

2026

Building the Future: New Zealand's Next Billion Customers

Building the Future: New Zealand's Next Billion Customers

Introduction

National believes New Zealand is a trading nation. We create jobs and lift incomes by supporting great Kiwi companies to compete on the world stage for a rising share of global trade and investment.

That can sound abstract, but the impact of trade is deeply local.

When a Hawke's Bay apple grower wins preferential access to a market of 1.4 billion people, or a kiwifruit grower in Te Puke gets tariff-free access to India ahead of every other country in the world, that means better returns at the orchard gate and more jobs in the packhouse. When a Marlborough winery sees tariffs fall from 150 per cent to 25 per cent, the vineyard hires more staff and invests in expansion. When a Southland sheep farmer sells lamb duty-free into new markets, that's more money flowing into rural towns, local schools and main-street businesses.

Ultimately, more trade means higher wages, more jobs and more money in people's pockets. Trade supports one in four New Zealand jobs. Our goal of doubling export value by 2034 is not just a number – it's a plan for stronger communities right across New Zealand, from the orchard to the factory floor to the main street.

That's why in our first term, National has been relentlessly focused on making New Zealand exporters more competitive offshore. In the last three years, National has:

- Completed an FTA with India, which eliminates or reduces tariffs on 95% of our exports.
- Brought the NZ–EU Free Trade Agreement into force ahead of schedule, supporting an additional \$3 billion in exports to the European Union.
- Completed New Zealand's first FTA in the Middle East with the UAE, which eliminates duties on 98.5% of exports, supporting a 37.9% growth in exports since the deal was signed.
- Completed negotiations with the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, an economic bloc worth \$4 trillion in GDP, which eliminates duties for 99% of our exports over 10 years.
- Completed 23 trade missions to 18 countries, generating \$2 billion of deals and commitments.
- Eliminated \$733 million of non-tariff barriers.

National's trade agenda has supported rapid growth in exports, which have risen from \$94.4 billion to \$114.1 billion, on track to exceed our objective of doubling New Zealand's exports by 2034.

Major contributors to that success have included our food and fibre exports, projected to hit \$64.3 billion this year, and international tourism, now worth \$13.7 billion.

Now, National is announcing how we secure New Zealand's Next Billion Customers.

We will do this by:

- Prioritising new trade deals with European, South American, African and Asian countries.
- Negotiating new essential supplies agreements with like-minded partners, using the NZ–Singapore AOTES agreement as the template.
- Cutting red tape by expanding paperless trade and digital customs, eliminating \$1 billion in non-tariff barriers.

- Creating new tools for businesses to help streamline their export experience.
- Giving New Zealand Trade and Enterprise a sharper mandate – leading Kiwi businesses to new opportunities and backing the next generation of exporters.
- Completing at least 23 trade missions over the next term, with a sharper focus on sector-specific missions and measurable commercial outcomes.
- Re-affirm our commitment to doubling the value of exports by 2034.

Prioritising new trade deals

In the last three years, National has worked hard to conclude new trade arrangements, bring existing trade agreements into force sooner, and bolster traditional trade arrangements, with new agreements that protect New Zealand from the risks of a more volatile world, like the Agreement on Trade in Essential Supplies with Singapore.

With the India Free Trade Agreement signed and now progressing through Parliament, National is focused on securing the next phase of New Zealand's trade agenda. That starts with an intention to commence trade negotiations with seven new economies in the next five years.

In the next five years, National will commence negotiations with:

Market	Population	GDP of country (USD)	NZ exports (NZD)
Brazil	214 million	\$2.19 trillion	\$205.81 million
Switzerland	8.7 million	\$936.56 billion	\$467.64 million
Argentina	46 million	\$638.37 billion	\$75.2 million
EFTA (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway)	6 million	\$525.09 billion	\$83.78 million
Bangladesh	178 million	\$450.12 billion	\$670.15 million
Nigeria	242 million	\$252.26 billion	\$224.99 million
Uruguay	3.5 million	\$80.96 billion	\$27.36 million

These seven markets combined represent almost 700 million people and a GDP of more than US\$5 trillion, similar to the size of the German and Japanese economies today, and growing rapidly.

Meanwhile, the total value of New Zealand's exports to those countries is just \$1.8 billion, demonstrating the scale of the opportunity. These are large, fast-growing economies with rising demand for the high-quality food, fibre, services, technology, and expertise New Zealand can offer, fitting into three broad categories:

- High value, high-income European economies
- Large, high-growth South American economies
- Emerging high growth, high potential Asian/African economies

Each category offers a distinct opportunity for New Zealand.

- Switzerland and the EFTA states are home to some of the wealthiest consumers in the world, paying premium prices for high-quality food and offering deep markets for New Zealand services and technology.
- Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay anchor a South American continent of more than 400 million people, where New Zealand's agritech, services and specialised food and beverage exports are well placed to grow.
- Bangladesh and Nigeria are among the fastest-growing large economies on earth, with young populations, rapidly expanding middle classes and rising demand for the safe, high-quality food New Zealand produces.

A re-elected National Government will prioritise commencement of negotiations with each of these economies in the next five years, focusing on better access for Kiwi companies to boost exports, create jobs and lift incomes.

This is an ambitious programme, but National has already shown it can be done. In the last two and a half years, National has signed three high-quality free trade agreements, with India, the United Arab Emirates and the Gulf Cooperation Council, while also bringing the NZ–EU FTA into force ahead of schedule.

A re-elected National Government will apply the same disciplined approach that delivered those agreements: clear negotiating mandates set early, sustained ministerial engagement, and a relentless focus on high-quality, commercially meaningful outcomes for exporters. New Zealand's reputation as a serious, reliable negotiating partner – reinforced by the India, UAE and Gulf agreements, means partners come to the table knowing that a deal with New Zealand can be done quickly, and done well.

Following that next tranche of immediate trade priorities, National has identified six other economies for trade negotiation, with negotiations to commence over the next decade, between now and 2036:

- South Africa
- Turkey
- Colombia (via Pacific Alliance)
- Morocco
- Sri Lanka
- Mauritius

Together, these two tranches span thirteen economies and almost one billion people – New Zealand's next billion customers.

In addition to opening new doors, National will focus on getting more value from the trade agreements New Zealand already has. That means:

- Growing services exports, which have already increased from around 23% to 27% of total exports under National, and driving them towards 35% of total export value by 2030.
- Modernising our existing FTAs, starting with China, by shifting to a negative list approach so services markets are treated as open unless specific restrictions are listed.
- Growing the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement.
- Pursuing a digital trade agreement between the CPTPP and the European Union.
- Continuing to expand the membership of CPTPP and RCEP so New Zealand exporters have better access into some of the world's most dynamic economies.

The AOTES Agreement: a new model for trade security

On 4 May 2026, New Zealand and Singapore signed the Agreement on Trade in Essential Supplies (AOTES) – a landmark agreement that ensures both countries maintain the flow of essential goods to each other during times of disruption, shortage or crisis.

AOTES is a direct response to the supply chain shocks of recent years – from COVID-19 to the Suez Canal disruptions and the war in Iran – that exposed how quickly global trade in critical goods can seize up. For a small, open trading nation like New Zealand, reliable access to essential supplies is a matter of national security as much as economic policy.

What AOTES delivers:

- Guarantees that essential goods – including food, medicines, medical supplies and critical inputs – continue to flow between New Zealand and Singapore, even during emergencies or global supply disruptions.
- Commits both countries to avoid imposing export restrictions on essential supplies to each other, providing New Zealand businesses and consumers with greater certainty.
- Creates a framework for rapid information sharing and coordination when supply chains come under pressure, so governments can act quickly to protect access to critical goods.
- Positions New Zealand as a trusted, reliable supplier of food and agricultural products to Singapore and the broader region – reinforcing our reputation as a safe, stable source of premium exports.

Singapore is one of New Zealand's most important trade and investment partners, and a gateway to Southeast Asian markets. AOTES deepens that relationship and sets a new standard for how like-minded trading nations can work together to build supply chain resilience.

A re-elected National Government will:

- Use AOTES as a template, negotiating essential supplies agreements with other like-minded partners to protect New Zealand's access to critical goods and cement our position as a trusted trade partner.
- Extend the AOTES model across the FIT Partnership, developing shared early-warning systems and supply chain resilience frameworks with our closest trading partners.

Expanding paperless trade and digital customs

Making trade easier for our exporters is also a priority.

A re-elected National Government will drive the next phase of the Future of Investment and Trade Partnership, a fast-growing network of 16 like-minded economies that New Zealand helped convene with Singapore, Switzerland, and the UAE. The FIT Partnership is expected to expand to more than 20 members in the near future – making it an increasingly significant force for trade facilitation among small and mid-sized open economies.

We will use this platform to cut the practical costs of trade, expand paperless documentation, reduce non-tariff barriers, strengthen supply chains, and make it easier for exporters to move goods and services across borders faster and at lower cost.

Through the FIT Partnership, a re-elected National Government will pursue four practical workstreams:

- Paperless trade and digital standards: extending real-time digital trade documentation across the FIT network, building on the NZ–Singapore electronic certification arrangement.
- Non-tariff barrier elimination: using the FIT Partnership as a coordinating platform to identify and systematically remove non-tariff barriers across member markets.
- Supply chain resilience: extending the AOTES model of shared frameworks and early-warning systems across the FIT network.
- Mutual recognition agreements: aligning standards and regulatory requirements to lower compliance costs for exporters operating across multiple markets.

A re-elected National Government will also modernise the border systems exporters rely on. Building on New Zealand and Singapore's electronic certification arrangement, we will expand real-time digital certification to the UK and more of our closest trading partners, while investing in automated customs and origin systems so New Zealand products clear borders faster, with fewer delays and lower compliance costs.

Together, these measures will help remove more of the practical barriers exporters face, building on the \$733 million in non-tariff barriers eliminated since 2023 and supporting our objective of eliminating a further \$1 billion in non-tariff barriers by 2030.

A re-elected National Government will:

- Drive the next phase of the FIT Partnership to reduce trade frictions among small and medium-sized trading nations.
- Modernise red tape at the border for exporters, with a focus on expanding paperless trade and digitalised systems.

New AI tools to streamline businesses' export experience

New Zealand's FTA network reaches more than 60 countries, but the benefits are not always immediately apparent. Exporters often have to navigate thousands of tariff lines, certification requirements, customs procedures, and regulatory conditions. For many businesses, this means paying for specialist advice before they even know whether a market is worth pursuing.

As a result, too many New Zealand businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, are leaving money on the table because they don't understand the tariff advantages, market access rules and regulatory requirements that our agreements have secured for them.

A re-elected National Government will help exporters make better use of New Zealand's trade agreements by creating **three AI-powered digital tools:**

- an FTA tariff adviser,
- a rules of origin navigator, and
- a market access requirements tool.

These will be natural language AI tools rather than conventional databases, where exporters describe their product and destination market in plain English, and the tools provide the tariff preference they qualify for, the rules of origin they must meet to claim it, and the requirements that apply before their goods ship. For exporters, that means they will not need to know tariff classifications, or read the legal text of the agreements themselves.

New Zealand Trade and Enterprise: a sharper focus on growth

New Zealand Trade and Enterprise is the engine room of our export growth strategy. NZTE currently works with around 1,000 companies to grow and expand their exports to important markets around the world – providing in-market intelligence, buyer connections and capability building that help businesses take the next step in their export journey. Under a re-elected National Government, NZTE will be given a sharper mandate, more resources in key markets and a clearer mission: helping more New Zealand businesses sell more to the world.

From follow to lead

Historically, NZTE has largely responded to the interests and requests of companies seeking export support – a responsive model that has served many exporters well. A re-elected National Government will ask NZTE to do more: to actively lead companies to new opportunities and markets, not just follow where they point.

This means NZTE will shift from a 'follow' to a 'lead and follow' model – proactively identifying high-value market opportunities created by our new FTAs, targeting the New Zealand companies best placed to capitalise on them, and bringing those opportunities directly to businesses rather than waiting to be asked.

- Where a new FTA opens a tariff window, in India, the Gulf, or future markets, NZTE will identify which New Zealand exporters stand to benefit most and proactively engage them with market intelligence, buyer introductions and entry support.
- NZTE will develop forward-looking sector opportunity maps – identifying where global demand is growing fastest and matching New Zealand's export strengths to those opportunities before competitors move.

Sector-wide growth initiatives

Alongside its work with individual companies, NZTE will drive sector-wide initiatives that lift the entire export economy:

- Food and beverage: deepening market access and premiumisation strategies across Asia, the Middle East and Europe, building on record export highs in horticulture, seafood and dairy.
- Technology and fintech: growing New Zealand's reputation as a source of high-value tech exports, particularly in markets where our new FTAs have reduced barriers.
- Mānuka honey: capitalising on growing demand in India, China and the Gulf, where our new agreements have dramatically reduced tariffs.
- Wood, forestry and building products: driving value-added exports rather than raw logs, with a focus on markets opened by CPTPP, RCEP and the India FTA.
- Education: working alongside Education New Zealand to convert growing student interest – boosted by expanded air connectivity – into enrolments that benefit institutions across the country.

Export development: the Next 200

Too many New Zealand businesses have the products, the quality and the ambition to export – but lack the connections, the market knowledge or the first step. National will direct NZTE to establish a dedicated Export Development function, with a specific focus on identifying the next generation of New Zealand exporters – companies that are not yet exporting but have the potential to do so.

The centrepiece of this function will be the 'Next 200' programme: an intensive, targeted initiative focused on 200 high-potential businesses ready to begin or significantly scale their export activity:

- NZTE will identify 200 small and medium-sized businesses across goods and services sectors with genuine export-ready products and the capacity to grow.
- Each business will receive a dedicated NZTE relationship manager, tailored market intelligence, introductions to in-market networks, and support navigating regulatory and customs requirements.
- The programme will be designed around results, with clear targets for export revenue, new markets and jobs, and progress publicly reported annually.
- Sectors will be prioritised based on the opportunities created by our new FTAs. India, the Gulf and the UAE will be key focus markets in the first year.

Aligning all export agencies

NZTE does not operate alone. A re-elected National Government will ensure that NZTE, Investment New Zealand and Education New Zealand operate under a single coordinated strategy – sharing in-market presence, aligning campaigns and maximising the return on every dollar invested in promoting New Zealand offshore.

- Coordinated in-market teams will mean New Zealand presents as one country, not separate agencies competing for attention and resources.
- Investment New Zealand will use the same networks and relationships built by NZTE to attract high-quality foreign direct investment that creates jobs and strengthens our export base.

Trade missions: taking New Zealand to the world

Trade missions are one of the most effective and direct tools a government has to grow exports. When the Prime Minister and Minister of Trade lead a delegation of New Zealand businesses into a new or growing market, doors open that would otherwise take years to unlock. Relationships are built, deals are done and New Zealand's reputation as a premium, reliable trading partner is reinforced.

National is committed to trade missions – not as photo opportunities, but as serious commercial exercises with clear targets, rigorous follow-up and measurable outcomes.

A record of delivery

Under National's previous term in government, we completed 18 trade missions to open opportunities to the world. In 2023 we committed to doing more trade missions in this term than any previous government – and we've delivered, completing 23 trade missions to 18 countries and generating more than \$2 billion in deals, contracts and commercial commitments for New Zealand businesses.

Our commitment for the next term

A re-elected National Government commits to matching and building on that record. We will complete at least 23 trade missions over the next parliamentary term, with a sharper focus on sector-specific missions and a stronger results framework.

Sector-specific missions

The next term will see a greater emphasis on missions built around specific sectors rather than only broad country visits – bringing together the right companies, with the right buyers, in the right markets.

- **Technology and fintech:** showcasing New Zealand's growing tech sector to investors and buyers in Singapore, Japan, the UK, EU and the United States.

- **Food, beverage and seafood:** premium food missions into India, the Gulf, Southeast Asia and China – capitalising on our new FTAs, record seafood export highs and the growing demand for trusted, high-quality food.
- **Services:** dedicated services sector missions into markets where our new FTAs have opened services commitments – including financial services, professional services, digital services and education.
- **Mānuka honey:** targeted missions into China, India and the Middle East, where tariff reductions under new agreements have made New Zealand honey significantly more price-competitive.
- **Wood, forestry and building products:** value-added forestry missions into Asia and the Gulf, promoting engineered wood, mass timber and construction products.
- **Education:** missions led jointly by the Prime Minister, Minister of Trade and the Minister of Education into South and Southeast Asia, building on the momentum of visa-free transit arrangements and growing student interest.
- **Creative industries:** film and screen, design and architecture – sectors where New Zealand punches above its weight globally.

Missions as part of a broader strategy

Trade missions do not operate in isolation. Each mission will be tied to New Zealand's broader FTA agenda: reinforcing our negotiating positions, demonstrating commercial intent and sending a signal to trading partners that New Zealand is serious about doing business. Missions into new priority markets will be used to lay the groundwork for new trade agreements as well as to generate immediate commercial results.

**National**

Authorised by J de Joux, 41 Pipitea St, Wgtn.