

MCGUINNESS INSTITUTE PRESS RELEASE
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The 2017 Political Party Agreements – Three Years On

The McGuinness Institute has published two working papers today that explore the extent to which the policy priorities in the Labour-NZ First coalition agreement and the Labour-Green confidence-and-supply agreement have been implemented since the appointment of government on 27 October 2017. Both papers report on what was actioned over the past three years and what was not.

Chief executive Wendy McGuinness says, “Coalition and support agreements are important documents and deserve more attention, particularly as they tend to drive the general direction of public policy over the parliamentary term. Given their importance, we would like to see these agreements tabled in the House at the start of the parliamentary term. We also consider that the public would benefit from a progress report being tabled in the House at the end of the three-year term.”

McGuinness says, “With an eye to the future, we were keen to understand how easily this sort of progress report could be undertaken and whether the resulting report would be of interest to New Zealanders. As it turned out, we found the process of undertaking the review relatively straightforward, especially given the useful feedback provided by the two minority parties involved.”

What can a three-year progress report tell us?

McGuinness says: “Gaining a factual actual account of what was actioned (and not actioned) over a parliamentary term has obvious benefits for those working in the policy arena or wishing to bring about change. However, this type of analysis may also shed light on the types of policy the minority party might wish to pursue in future agreements, such as unfinished business or next stages and steps in the evolution of a policy that has been implemented this term.”

McGuinness adds, “Importantly, such assessments do not indicate whether an agreement has been successful or not, or, indeed, whether the policy priorities were good or not.”

McGuinness says, “For example, if the analysis found that 100 percent of all priorities listed in an agreement were implemented, this may indicate different things to different people, such as:

- The minority party lacked ambition (for example, they only selected easy to implement priorities),
- The minority party failed to be flexible or responsive to the evolving policy needs of New Zealanders (for example, they tended to be operational or box ticking rather than strategic), or
- The majority party negotiated policy that was already part of their policy (resulting in the agreement, in practice, being irrelevant).”

A list of all previous coalition and support agreements since 1996

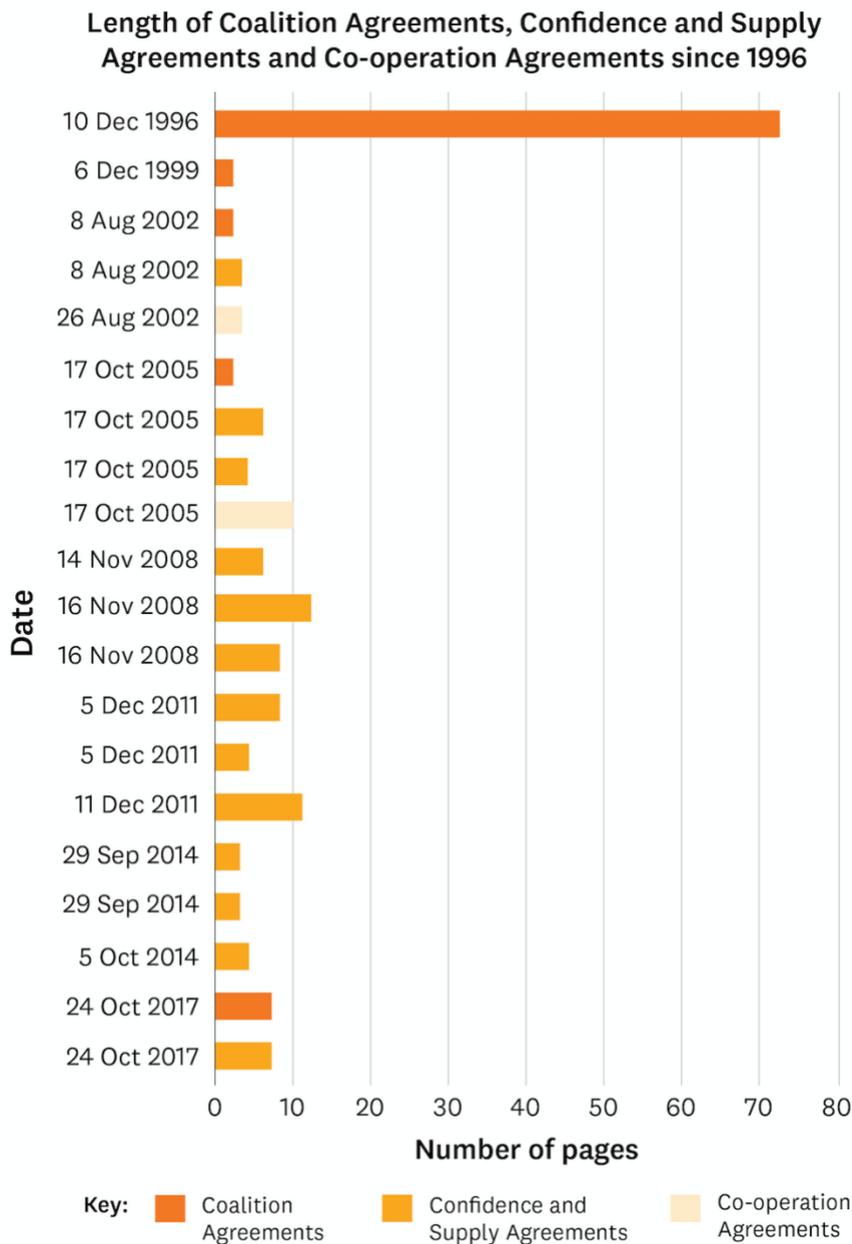
McGuinness says, “For anyone that is interested, we have collated copies of all previous coalition and support agreements since 1996 in our blog.” (See the link below).

McGuinness notes: “Of concern is that these documents belong to the parties who sign them; they do not form part of any formal national archive. They are therefore not easy to find or access. If it was not for the Governor-General’s ‘Speech from the Throne’ they would literally disappear from our history books. Hence, to our knowledge, this is the first time they have been brought together and made available as a comprehensive list.” She adds, “This historical record of agreements would not have eventuated without the help of a number of people – we thank all those individuals that have helped us in this endeavour.”

McGuinness emphasised that, “None of the copies we have listed are signed. The only exception was an update to a confidence-and-support agreement, signed by Rodney Hide (Act) and John Key (National) in 2010”. McGuinness believes this

indicates a very poor benchmark of transparency and accountability. “The public deserve a comprehensive list of pen-signed coalition and support agreements.”

The graph below illustrates the number and length of agreements by the number of pages.



Note: Each of the agreements above are mentioned in a ‘Speech from the Throne’. One agreement is excluded; it is mentioned in a 1999 ‘Speech from the Throne’ but is not included in the graph above as it was never signed. See the blog for more detail.

Next steps

These working papers are the first in a series of publications that form part of the McGuinness Institute's *CivicsNZ* project. The Institute intends to publish other work in this series over the next few months, while the list of agreements will appear in the upcoming fourth edition of the Institute's signature book *Nation Dates*. McGuinness says, "I hope New Zealanders will want to learn more about these arrangements and the resulting public policy that shaped our past and drives our future."

[ENDS]

About the McGuinness Institute

The McGuinness Institute is a non-partisan think tank working towards a sustainable future for New Zealand. The Institute undertakes research and analysis with a view to contributing to a national conversation on New Zealand's long-term future.

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McGuinness Institute publications

- The two working papers can be found here: <https://www.mcguinnessinstitute.org/publications/working-papers>
- The blog containing soft copies of all political agreements since New Zealand's MMP system was introduced can be found here: <https://www.mcguinnessinstitute.org/civicsnz/obtaining-a-comprehensive-list-of-coalition-agreements-and-support-agreement-documents-since-1996>

Also of interest

Audrey Young's Election 2020 Progress Reports. Although these articles were published before the end of the Parliamentary term, they did provide a very useful overview. In particular, Young applied a similar approach and in our view, supported our belief that these agreements deserve more attention.

- *Election 2020: New Zealand First Coalition agreement - progress report*, an article written by Audrey Young and published in NZ Herald. View Young's article (18 July 2020) here: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?cid=1&objectid=12348676>

- *Election 2020: New Zealand Green Party confidence and supply agreement - progress report*, an article written by Audrey Young and published in NZ Herald. View Young's article (4 August 2020) here: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?cid=1&objectid=12353215>