

# New Zealand Government Sport Diplomacy Strategy

2025–2030



**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

# Ministerial foreword

**New Zealand may be small, but our sporting footprint is immense. Sport is woven into our culture, defining us as a nation and reflecting our values to the world. Our athletes, who have worn the silver fern and achieved greatness, have helped us build an exceptional global reputation as a world-class sporting nation.**

Off the field, we are sought after for our expertise, leadership and innovation, and our sports leaders are known for their integrity, fairness and humility.

Given our global reputation and prominence, sport offers a significant source of diplomatic soft power for New Zealand. Through sport, we can more effectively engage politically, economically and culturally with the world.

As Associate Minister for Sport and Recreation, I'm proud to introduce the New Zealand Government Sport Diplomacy Strategy 2025–2030 – a forward-looking plan to harness the full potential of sport as a diplomatic asset.

This strategy sets out a clear, coordinated plan to leverage sport as a tool for advancing our national interests across trade, investment, foreign policy, tourism, education and cultural relationships.

In a world that is becoming less open, secure and predictable, this sport diplomacy strategy will help open doors, strengthen bilateral relationships and connect our exporters to the world. It will enhance New Zealand's international standing through people-to-people connections and powerful storytelling.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all the government agencies that have contributed to this important work. Through the unified power of government – working in partnership with the sport sector and private sector – this strategy will help us unlock better outcomes for New Zealand through sport.



**The Hon Chris Bishop**

Associate Minister for Sport and Recreation

## Cover photos:

*Top left: Prime Minister Luxon joining Indian cricketer Kapli Dev for some street cricket – New Zealand Government Trade Mission to India, 2025.*

*Middle: Anna Grimaldi celebrates her bronze medal in the Women's 100m T47 final at the 2024 Paris Paralympics. Photo credit: Drew Chislett*

*Top right: Netball teams from Fijian Saint Anne's School and New Zealand's Belmont Intermediate School competing at the 2025 New Zealand AIMS Games. Photo credit: Michael Bradley*

*Bottom: All Blacks players perform a pre-match haka at the New Zealand versus Ireland International Rugby Test in Dunedin, New Zealand, 2022. Photo credit: Steve McArthur*



# What is sport diplomacy?

Sport diplomacy is a new term that describes an old practice. It focuses on areas where sport, politics, international relationships and economic interest overlap.

Given the non-partisan nature and universality of sport, it is highly valued as a vehicle that can draw attention, generate interest and engage passions. Globally, sport is recognised as a vital and expanding form of diplomatic “soft power”. Governments are increasingly using sport as a platform to reshape perceptions, open doors and foster people-to-people connections.

By strategically leveraging New Zealand’s considerable global sporting prominence, we can powerfully and effectively engage with the world, driving enhanced economic, political and cultural outcomes.

The New Zealand Government Sport Diplomacy Strategy 2025–2030 (the strategy) seeks to leverage New Zealand’s sporting assets – our international reputation, global success, major events, brands, networks, sport leaders and sporting stars – to:

- develop and maintain international relations
- support the economic growth strategy of doubling export value in the next 10 years through trade, investment, tourism and education
- tell New Zealand’s story and showcase our culture to the world.

In doing so, this strategy supports wider government outcomes of building a safer, more prosperous and sustainable future for New Zealand.



Prime Minister Luxon playing street cricket – New Zealand Government Trade Mission to India, 2025.

The strategy will play an important role in enhancing New Zealand's global reputation and influencing preferences for New Zealand, through people-to-people connections and storytelling capabilities. The strategy is designed to help open doors beyond what formal diplomatic or commercial endeavours might achieve.

While primarily outward facing, the strategy seeks to generate and capture value for New Zealand, both internationally and domestically. It complements and supports the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Major Events Strategy, which also contributes to onshore sport diplomacy outcomes through major events held in New Zealand.

Given the cross-agency nature of sport diplomacy, the strategy also signals an intent by government agencies to operate in a more aligned, collective and strategic manner with regard to sport diplomacy activity.

It also flags a commitment from the Government to work in partnership with the sport sector and to encourage strategic collaboration with sporting organisations while providing a framework for improved engagement and operational interaction between sporting organisations and government agencies.

The strategy aims to strengthen the New Zealand sport system by helping sporting organisations gain greater international presence and influence, and to provide support to athletes and sportspeople. This will enable them to contribute to sport diplomacy outcomes and operate more effectively in the global arena.

**This strategy has been designed to help government agencies achieve their organisational objectives through the context of sport, delivering value both offshore and onshore.**



# The strategic opportunity

The New Zealand Government Sport Diplomacy Strategy 2025–2030 is an all-of-government approach designed to support externally facing government agencies in achieving their organisational goals through sport.

The government agencies committed to this approach include:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)
- New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE)
- Invest New Zealand (Invest NZ)
- Tourism New Zealand (Tourism NZ)
- Education New Zealand Manapou ki te Ao (Education NZ)
- New Zealand Story (NZ Story)
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment Hikina Whakatutuki - Major Events (MBIE)
- Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH)
- Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa (Sport NZ)

The strategy aligns with the unique business needs of each agency and the global context in which they operate. It seeks to complement, rather than duplicate, existing agency efforts, and acknowledges that each agency determines if, how, and when to engage in any sport diplomacy opportunity.

## Key focus areas

1. Foster government-to-government relationships.
2. Drive economic growth through business-to-business and government-to-business engagement.
3. Boost tourism and educational outcomes through a business-to-consumer focus.
4. Enhance global understanding and preference for New Zealand, through storytelling and showcasing our rich culture.



2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, New Zealand versus Norway, Eden Park, Auckland. Photo credit: Andrew Cornaga

## Sport as a diplomatic asset

Despite our size and geographical isolation, as a country, we have carved out an exceptional reputation as a leading sporting nation. From grassroots to elite, we are globally recognised for our expertise, leadership, innovation and world-class systems. Our reputation as a world leader in sport extends both on and off the playing field, earning respect and admiration worldwide. We are sought out by others for our world-class expertise, leadership and systems. New Zealand has an endless and untapped supply of sporting assets that can be leveraged, including the following.

### Our athletes

Some of our athletes are global superstars, with a significant social media presence and fan following.

### Our leaders

Our leaders, who are recognised and respected around the world, sit on some of the most powerful sporting decision-making tables in world sport.

### Our networks

Because of their influence and standing, our sportspeople frequently engage with heads of state, political dignitaries and people with powerful commercial influence and connections.

### Major events

New Zealand has forged a hard-earned reputation as a host and deliverer of successful major events. We are a sporting event destination of choice for athletes and administrators.

### Our brands

The phenomenal success of our teams and athletes has created global brand recognition and awareness of New Zealand, from the All Blacks, Black Ferns and Black Caps to our Olympic and Paralympic teams.

### Our reach

New Zealand teams and athletes are competing and training on all continents of the world throughout the year, with significant marquee events in key markets and countries for New Zealand.

### Our intellectual property (IP)

New Zealand is recognised as having world-class sporting innovation, systems and programmes.



*Prime Ministers Luxon and Modi acknowledging the celebrations of 100 years of sporting ties between New Zealand and India in 2026.*

## Agency objectives

While each agency has a different business focus, in general, the agencies are looking internationally to:

- strengthen relationships and people-to-people connections within important markets (MFAT)
- support bilateral cooperation (MFAT)
- support the securing of further trade access and agreements (MFAT)
- support New Zealand exporters to grow international revenue (NZTE)
- support attraction of foreign direct investment (Invest NZ)
- market New Zealand as a visitor destination, grow the value of tourism, drive seasonal and regional dispersal, increase visitor spend and build resilience in the tourism sector (Tourism NZ)
- promote New Zealand as a study destination (Education NZ)
- tell and amplify the New Zealand Story (NZ Story)
- procure and leverage major sporting events of interest to New Zealand (MBIE)
- help New Zealand sporting organisations to thrive domestically and succeed internationally (Sport NZ).

Critical to the success of this strategy, and to unlocking additional benefits for New Zealand, will be the ability to match the agency business imperatives (the need) with the most appropriate sporting opportunity or asset (the supply).

# The strategic approach

## Vision

**Unlocking greater political, economic and social value for New Zealand through leveraging sport events, opportunities and networks.**

## Priorities

There are 4 priorities for collective focus to achieve the overall vision for the Sport Diplomacy Strategy. These priorities serve as a guiding framework to align the efforts of all agencies, while ensuring that each can advance its own business objectives through these focus areas. Additionally, the priorities establish clear accountability and provide a process for reviewing and measuring progress against objectives.

# 1



### Enhance global connections and reputation

- Identify strategic opportunities to strengthen bilateral connections and build relationships of value for New Zealand.
- Help develop and maintain international networks, insights and influence.
- Identify opportunities to use sport diplomacy to support gender equality, disability equity and human rights.

# 2



### Help grow New Zealand's economy

- Identify sport diplomacy opportunities that maximise economic outcomes for New Zealand.
- Develop regional sport diplomacy plans to target specific in-market opportunities that unlock greater value for New Zealand.

# 3



### Strengthen the Pacific through sport

- Develop sport diplomacy and sport-for-development initiatives that strengthen Pacific communities and improve outcomes for rangatahi, women and girls, disabled people and other marginalised communities.
- Foster people-to-people cultural connections in the Pacific through sport.
- Enhance Pacific sporting leadership, governance and capability.

# 4



### Tell our story

- Amplify the New Zealand Story and the 100% Pure branding within activations.
- Showcase our culture to the world across sport diplomacy activations.
- Develop and deliver leveraging programmes to maximum political, economic and social returns.



# Enhance global connections and reputation



*New Zealand Black Caps versus India, 3rd ODI, Bay Oval, Mount Maunganui, 2019. Photo credit: Andrew Cornaga*

A strength of New Zealanders is their ability to connect and collaborate with others. Our prosperity, resilience, security and sporting success depend on building relationships founded on respect, care and reciprocity – our manaakitanga.

MFAT leads New Zealand's international engagement, seeking to influence outcomes that align with our values and national interests. The Government's offshore network of diplomatic posts and offices is essential for sustaining New Zealand's international relationships. These posts are crucial to the strategy, offering local context, insights, connections and engagement capabilities.

The strategy aims to help government agencies build closer people-to-people connections and strengthen bilateral ties by leveraging major sporting events and the pulling power of our sports teams, athletes and sports leaders on the global stage. These individuals possess influence, insights and networks, enabling them to create connections and open doors beyond formal diplomacy. This approach provides opportunities to foster deeper engagement and advance both government and sporting interests.

This strategy also aims to enhance international collaboration on sport-related matters with like-minded nations, sporting organisations and stakeholders, to ensure New Zealand remains relevant, current and influential in the world of sport.

## Objectives

1. Identify strategic opportunities to strengthen bilateral connections and build relationships of value for New Zealand.
2. Help develop and maintain international networks, insights and influence.
3. Identify opportunities to use sport diplomacy to support gender equality, disability equity and human rights.

## Actions

- Collaborate across agencies to identify strategic sport diplomacy opportunities that support international bilateral objectives.
- Advise, support and work with diplomatic posts on leveraging sporting opportunities (events, visiting teams, athletes and sportspeople), to achieve in-country and bilateral objectives.
- Integrate sport diplomacy into government missions, delegations and ministerial trips (and inbound hosting programmes) to enhance government-to-government relationships and outcomes.
- Drive greater international collaboration and knowledge sharing with key international stakeholders and with New Zealanders operating on the world stage.

## Measured by

- Individual key performance indicators (KPIs) will be developed for each activation.
- KPIs to be developed to measure positive attribution of sport diplomacy activity to individual agency objectives.



# 2

## Help grow New Zealand's economy



Dame Lisa Carrington – Women's Kayak Single (K1) 500m Gold, Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Photo credit: Iain McGregor

New Zealand's prosperity relies on strong international relationships to support our export, foreign investment, education and tourism sectors. Trade is a key driver of employment and income, while foreign investment is vital to our economic success.

Sport diplomacy can support the Government's economic goal to double exports by value in the next 10 years by helping exporters to connect with global customers and suppliers and foreign direct investment in unique and engaging ways. Activating and hosting sporting events can unlock valuable relationships, promote New Zealand as a year-round tourist destination, and amplify and showcase our cultural uniqueness to the world.

Critical to this approach is having a good understanding of the in-market ambitions and focus of the various government agencies and their customers. Matching the business imperatives (the need) with the most appropriate sporting opportunities (the supply) has the potential to return increased benefits for New Zealand.



Sports and Business Leadership Luncheon – New Zealand Government Trade Mission to Japan, 2025.

### Objectives

1. Identify sport diplomacy opportunities that help maximise economic outcomes for New Zealand.
2. Develop regional sport diplomacy plans to target specific in-market opportunities that unlock greater value for New Zealand.

### Actions

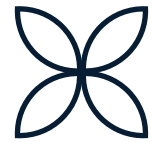
- Hold workshops with agencies and national sports organisations (NSOs) to explore, strategise and agree a portfolio of sport diplomacy opportunities to target over the next 2 to 4 years.
- Develop specific in-market plans for strategically important markets and regions, such as the Pacific, Asia and the USA, that better position and advance business, government and sport objectives.
- Maintain a rolling pipeline of sporting opportunities that government agencies can strategically target.
- Target mutually agreeable strategic opportunities, based on business demand and needs.

### Measured by

- Individual KPIs will be developed for each initiative and activation.
- KPIs to be developed to measure positive attribution of sport diplomacy activity to individual agency objectives.

# 3

## Strengthen the Pacific through sport



*New Zealand Rugby's Quickrip programme, Samoa.  
Photo credit: Aua'i Areta Areta*

While the strategy is anchored in advancing New Zealand's global interests through sport, it has a particular focus on the Pacific. Nowhere else does the power of sport hold greater potential for New Zealand than in the Pacific.

New Zealand's interests in the Pacific are substantial and critical and have been heightened recently with growing security, economic resilience and environmental concerns. Sport provides a deep and important cultural connection to Pacific peoples (both in New Zealand and across the Pacific), because it is integral to the very fabric of Pacific communities, alongside church and family. This makes sport a uniquely powerful platform for relationship building.

Sport is also an important development tool in the region, because it contributes to policy outcomes across health, education, equity, inclusion, culture and economic development. This is recognised in the Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which underscores sport's pivotal role as a driver of people-centred development and economic progress.

The 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games present an opportunity to positively transform the sport and recreation sector across Oceania, with the broad range of developmental benefits this could bring. New Zealand has a unique opportunity to support this process, including through contributing to performance pathways for aspiring Pacific athletes and coaches, ensuring sport remains a core thread of unity and connection in our Pacific relationships.

### Objectives

1. Develop sport diplomacy and sport-for-development initiatives that strengthen Pacific communities and improve outcomes for rangatahi, women and girls, disabled people and other marginalised communities.
2. Foster people-to-people cultural connections in the Pacific through sport.
3. Enhance Pacific sporting leadership, governance and capability.

### Actions

- Support MFAT's Sport for Development Fund by focusing on opportunities for women and girls and disabled people and improving Pacific youth wellbeing through sport and physical activity.
- Identify strategic opportunities to bring people, communities and countries together through sport.
- Collaborate with High Performance Sport New Zealand to support aspiring Pacific athletes, teams and coaches, with access to training, coaches, competitions and facilities in New Zealand.
- Partner with regional stakeholders to help build connections, organisational capability and improve participation pathways for Pacific nations.
- Work collaboratively with Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other partners, to support positive regional outcomes.
- Maximise benefits for the Pacific and New Zealand arising from the awarding of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games to Brisbane.

### Measured by

- Individual KPIs will be developed for each initiative and activation.
- KPIs to be developed to measure positive attribution of sport diplomacy activity to individual agency objectives.

# 4

## Tell our story



FIFA President Gianni Infantino – pōwhiri, 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, Auckland, New Zealand.  
Photo credit: Alan Lee

At its heart, the strategy is about using the context of sport to enhance New Zealand's global understanding and reputation, through people-to-people connections and our storytelling capabilities.

New Zealand's sportspeople and sport diplomacy activations provide a unique platform to showcase and promote our values and culture to the world. Through these opportunities, we can tell our 'New Zealand Story' and promote our destination 100% Pure brand. We can amplify what we are known for, who we are as a country and improve knowledge and preference for New Zealand products and services.

The strategy also seeks to improve the quality and effectiveness of New Zealand's sport diplomacy activations. To maximise the long-term benefits from these sporting opportunities, government agencies and sporting organisations must continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of their leveraging expertise and capability.



New Zealand Black Sticks – 2025 Nations Cup winners, Chile.  
Photo credit: Rodrigo Jaramillo

### Objectives

1. Amplify the New Zealand Story and the 100% Pure branding within activations.
2. Showcase our culture to the world across sport diplomacy activations.
3. Develop and deliver quality leveraging programmes to maximum political, economic and social returns.

### Actions

- Work with NZ Story and Tourism NZ to integrate messaging into activation, where appropriate.
- Work with MCH and NZ Story to incorporate and showcase our culture within sport diplomacy activities.
- Design world-class leveraging programmes and activation plans for identified opportunities that maximise the business objectives of all parties.
- Support New Zealand major events (onshore) prospecting and bidding activity, to target mega and major events that align with agency business objectives.

### Measured by

- Individual KPIs will be developed for each initiative and activation.
- KPIs to be developed to measure positive attribution of sport diplomacy activity to individual agency objectives.



# Implementation

## A new way of working

To advance the strategy, a new approach will be established to ensure unified agency commitment and collaboration, centralised cross-agency and sport sector coordination, and collective decision-making. A priority will be to ensure that initiatives are highly targeted and focused only on opportunities with clear value-add potential and with a direct line of sight to the priority objectives.

The key components of this approach include the following.

### Unified commitment

An agreed all-of-government 5-year strategic plan, providing focus and direction to collective sport diplomacy efforts.

### Sport diplomacy steering group

Form a cross-agency sport diplomacy steering group (SDSG) to oversee the implementation of the strategy, identify and agree targeted opportunities, coordinate interests, respond to requests and provide necessary support.

### Strategic partnerships with sport

A reciprocal all-of-government memoranda of understanding will be negotiated with key national sports organisations to unlock access and opportunities in target markets.

### Dedicated activation budget

Agree a dedicated budget to lead sport diplomacy activities, with funding to support agreed marketplace activations on an activity-by-activity basis, via the SDSG.

### Lead agency

Sport NZ will lead cross-agency coordination, SDSG management, activation design and support, and agency strategic interface with national sports organisations.

## Next steps

### Target opportunities

Agree on a targeted list of opportunities to leverage in 2025 and 2026.

### Partner with national sports organisations

Initially with NZ Cricket and NZ Rugby.

### Focus on key markets

Develop specific sport diplomacy plans initially for the Pacific, India and the USA.

### Engage athletes

Engage high-profile athletes to support missions, delegations, in-market promotions and connections.

### Strengthen alliances

Continue to build relationships with a wider range of international stakeholders and like-minded nations.

### Deepen sport

Work with the sport sector to strengthen New Zealand's global representation and ongoing influence.



New Zealand U23 women's basketball team – winners of the FIBA 3x3 Nations League, Malaysia, July 2024.  
Photo credit: Asia NZ Foundation