

Hon Penny Simmonds

Minister for the Environment
Minister for Vocational Education
Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment



PS-COR1144/CORM-3837

9 June 2025

Rt Hon Simon Upton
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
C/- Matthew.Paterson@pce.parliament.nz

Dear Simon

Thank you for your letter of 30 April 2025 regarding the development of a federated system for environmental data and information. I am responding as the Minister for the Environment on behalf of joint Ministers.

We appreciate your clear articulation of the challenges of the current system – fragmentation, duplication and limited accessibility. We agree that improving how we collect, integrate and share data is essential for informed, effective decision-making across local government, business, iwi, and communities.

Your proposal of a federated model – where data is connected but not centralised – offers a practical and scalable way to improve access, interoperability and long-term resilience.

The Government's immediate focus is on progressing priority reforms where there is already strong momentum and Ministerial agreement. Your recommendations are highly relevant to these reforms. These include:

- Replacing the Resource Management Act – including better integration and standardisation of land use data
- Reform of the Environmental Reporting Act – earlier this month the Cabinet Economic Committee agreed to progress the reforms of the Environmental Reporting Act, broadly aligned to the advice you provided in 2019
- Climate adaptation – where the National Adaptation Plan and National Adaptation Framework will prioritise improved access to natural hazard and risk information.

These initiatives provide a foundation for broader system change and are helping us identify practical opportunities to improve data sharing and coordination in the near term.

There is also strong alignment with the reform of the Science, Innovation and Technology (SIT) system, particularly the need to prioritise public good datasets from Crown Research Institutes (CRIs, soon to become Public Research Organisations). My environment Ministerial colleagues, the Minister of SIT, Hon Dr Shane Reti, and I met recently to discuss the intersection of these reforms. We agreed on the value of a more coordinated, federated approach to environmental data, one that supports smarter investment, fairer risk pricing, and more efficient deployment of capital to protect infrastructure and assets. We also acknowledged the current fiscal and institutional constraints, and the need to prioritise access to core datasets that deliver public value.

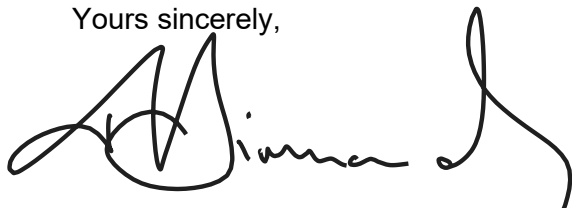
Your recommendation for a lead coordinating agency and a supporting steering group is already under consideration as part of the advice currently being developed for Ministers.

Officials are engaging with Land Information New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand, and other government agencies to explore potential roles and governance arrangements.

We welcome your forthcoming report on the role of emerging technologies. Practical insights into how space-based data capture, greater use of technologies such as AI, and other tools will be valuable as we shape a more connected, future-ready data system.

Thank you again for your continued leadership and contribution to this important area.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Penny Simmonds', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hon Penny Simmonds
Minister for the Environment

Cc: Hon Chris Bishop – Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, Minister for Infrastructure, Minister of Housing, Minister of Transport

Cc: Hon Dr Shane Reti – Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology, Minister of Statistics

Cc: Hon Chris Penk – Minister for Land Information

Cc: Hon Judith Collins KC – Minister for Digitising Government

Cc: Hon Simon Watts – Minister of Climate Change, Minister of Local Government

Cc: Hon Andrew Hoggard – Associate Minister for the Environment

Cc: Simon Court MP – Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform and the Minister for Infrastructure