Virtual Committees: COVID-19 and the NZ Parliament

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The Challenge:

• Keeping parliament “in the picture” during COVID-19 restrictions
• Filling the role of oral questions, ministerial statements
• Restrictions on attendance by MPs, public
• Practical difficulty of virtual sittings of the House
NZ Parliament’s response:

- Enable virtual meetings of select committees via Zoom
- Establish the Epidemic Response Committee
- Digital & TV broadcast of committee proceedings
Background:

- Committees already widely use Zoom for hearings of evidence & public livestreams
- Strong business analysis in place, including security assessments
- Procedural limitations on digital participation
Our actions:

- Procedural change to enable remote participation
- Agency-wide Zoom rollout (enterprise structure)
- Rapid testing & developing new protocols
- Support for MPs & other users
- Broadcasting & media liaison
Pt I: Models of social media disruption
There's nothing new under the sun.
Characteristics of virtual committees

• Meeting frequency varies by committee – ranging from no meetings to ‘business as usual’
• Security & ‘Zoom hygiene’ - Webinars vs meetings
• Emphasis on public availability
• Range of camera quality, experience, connectivity... and that’s OK!
• Secretariat staff are front and centre
Epidemic Response Committee

• Established unanimously after apolitical genesis
• Opposition majority & Chair
• Cross-party buy-in = constructive approach
• Extremely broad remit – anything to do with COVID-19 response
• Format: experts & sector voices presenting in person, leading and framing conversation

• Public visibility & media coverage a very high priority
Epidemic Response Committee - Broadcast & livestream workflow as at 22 April 2020

Participants 
Host 
Custom RTMP 
Encoder/Decoder Service 
Vimeo 
Facebook Live API 
Parliament Facebook 
Cross posts to political party Facebook Pages 
Manual iFrame Vimeo embed for on-demand playback 
Parliament Website 
Media outlets 
Parliament Website 
Facebook 
Manual iFrame 
Vimeo embed 
for on-demand playback 
RNZ 
Audio 
RTMP 
Zoom 
AWS 
Kordia 
Parliament Website
Results:

- Extremely high levels of public engagement & media coverage
- Good public feedback re transparency, format, “digital divide”
- Investigations underway into ongoing committee broadcasts
LESSONS LEARNT

WHAT DO WE WANT TO RETAIN?
Many thanks.
Ngā mihi nui.