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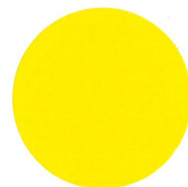
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Workshops on the Constitution Grand Hall, Parliament– 28/29 August 2012

Kia ora tatau katoa – greetings everyone

Given the details of the challenge before you – as outlined by the previous speakers, you now know just what a challenge these two days are going to be. Some of you might be thinking: Is this mission impossible? Banish the thought! Already you have gained a fair grasp of the elements of a constitution, and Dean Knight is shortly going to suggest a way forward – first steps - that you will build on in the workshops.

Let's get our purpose clear, then: For the first time in our country, we New Zealanders are being asked to have a national conversation on our constitutional provisions. And you – specifically – over two days have the luxury of space and the support of experts to explore our country's constitution and to draft its future. This is a unique opportunity. You have a real chance to use this to make a difference to New Zealand.

What you produce will be important to the way our nation may decide how we should express our democratic rights and how we should protect those things that are dear to our identity as New Zealanders. Your thinking and your propositions will - by tomorrow night - be framed up and will thereafter resonate powerfully in the many wider and deeper national discussions on the constitutional review.

Let's begin with a simple but key point: The constitution of a nation is about power - about the set of rules that govern how a government can exercise public power. It identifies who or what institutions should exercise power and how they should do it. In a democracy the government is usually the most powerful coercive force within a country so the rules about how power is exercised are very important indeed. They ensure that power is not abused and that government uses its powers wisely.

Creating a constitution can be complicated as different people will disagree over how a government should exercise its powers. You too will no doubt disagree. Up till now, we have done pretty well in a fluid and flexible situation where we abide by a number of acts, conventions and procedures In short we have some written