

## MESSAGE TO ALL DEPT OF LABOUR STAFF FROM JAMES BUWALDA

Tena koutou katoa

This morning, at the same time this is sent to you, I publicly released on the DoL [website](#) my report on the Department's management of information in relation to Mr Ahmed Zaoui. The report addressed five questions about our handling of official information and adherence to public service standards and behaviours.

The report shows I found no evidence of any agreement to "lie in unison" or of any deliberate intention to mislead the Ombudsman as alleged in the media on 29 & 30 July. But I did find that there were weaknesses in management processes and procedures for handling official information. I have initiated disciplinary procedures to consider possible breaches of our code of conduct.

I take these matters seriously. Failures to follow good processes and practices can affect the Department's reputation and the confidence citizens should be able to have in us. They have the potential to undermine the comprehensive service delivered to customers by DoL around New Zealand. Weaknesses in any one area may be judged as failure of the whole – it's important we demonstrate good practice everywhere, so it's the good work we do daily that's newsworthy.

I want to make sure DoL is seen as reliable, professional, honest, trustworthy, approachable and innovative in our work and customer service. I need support and action from all of you to do that. I have made it clear to members of the Management Board that they are accountable for ensuring all staff meet expected standards and behaviours, and these accountabilities will be reinforced in their performance management.

I expect high standards of conduct and behaviour from all staff. I now ask each of you to take personal responsibility for re-reading and absorbing the Department's [codes of conduct](#), and discussing these with your managers to confirm or clarify the standards expected of you. We each have personal obligations and responsibilities in relation to the code and DoL values. Everything we do must be in line with both the spirit and specifics of the code, and with departmental [values](#). I will not tolerate unprofessional behaviour and standards that risk our reputation and undermine confidence.

I have initiated an urgent review of our [guidelines](#) for managing official information, to ensure they clearly describe required standards and accountabilities. Any changes made to those guidelines will be communicated to staff, and people handling official information and requests will receive training as necessary.

I attach the release being sent to media, which also outlines my views, and next steps the Department will take. I am speaking to Wellington managers and Immigration Service staff between 9am and 10am today; and holding a briefing for media at 11.30am today. Over the next weeks I will continue to travel round the country to meet as many of you as possible, to see DoL's operations at the frontline, to give you my views and hear yours, and to ask directly for your adherence to our code and values.

I expect you'll see and hear media and Parliamentary comment about my report in the next few days. I realise this will make it difficult for many of you who deal constantly with customers. If they bring the subject up, use the information from this message. Acknowledge we have made mistakes in some areas but there is no evidence of deliberate misleading, and that we are moving urgently to remedy failures in processes. Please continue to deliver information, advice, guidance and connected customer service in line with our values and code of conduct, and don't get side-tracked or downcast by this business.

In my first five weeks I've visited DoL staff in many areas of the country and seen our work first-hand. I've been impressed by your warmth and willingness, by good people with commitment and talent working hard to meet and surpass customer needs. That's the picture of DoL I want the rest of New Zealand to see, along with our professionalism and innovation in policy advice, research and support. I'm working to get that message out wherever I go.

I expect to write to you again next week. Tomorrow and Friday we have our Management Board strategic Wanaanga, "Realising our Potential". The Board will be developing stronger collective responsibility for the strategic direction, shared governance and management of the Department. That includes shared ownership and management of risks and clear linkages between Services' work.

The Outcome we all work towards – *People with high-quality working lives in thriving and inclusive communities* – is very clear and motivating. The connections to get us there are perhaps less clear at a daily work level. We'll spend the two days developing strategic steps and looking at capability, structure and resources that will enable the whole Department to perform at the top of our game and be well-prepared to meet the increasing challenges we will face in the work-place and labour market area over the next few years.

I look forward to your support.

Noho ora mai ra

James Buwalda