build a highly motivated, engaged and respectful team.