

AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL

15TH AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION TO NEW ZEALAND

Sunday 6 December 2025 to Friday 12 December 2025

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Executive Summary

From Saturday 6 December to Friday 12 December, the 15th Australian Political Exchange delegation undertook a comprehensive visit to New Zealand, spanning Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland. The program combined political, cultural, economic and community engagements, offering the delegation a deep and practical understanding of contemporary New Zealand, while reinforcing the enduring relationship between our two countries.

Throughout the week, a clear theme emerged, Australia and New Zealand are not just neighbours, but close allies bound by shared democratic traditions, deep people to people ties, and an instinctive sense of partnership. Whether through formal meetings with political leaders, engagement with community organisations, or shared cultural experiences, the visit consistently highlighted the strength, maturity and ease of the trans Tasman relationship.

Shared institutions, shared values

The delegation's engagements with New Zealand's democratic institutions reinforced the similarities in our systems of government, while also highlighting areas of difference that prompt reflection and learning. Visits to the **Christchurch Justice Precinct** and **New Zealand Parliament** demonstrated how public institutions can be designed to foster collaboration, transparency and resilience, particularly in the wake of crisis.

At Parliament, the delegation was formally welcomed through a Mihi Whakatau, later met with the Speaker of the House, the Rt Hon Gerry Brownlee MP and was introduced to Parliament during Question Time. These engagements underscored the importance New Zealand places on tikanga and protocol alongside Westminster traditions. For the delegation, it offered a valuable insight into how cultural recognition and parliamentary practice can coexist in a way that feels both authentic and contemporary.

Culture, identity and reconciliation

A recurring theme across the visit was the central role of Māori culture, language and history in New Zealand's national identity. At the **National Library of New Zealand**, the delegation toured **He Tohu**, viewing the foundational constitutional documents of Aotearoa. Standing in front of the mural Te Wehenga o Rangī rāua ko Papatūānuku, the delegation was introduced to the creation story of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, a moment that set a strong cultural context for the day.

The visit sparked open discussion about how Te Reo Māori is woven into daily life across New Zealand, and how Australia is grappling with similar questions through

initiatives such as the recently introduced Victorian Treaty process. These conversations were thoughtful, respectful and grounded in shared curiosity.

Later in Auckland, hands on experiences at the **Aotearoa Bone and Stone Carving Academy** further deepened understanding of tikanga, taonga and Māori storytelling, reinforcing how culture is passed on through practice, not just policy.

Innovation, resilience and community

Across Christchurch and Auckland, the delegation engaged with organisations tackling real world challenges through innovation and collaboration. Meetings with the Ministry of Awesome showcased New Zealand's start-up ecosystem and its focus on practical innovation, entrepreneurship and global ambition. The visit to the **Gillies McIndoe Research Institute** highlighted how small, independent research organisations can deliver world class outcomes with a clear social purpose, particularly through affordable and accessible healthcare solutions.

Community resilience was another strong theme. Engagements at **Te Mahia Community Village** demonstrated how long term, locally led solutions can support people facing housing insecurity and social disadvantage. These conversations reinforced the value of community driven models that prioritise dignity, stability and support.

Environmental stewardship also featured prominently. The delegation's visit to the **International Antarctic Centre** in Christchurch provided insight into the scientific and logistical importance of Antarctica to both countries. Learning about penguin rescue and rehabilitation, climate science and life on the ice reinforced the shared responsibility Australia and New Zealand hold in protecting the Southern Ocean and Antarctic region.

The Trans-Tasman partnership

The delegation's meeting with the Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand, His Excellency Daniel Sloper, brought together many of the visit's key themes. Discussion focused on the depth of Australia's engagement in the Pacific, recent ministerial level cooperation between Australia and New Zealand, including 2+2 meetings involving Treasurers and Climate Ministers, and the shared focus on productivity, artificial intelligence, cost of living pressures, housing supply and exports.

Defence and strategic cooperation were also central, reflecting the close alignment between both countries on regional stability and security. Across these discussions, the emphasis was not on formality, but on trust, familiarity and shared purpose, hallmarks of a relationship that has been built over generations.

Report

Saturday 6 December 2025

International Antarctic Centre

Upon landing into Christchurch the delegation visited the **International Antarctic Centre**, located on the International Antarctic Programme's working campus at Christchurch Airport. On arrival, we were met by David Kennedy, General Manager of the International Antarctic Centre Experience, who hosted us for a private tour.

The visit provided a hands-on look at Antarctica's connection to both New Zealand and Australia, particularly through logistics, science and environmental research. The centre strikes a careful balance between education and experience.

A highlight of the tour was the Penguin Rescue area, where staff explained the centre's role in rescuing, rehabilitating and caring for little blue penguins that are injured, unwell or displaced. We learned about the veterinary care, feeding routines and recovery environments designed to prepare the penguins for release back into the wild whenever possible. The dedication of the staff and volunteers was clear, and it reinforced the broader conservation effort underway to protect vulnerable species affected by environmental change and human activity.

We also visited the Storm Dome, experiencing simulated Antarctic conditions including extreme cold and wind, which gave a strong sense of the realities faced by those working on the ice.

The tour concluded in the Husky Zone, where we learned about the historic role huskies played in Antarctic exploration and research, and saw the animals up close.

The visit was both engaging and informative, offering a memorable introduction to life in Antarctica while underlining the importance of conservation, scientific research and international cooperation in the region.



Sunday 7 December 2025

Akaroa & Harbour Cruise

Sunday offered an easing into the tour and a change of pace from formal engagements, with the delegation travelling out onto Banks Peninsula to experience some of the region's natural beauty, local history and community life.

We arrived in Akaroa mid morning, a town that feels instantly distinctive. With its French street names, waterfront setting and relaxed rhythm, Akaroa wears its history lightly but proudly. Walking along the main street, it is easy to see why the town is often described as one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most loved destinations. Its roots as a former French settlement are still visible today, particularly through its food, architecture and atmosphere.

We boarded the **Akaroa Dolphins harbour cruise**, operated by a local, family run business with a strong focus on sustainability, the cruise offered a close look at the harbour and its wildlife. The highlight for many was the chance to see Hector's dolphins, the world's smallest and rarest dolphin species, in their natural environment. Along the way, the group also spotted seals, seabirds and some of the harbour's distinctive geological features, including Cathedral Cove and the Elephant Head rock formation.



Following the cruise, we enjoyed lunch overlooking the harbour. It provided an opportunity to relax, reflect on the morning and enjoy the local produce that Akaroa is known for – Salmon! The afternoon included private time to explore the town, wander along the waterfront, and take in the shops and cafés that give Akaroa its unique character.

Lyttelton

Mid afternoon, the group reconvened and travelled to Lyttelton, the historic port town just outside Christchurch. Lyttelton has a distinct identity of its own, blending its working port heritage with a growing arts and hospitality scene. It is a place where

long standing maritime traditions sit comfortably alongside creative energy and small, independent businesses.

We visited Eruption Brewery on London Street and were met by Scotty, the brewer. The brewery itself tells a story of resilience. Housed in the former BNZ bank building that was destroyed during the 2011 Christchurch earthquake, the space has been carefully repurposed, with the original bank safe now serving as the beer chiller.

The tour and tasting highlighted Eruption's focus on small batch, handcrafted beers made with New Zealand ingredients. Dinner followed, providing a relaxed end to the day and another chance for the delegation to connect over local food, drink and conversation.

Monday 8 December 2025

Ministry of Awesome

Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Economic Resilience

The first formal stop of our political exchange program was a visit to the **Ministry of Awesome (MoA)** in Christchurch, where we were hosted by CEO *Graham Scown* and his team. The visit provided valuable insight into how innovation, entrepreneurship, and community-led economic development have played a central role in Christchurch's post-earthquake recovery and future vision.

We were welcomed with a warm cultural greeting and an introduction to the origins of MoA. Established in response to the earthquakes, the Ministry of Awesome was conceived as more than a traditional incubator, it was designed as a space for reimagining what Christchurch could become and be, following what would be a significant rebuild/reimagining of the city. With a strong focus on innovation, entrepreneurship, and increasingly AI-driven businesses, MoA has positioned itself as a cornerstone of the city's economic rebuild.

MoA operates as a national program headquartered in Christchurch, delivering incubator programs typically spanning 8–10 weeks. The effectiveness of their model is reflected in their outcomes: 84% of businesses supported remain operational and viable, with approximately 60 startups supported each year. New Zealand currently has around 1,000 startups per million people, with an ambitious national target to grow this to 4,000 startups per million, underscoring the importance of organisations such as MoA in achieving this goal.

The delegation learned about MoA's key program streams, including *Start-up Aotearoa* and *Electrify Aotearoa*.

Start-up Aotearoa is delivered in partnership with the New Zealand Government and aims to introduce individuals to the startup ecosystem. Participants receive up to 10 hours of mentoring, guiding them from ideation through to feasibility, supported by a network of 20 experienced coaches working directly with founders.

Electrify Aotearoa focuses on addressing gender imbalance within the startup and investment ecosystem. With only *2.7% of venture capital currently going to women-led startups*, *Electrify* seeks to increase participation and success for women founders. A key component is its annual conference, which brings together women founders, investors, and ecosystem partners, connecting ideas with capital and creating pathways for long-term change.

During the visit, we were introduced to several successful startups that have been supported by MoA, including *Partly*, *Holter*, *Pam*, *iCollect*, *RoosterLan*, *Pyper Vision*, *Timble*, *Komodo*, and *Tracksuit*, among many others. Hearing directly from founders

provided valuable insight into the tangible impact of MoA's work, including examples of businesses growing from *four employees to fourteen* during their time within the program.

MoA's ambition is bold: to support the creation of four to five “unicorn” companies each year, defined as businesses reaching a valuation of \$1 billion. To achieve this, MoA has identified several challenges, including geographic dispersion across cities, which can create travel and accessibility barriers for founders and investors.

One of the most compelling lessons from the visit was MoA's approach to solving the investment and financing gap faced by early-stage startups. Recognising that traditional financial institutions are often risk-averse, MoA formed a strategic corporate partnership with *Kiwi Bank*. Through this partnership, Kiwibank now offers tailored financial products that recognise the inherently high-risk nature of startups. MoA successfully reframed the challenge by arguing that if startups are expected to take risks for New Zealand's economic future, financial institutions must also share in that risk.

To date, MoA's impact has been substantial, with *over \$202 million in capital raised, 795 jobs created, and more than 300 startups supported*. They also maintain strong partnerships with tertiary institutions, providing student internships that expose students to startup environments and often lead to full-time employment within the businesses they support.

A key factor in MoA's success is its philosophy around culture and space. Rather than operating as a clinical incubator or standard co-working environment, MoA prioritises community-driven spaces that foster collaboration, trust, and shared purpose. This cultural approach has been instrumental in building resilient founder networks. Additionally, MoA has partnered with Auckland Council to establish an innovation hub known as “The Grid”, extending their community-focused model beyond Christchurch.

Overall, the visit to the Ministry of Awesome was a standout example of how place-based innovation, strong partnerships, and community-centred design can drive long-term economic resilience. The lessons learned have clear relevance for local, State and Federal governments seeking to support entrepreneurship, diversify their economies, and create pathways for inclusive growth.



Christchurch Justice Precinct

Resilient Design, Cross-Agency Collaboration and Justice System Insights

As part of the political exchange program, the delegation visited the **Christchurch Justice and Emergency Services Precinct**, where we were welcomed by Ricardo, Precinct Manager, who led us through the facility and provided a comprehensive overview of its development, operation, and purpose.

The visit began with a high-level presentation outlining the precinct's journey from inception through to construction and ongoing operation. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, the New Zealand Government undertook a significant review of how emergency and justice services could operate more effectively. A key outcome of this review was the recognition that greater cross-agency collaboration, coordination, and co-location could deliver faster response times, improved information-sharing, and more efficient use of resources. This vision ultimately led to the development of the Christchurch Justice and Emergency Services Precinct, bringing multiple critical services together within one integrated site.

The precinct claims to be the safest building in the Southern Hemisphere, purpose-built to withstand large-scale seismic events. Every component within the building has been engineered to move with the structure during an earthquake, ensuring operational continuity during major emergencies. Completed in 2017, the precinct spans 42,000 square metres, accommodates approximately 1,100 staff, and comprises four distinct buildings. A strong and deliberate partnership with Māori informed both the design and function of the precinct.

The precinct houses 19 courtrooms, including a specialist Youth Justice Court and a Māori Court. The Youth Justice Court in particular stood out as an example of justice system innovation. Designed distinctly from traditional courtrooms, it adopts a horseshoe-shaped layout, allowing youth services and wrap-around support agencies to sit alongside young offenders. The judge may sit at the table or just above it, reinforcing a less adversarial environment focused on accountability, support, and reducing reoffending rather than punishment alone.

Throughout the tour, consistent feedback from agencies highlighted that the physical design of the precinct significantly enhances collaboration, with proximity and shared spaces enabling better communication, faster feedback loops, and stronger inter-agency relationships. This design was repeatedly cited as a major operational success.

The delegation then met with *the Honourable Justice Osborne of the New Zealand High Court* for a frank and open discussion on the realities of co-located justice and emergency services. While Justice Osborne acknowledged the many benefits of cross-agency collaboration, he also spoke candidly about key challenges -

particularly the importance of maintaining a clear and visible separation between the judiciary and police. To preserve judicial independence and public confidence, strict protocols are in place, including separate access arrangements requiring police to enter the building through the main public entrance only. Justice Osborne noted that perceptions of independence remain an ongoing challenge, and that some within the judiciary continue to advocate for greater physical and symbolic separation from enforcement agencies.

The discussion extended to broader justice system issues, including the *over-representation of Indigenous and Māori communities* in the court system. The delegation with Justice Osborne reflected on the similarities between New Zealand and Australia in both data and lived experience, while also recognising the distinct cultural, historical, and legal contexts of Indigenous communities in each country. We also discussed a range of *specialist courts across New Zealand*, including *New Beginnings and Special Circumstances Courts*, as well as *Pasifika Courts*, and explored the growing role of restorative justice in addressing offending behaviour.

Another important topic was the dynamic between *changing governments, legislative frameworks, and judicial independence*. Justice Osborne provided insight into the expectations placed on judges to faithfully apply the law, even amid shifting political priorities or periods of legislative inaction, and the inherent tensions this can create.

Following the meeting, the delegation continued its guided tour with Ricardo Chisholm through the wider precinct. This included learning about the internal flow of the buildings, architectural intent, and the careful balance between shared spaces and necessary separation across departments.

A highlight of the visit was the **Emergency Operations Centre**, which clearly demonstrated the success of the precinct's core vision. Each key arm of the emergency response system has a dedicated space within the centre, enabling agencies to come together quickly and operate in a highly coordinated, practical, and efficient manner during disasters and major incidents.

The visit concluded with time spent in the **Māori Court**, where we learned about its history, cultural foundations, and ongoing success. The court's incorporation of Māori customs, language, and tikanga highlighted how cultural recognition can be embedded meaningfully within formal justice systems.



The visit was a powerful case study into resilient infrastructure, cross-agency collaboration, and justice system reform. This meeting provided valuable lessons on the benefits and complexities of co-location, the importance of design in enabling collaboration, and the need to carefully balance efficiency with independence and public trust.

Meeting with the Mayor of Christchurch

Local Government Leadership, Reform and Post-Disaster Opportunity

The day concluded with an official meeting with the Mayor of Christchurch, which was a highly anticipated engagement for the delegation. Given that the Australian delegation was comprised of three elected local government councillors, there was strong enthusiasm for the opportunity to engage directly with a mayor and exchange perspectives grounded in practical local government leadership.

The meeting provided an open and constructive forum to discuss our respective municipalities, with a strong focus on the shared challenges facing cities on both sides of the Tasman. These included managing population growth, infrastructure investment, financial sustainability, community expectations, and the increasing complexity of local government responsibilities. The discussion allowed for the sharing of practical insights and examples of how each city has sought to address these pressures within different legislative and governance frameworks.

The timing of the exchange was particularly significant, as New Zealand is currently considering substantial nationwide reforms to the local government sector. These proposed changes include reforms to governance structures, reporting requirements, planning frameworks, rate-capping mechanisms, and council amalgamations, representing some of the most far-reaching changes to local government in decades. This created a valuable opportunity for comparative discussion, as many of the reforms under consideration in New Zealand reflect changes that were introduced in Australia several decades ago.

Members of the delegation shared first-hand experiences of similar reforms in Australia, including reflections on what worked well, where challenges emerged, and the long-term impacts these reforms have had on council capacity, financial sustainability, democratic representation, and service delivery. These reflections were particularly valuable in highlighting that while structural reform can drive efficiency, it can also create unintended consequences if not carefully designed and supported.

The delegation also took the opportunity to provide positive feedback on Christchurch as a city, acknowledging the impressive progress made since the devastating earthquakes. We discussed both the challenges and the opportunities that arose from the scale of destruction, including the ability to re-envision urban design, infrastructure investment, public spaces, and civic facilities. Christchurch's experience offered important lessons on resilience, long-term planning, and turning crisis into opportunity, which are directly relevant to cities facing climate, infrastructure, or disaster-related risks.

Overall, the meeting with the Mayor of Christchurch was a valuable conclusion to the day's program. It reinforced the importance of international local-government exchanges as a means of sharing practical knowledge, learning from past reforms, and strengthening leadership capability across jurisdictions. The discussion provided insights that will directly inform future policy thinking and governance practice within our own councils.



Tuesday 9 December 2025

After three days in and around Christchurch, which proved to be a genuinely warm, welcoming and easy city to spend time in, Tuesday started early. Everyone was downstairs in the lobby early, checked out and ready to move. By 6.00 am we were on the way to Christchurch Airport for our flight north. Once on the ground in Wellington we headed straight to the National Library of New Zealand to start the day's official engagements.

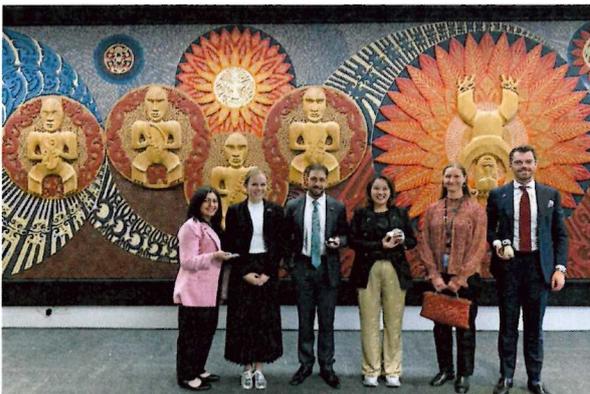
National Library of New Zealand

We were welcomed by Dr Tanja Schubert McArthur, originally from Stuttgart (Germany) who guided us through *He Tohu*, the permanent exhibition that brings together three foundational documents that shaped Aotearoa: the 1835 Declaration of Independence, the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi and the 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition.

Dr Schubert McArthur started the tour in front of the large mural *Te Wehenga o Ranginui ko Papatūānuku*. Standing in front of it, she explained the Māori creation story of Ranginui, the sky father, and Papatūānuku, the earth mother, and how their separation brought light into the world. It was a simple but powerful introduction to Māori worldviews, grounding the rest of the visit in a cultural context many of us were less familiar with.

The discussion moved naturally into the difference in how our two countries approach language and culture. There was a genuine interest in how Te Reo Māori is so deeply embedded in everyday New Zealand life, from public institutions to signage to the way people speak casually. The delegation also touched on the recently introduced Victorian Treaty process, comparing how Australia is approaching similar questions of recognition, culture and partnership.

At the conclusion of the exhibition, our delegation shared something uniquely Australian. We gave a rendition of Daryl Braithwaite's *Horses*, a song that holds a special place at home, we chose it because it speaks to moments of love, joy and connection, and it felt like an honest expression of who we are culturally.



Gillies McIndoe Research Institute

We were greeted by Cindy Naresh, who introduced us to Dr Clint Gray. Dr Gray led a short briefing on the Institute's mission, which is centred on developing accessible, life changing treatments for complex conditions like brain cancer, vascular birthmarks and keloid scarring.

Their approach is clever and pragmatic.

Rather than chasing high cost new drug development, they are repurposing existing medications and testing them using spheroids and organoids that mimic human tissue more closely. If successful, this could open the door to treatments that are not only effective but affordable for patients who would otherwise face invasive procedures or unaffordable therapies. Dr Gray also spoke about how artificial intelligence is set to shape how the will speed up reporting into the future. The institute has received a wide array of published articles and global attention for it's approach towards cancer research.

We met student researchers and toured their labs, which gave the delegation a good sense of how much this relatively small institute is achieving.



The Backbencher Gastropub

We arrived at **The Backbencher** at around midday. The venue carries its political heritage proudly, from the caricatures on the walls to its old role hosting *Back Benches*, the live political show filmed just across from Parliament.

Lunch was relaxed and a good reset before the final engagement of the day. The location also offered the perfect vantage point of the parliamentary precinct and the buzz was electric and energy of Wellington politics.



Australian High Commission

After lunch, it was a short drive to the **High Commission**. We arrived and moved through security gates before meeting with His Excellency Daniel Sloper and Second Secretary Henry Galbraith.

The conversation was wide ranging and grounded in the strength of the trans Tasman relationship. The High Commissioner spoke about his extensive work in the Pacific, including the strategic priorities shaping Australia's engagement in the region. He shared insights from a recent 2+2 Ministers meeting between the Australian and New Zealand, highlighting the growing alignment on economic and climate policy.

His Excellency also talked through the core issues currently driving government focus back home: productivity challenges, the growth of AI and its economic potential, cost of living pressures, migration, housing supply and affordability, and the scale of exports moving between our two economies. Defence cooperation was also a key theme, with a strong emphasis on how both countries are strengthening interoperability and regional stability.

The hour-long discussion was an open, constructive session that rounded out the program with a clear picture of the shared priorities that will shape cooperation going forward.



Wednesday 10 December 2025

New Zealand Parliament

On Wednesday, 10 December, the delegation visited **New Zealand Parliament** in Wellington. We were greeted by parliamentary staff and welcomed through Mihi Whakatau, a traditional Māori welcoming ceremony that set a respectful and meaningful tone for the visit. We reciprocated the welcome which was warmly received.

Next on our agenda was meeting with the Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament, Rt Hon. Gerry Brownlee. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity for dialogue on shared democratic values, governance, and regional security.

The Speaker commenced the meeting by welcoming the delegation and inviting each participant to introduce themselves. He highlighted the similarities between New Zealand and Australia, particularly in relation to our migrant populations and the role multiculturalism plays in shaping both societies.

He then asked the delegation what we hoped to gain from the meeting and from the broader exchange program. This opened a constructive discussion on mutual learning, parliamentary processes, and strengthening bilateral relationships.

The Speaker expressed particular interest in Australia's defence policy, with a focus on the AUKUS agreement. He discussed New Zealand's approach to defence spending, noting that there is broad bipartisan support across all major political parties for investment in defence, except for the Green Party. In addition, the Speaker noted that New Zealand does not currently have a free trade agreement with the United States.



In closing, the Speaker offered personal advice to the delegation, emphasising the importance of public service and reminding us to always act in the best interests of the people who have elected us to represent them. This message highlighted the core responsibility of elected officials.

Following our meeting with Mr Speaker, we had lunch in Parliament House with the Speaker, RT Hon. Gerry Brownlee, Dr Deborah Russell MP, Ms Rima Nakhle MP and Mr Tom Rutherford MP.

After lunch, we explored three important buildings that make up the parliamentary complex, the Beehive, Parliament House, and the Parliamentary Library. Each of these buildings has its own purpose, history, and architectural style. We learnt from our tour guide that the Executive Wing of Parliament is famously called the Beehive, mainly because of its unique shape. The design was first sketched by the architect Sir Basil Spence, who drew it as a beehive shaped structure. The name stuck even before construction began. The Beehive houses the most important offices of New Zealand's government, including the Prime Minister's office, the Cabinet room, Minister's offices, meeting and function rooms. An interesting fact as to why the Cabinet room is on the 10th floor and the Prime Minister's room is on the 9th floor is that the Cabinet holds the executive power rather than the Prime Minister, as the Cabinet is where collective decisions are made.

From the Beehive tour we went to the next important building which is Parliament House (built completed in 1922). This is where the main democratic processes of the country take place. The building involves the Chamber where debates take place, committee rooms and the Speaker's office.

The last make-up of the parliamentary complex was the historic Parliamentary Library. It is the oldest building in the parliamentary place, completed in 1899 and is known for its Gothic Revival architecture design. The purpose of the library is that it provides Members of Parliament and researchers with books, reports and data. An interesting fact that we learnt was that the library survived two major fires, one in 1907 and another in 1992. Because of this, the library is considered one of the most historically valuable government buildings in Wellington.



Another interesting fact is that in 1899 while digging, the tradesmen found a time capsule. They had replaced that time capsule with another new one for future generations to find it. We learnt that a clock that is hanging in the library is in fact the oldest item there, built in 1720 in London.



The last tour bit was learning about the meaning of the "Biscuit Tin", which is traditionally used as a ballot to randomly select Members' Bills for debate. This process helped bring forward two historic conscience issues, legislation on same-sex marriage and euthanasia which later became landmark laws following parliamentary votes.

After the Parliament tour, we sat in question time, Mr Speaker formally introduced and welcomed the delegation.

Overall visiting New Zealand Parliament allowed us to gain an insight to learn about how the country is governed and to see three very different buildings, each with a unique look and purpose.

When Parliament duties concluded, we went to shop on Cuba Street before we departed to Auckland.

Thursday 11 December 2025

Auckland University of Technology

On Thursday, 11 December, the delegation visited the **Auckland University of Technology** (AUT), at 55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central, Auckland. AUT is a public university established on 1 January 2000, when the Auckland Institute of Technology was incorporated into the newly created university by Order in Council under the Education Act 1989.

On arrival at AUT, the delegation was met by Mr. Conner Roberts, the Government Relations Advisor, and led us to the science building, greeted by the AUT's humanoid robots, Auto and Autaiia. They were coordinated by Mr. Tim Davison, Director of Data, AI and Digital Experience Solutions. Auto and Autaiia performed a dance and martial art demonstration for the delegation.

Following the robot demonstration, the delegation was met by Mr. Damon Salesa, who is the first Pacific person to hold the position of vice chancellor at a New Zealand University; Ms May Malcolm, Assistant Vice Chancellor and Engagement, and Mr. William Ho, Director international for a briefing on AUT's contribution to regional and national economy.

AUT contributes to both the Auckland regional economy by educating and retaining a large, diverse, work-ready population in New Zealand's most economically significant city. With around 30,000 students, many working while studying AUT directly feeds skilled graduates into local industries such as technology, health, business, creative industries, and sport. Its strong industry partnerships (for example with Fisher & Paykel Healthcare and local sports organisations), applied research, and work-integrated learning help businesses innovate and grow. Student and staff spending, international students, and university operations also generate substantial economic activity across the Auckland region.

At a national level, AUT strengthens productivity and long-term economic resilience by expanding access to higher education for non-traditional and first-generation students, lifting workforce participation and social mobility. Its focus on applied innovation, ethical AI adoption, and practical problem-solving supports New Zealand's transition to a knowledge-based economy, particularly through use-case driven technology rather than capital-intensive frontier research. AUT also contributes to export earnings through international education, global partnerships, and alumni who found and lead major companies, reinforcing New Zealand's economic competitiveness and international reputation.

Following the briefing, the delegation met by both Recreation Centre Manager Mr. Himan Patel and Mr. Bruce Meyer, for a tour of the AUT City Campus Te Āhuru

Recreation Centre. It is a vibrant hub for students, offering a range of facilities and activities to support student wellbeing and social connections. The centre features a sports court, dance and exercise studios, flexible space for clubs, and large gathering areas. It also includes a lounge with movable furniture, an interactive screen, and a stadium with a viewing area, all designed to encourage diverse activities and social events. The centre is accessible to all AUT students and provides a safe space for sports and activities that support student wellbeing and a sense of belonging. In conclusion the delegation departs to Te Mahia Community Village.



Te Mahia Community Village

On arrival at **Te Mahia Community Village**, the delegation was met by Mr. Roger Nakhle, Director of the Village, Henriette Nakhle “QSM”, Honorary Consul of Lebanon, and Tina manager of the Village. The visit began with engagement and a tour of the Te Mahia Facility.

The site was originally a caravan park intended for tourist accommodation, but over time the owners saw a clear vision and purpose to instead create a community centre style housing placement for people with nowhere else to go, including individuals on benefits and those experiencing homelessness. This reflected a broader housing system gap, where government housing historically focused on larger family homes and failed to provide enough single or one-bedroom units. As a result, many vulnerable individuals ended up in unsuitable accommodation such as caravan parks. Through special planning consent, the site was transformed into a managed transitional housing complex with self-contained small units, allowing residents to stay for up to two years while stabilising their lives.

The transformation of the site significantly improved safety and community wellbeing. Once one of the highest police call-out locations in the area, it is now a well-managed, family-friendly environment with on-site security, clear behavioural expectations, and strong partnerships with social service providers. Residents receive wraparound support including mental health, drug and alcohol services, budgeting, tenancy skills, education, and employment pathways, with follow-up support after they move into long-term housing. The model demonstrates that managed transitional housing, combined with strong community and council collaboration, can successfully support vulnerable people while addressing community concerns and creating safer, more inclusive neighbourhoods.

The delegation was also greeted by a group of children from the Māori cultural education centre in the Village. This program engages children and families in traditional education, games, storytelling, and crafts, such as carving whale and fish hooks inspired by Māori mythology. The program was led by Rima Nakhle MP and Mr. Roger Nakhle, it emphasizes values like trust, gratitude, reciprocity, and community connection, offering a hands-on, immersive experience that teaches participants about Māori heritage while promoting wellbeing and cultural understanding. It combines practical activities, ancestral stories, and life lessons to create a meaningful and educational space for learning and personal growth.

Following the site visit, the village hosted a community lunch with Mr. Nakhle, Councillor Daniel Lamont from the local Council, Joanna, team leader at Strove Community Trust, Mananea branch, Angel, transitional housing operational manager, Tina, and Cheena, manager of Strove Road Transitional Housing, overseeing families and staff. In conclusion, the delegation departed to Aotearoa Bone & Stone Carving Academy at 60 Polaris Place, East Tamaki.

Aotearoa Bone and Stone Carving Academy

We were hosted and greeted by director, Mr. Maha Tomo and Laura from **Aotearoa Bone & Stone Carving Academy**. The Taonga Carving Workshop began with a Karakia Timata (opening blessing), then explanation and discussion of tikanga (Māori protocol), taonga (treasure) cultural practices, and Māori mythology associated with carvings provided. The Taonga Carving Workshop steps included, deciding the pendant shape, shaping with sandstone, sanding, polishing, braiding/lashing, attach braid, at final blessing karakia whakairo.

The two hour session was fun and enjoyable. The delegation received light refreshments during break.

In conclusion of today's engagement, the delegation returned to the hotel for a brief break, then headed to Ada for the final delegation dinner.

Friday 12 December 2025

Sky Tower

Our final morning in New Zealand started high above Auckland at the **Sky Tower**. Standing 328 metres tall, it has been part of the city's skyline for nearly three decades and remains one of the tallest structures in the Southern Hemisphere.

From the viewing platform, the scale of Auckland really comes into view, the harbour, the coastline and the spread of the city in every direction. It was a fitting way to pause and reflect after a full and busy week across Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland.

Later that afternoon, the delegation departed for Australia, bringing the program to a close. As we sat at the airport we reflected on a week that offered valuable insights, strong conversations and a deeper appreciation of the close ties between our two great countries.

Conclusion

The Australian Political Exchange visit to New Zealand provided far more than a series of meetings and site visits. It offered space for genuine connection, learning and reflection. The program highlighted how closely aligned our countries remain, not only at the governmental level, but across communities, institutions and culture.

As neighbours and close allies, Australia and New Zealand continue to benefit from an instinctive partnership grounded in shared values, mutual respect and a willingness to learn from one another. This visit reinforced that relationship and laid strong foundations for continued dialogue, cooperation and friendship into the future.