Public Service Commission
Te Kawa Mataaho

15 October 2026

9(2)(a) privacy

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Official Information Act Request
Our Ref: OIA 2026-0299

I refer to your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request received by the Public Service Commission Te Kawa Mataaho (the Commission) on 17 September 2026 for:

> *"I request under the OIA all correspondence between DPMC CE Ben King and the PSC about his partner Jessica Rowe's National Party candidacy".*

Our response

The Public Service Commissioner (the Commissioner) is the employer of public service chief executives, including Mr Ben King. Chief executives are expected to identify and disclose any interests that may give rise to an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest. Where a conflict is identified, the Commission works with the chief executive to determine the appropriate arrangements for managing it.

Information being released

Please find enclosed the following document:

Item	Date	Document Description	Decision
1	7 September 2026	Email: 'Message to PSLT colleagues'	Released in part

I have decided to release the document listed above, subject to information being withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA to protect the privacy of natural persons. In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the OIA.

Information being withheld

Further correspondence covered by your request relates to Mr King's personal circumstances and the management of an employment matter between Mr King and the Commissioner. I have decided to withhold this correspondence under the following sections of the OIA, as applicable:

- section 9(2)(a) – to protect the privacy of natural persons;

- section 9(2)(ba)(i) – to protect information that is subject to an obligation of confidence, where release would be likely to prejudice the future supply of similar information and it is in the public interest that such information should continue to be supplied; and
- section 9(2)(g)(i) – to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by officials in the course of their duty.

In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the OIA. I recognise the significant public interest in providing assurance about how this matter has been handled. I consider that public interest is best met by providing the summary below, while protecting the personal and confidential information contained in the underlying correspondence.

Summary of the steps taken

Mr King first informed the Commissioner in late August 2026 that his partner, Ms Jessica Rowe, intended to seek selection as a National Party candidate. Mr King then advised the Commissioner when Ms Rowe's candidacy was confirmed.

The Commissioner and senior Commission officials subsequently met with Mr King on several occasions to discuss the implications of the matter and the appropriate arrangements for managing them. These discussions have built on existing declarations of interest and management plans, as well as Mr King's commitment to maintain the high levels of impartiality and integrity expected of the Public Service. The Commissioner has noted that he needs to be satisfied that Mr King's arrangements are sufficient both to maintain public confidence in the neutrality of the Public Service and ensure that he can carry out his role effectively.

The Commission undertook a detailed assessment of this conflict of interest, including considerations of how identified risks may change during the election campaign, the caretaker and government-formation period, and following the election. The steps required to manage the conflict of interest have been comprehensively reviewed and strengthened.

The Commissioner has reviewed the conflict of interest management plan and is satisfied the arrangements in place are appropriate and proportionate, recognising that the plan is subject to change as and when circumstances change.

The Commissioner has made his expectations around political neutrality, impartial decision-making and the protection of confidential information clear. The plan places clear restrictions on Mr King's involvement in relevant discussions and decisions, requires recusal or delegation where appropriate, and includes strict requirements around confidential information and any use of his position, relationships or access. It also provides for ongoing oversight and regular written assurances.

The plan will be actively monitored and reviewed as circumstances develop. If the Commissioner considers additional measures are required, he will work with Mr King to ensure they are put in place.

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact Enquiries@publicservice.govt.nz.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that we intend to publish this response (with your personal details removed) on the Commission's website.

Yours sincerely



Nicky Dirks
Manager – Ministerial and Executive Services
Public Service Commission Te Kawa Mataaho

From:	Ben King [DPMC]
To:	Brian Roche; Amanda Malu; Andrew Clark; Andrew Hampton; Andrew Kibblewhite; annaadams; Audrey Sonerson; CORRY, Bede (CEO); Brad Ward; Brendan Boyle; Barrington, Brook; Christine Stevenson; Colin Lynch; Dave Gawn; David Ferguson; Debbie Power; diontuuta; Ellen MacGregor-Reid; Gaye Searancke; Gerardine Clifford-Lidstone; Grainne Moss; Heather Baggott; iainrennie; Jeremy Lightfoot; Smith, Justine; Karen Chang; Kellie Coombes; Mac Leauanae; Nic Blakeley; Paul James; Paula Tesoriero; Peter Chrisp; Peter Mersi; Pratima Namasivayam; Rachel Leota (PONEKE); Ray Smith; Richard Chambers; tonydavies
Cc:	Erik Koed; Kathrine Wigley [DPMC]; Janine Smith [DPMC]
Subject:	[IN-CONFIDENCE] Message to PSLT colleagues
Date:	Monday, 7 September 2026 7:24:33 pm

This email was sent from someone outside of Public Service Commission. Please take extra care.

[IN-CONFIDENCE]

Good evening colleagues,

I wanted to make you aware of a change in my personal circumstances that is relevant to my role.

This morning, my partner, Jessica Rowe, was announced as the National Party candidate for Kaipara ki Mahurangi following her successful selection yesterday.

I have kept the Public Service Commission informed during Jessica's selection process. I am now working closely with the Commission to put in place appropriate arrangements, including a formal conflict management plan, to manage the situation. This will ensure there is full and ongoing transparency around how I continue to discharge my responsibilities.

Should any aspect of these arrangements have implications for my engagement with agencies or my involvement in cross-government work, I will ensure those affected are informed and appropriate alternative arrangements are put in place where required.

I am committed to maintaining the highest level of impartiality, political neutrality and integrity expected of all public servants, and I will continue to work with the Commission to ensure the appropriate safeguards are both in place and actively managed. I am acutely aware of the perception issues that arise from these circumstances and will conduct myself accordingly.

Ngā mihi nui
Ben

Ben King (he/him)
Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet | Chief Executive
Te Tumu Whakarae mō Te Tari o te Pirimia me te Komiti Matua

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