



▶ **Submission to the Law and Order Select Committee  
Police (Cost Recovery) Amendment Bill: Policy Approval  
Submitted online, 5 February 2015**

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▶ **Contact Details**

This submission is from a group.

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▶ **Background**

**Volunteering New Zealand**

1. Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ) is the “voice of volunteering” in Aotearoa. Our vision is for a New Zealand that promotes, values and supports effective volunteering for the benefit of individuals and communities – and our mission is to promote, support and advocate for volunteering.
2. We are the only national organisation in New Zealand that focuses purely on volunteering and volunteer management. We hold the ‘big picture’ and are in a position to liaise, work with, and advise government and business sectors. This works to ensure that volunteering occurs within a positive and encouraging environment. For over 13 years, VNZ has raised

the profile of volunteer groups, volunteer management and volunteering. We have given voice to volunteering in Aotearoa, we share our stories, we create tools like the “Best Practice Guidelines and Competencies for Managers of Volunteers” and we help raise the value of volunteering to New Zealand society.

3. We can see the big picture when it comes to volunteering in New Zealand as we work with numerous organisations across the voluntary and community sectors. This big picture view means we are best placed to give advice on matters related to volunteering.
4. We work to ensure that volunteering occurs within a positive environment, where it is encouraged and fostered. We envisage a society that promotes, values and supports effective volunteering for the benefit of individuals and communities.
5. We have a membership of 45+ national and regional member organisations that involve volunteers achieving their missions. We advocate on behalf of member organisations and other groups aligned to our mission and values, who may not be members.

### **New Zealand’s voluntary sector**

6. New Zealand has more than 97,000 non-profit organisations, contributing 2.6% to GDP. This increases to 4.9% of GDP when taking into account the volunteer labour contribution and is similar to the contribution of the entire construction industry. We have been ranked as fifth in the world for volunteer participation in 2014<sup>1</sup>.
7. The most up-to-date data on the New Zealand volunteer sector suggests that there are more than 1.2 million volunteers who give over 270 million hours of unpaid labour to the sector. In 2008, 67% of the community and voluntary sector workforce was made up of volunteers; 90% of New Zealand non-profit organisations employ no staff, and rely solely on volunteers<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> From the World Giving Index 2014:

[https://www.cafonline.org/PDF/CAF\\_WGI2014\\_Report\\_1555AWEBFinal.pdf](https://www.cafonline.org/PDF/CAF_WGI2014_Report_1555AWEBFinal.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> From the *The New Zealand Non-profit Sector in Comparative Perspective*, 2008

## How VNZ collated this submission

8. VNZ's submission is based on responses from our members and networks to three areas of interest raised by the *Regulatory Impact Statement* released on the 4 October 2014 by the New Zealand Police.
9. The questions presented were as follows:
  1. *Is there any benefit to vetting volunteers for your staff, the users of your organisation or to the general public?*
  2. *What impact would paying for police vetting have on your organisation?*
  3. *Are there practical alternatives to the free Police vetting system? (e.g. funding private companies as vetting providers, an exemption system, discretion to charge by the Police based on hardship etc.)*
10. We received 17 responses from a mixture of individuals, regional Volunteer Centres and national volunteer involving organisation. The following submission provides a thematic analysis of these submissions with verbatim comments to illustrate specific points.

## Summary

The three salient points from our submission are as follows:

1. Police vetting provides a wider public good and should be part of the Police's core duties.
  2. Paying for police vetting of volunteers will significantly impact community groups and the services they are able to provide.
  3. A clear exemption system with little administrative work for community organisations to maintain is the preferred option for exemptions.
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## ► Submission

### Vetting and who it benefits

11. The primary statutory functions of the police are listed under s9 of the Policing Act 2008. This includes the maintenance of public safety and the provision of support and reassurance to the wider community.
12. In Table 1, Paragraph 1.1 of the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) released by the New Zealand Police on 4 October 2014 vetting applications are classed as “over and above” services for the Police, rather than core services. Table 2 in Paragraph 1.2 states also that the rationale for re-assessing provision of a free of charge service is that the “general public only benefits indirectly from provision of the vetting service”.
13. Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ) and our members and networks that contributed to this submission do not agree with this line of thinking. All 17 respondents believed that the vetting of volunteers was of enormous benefit not only for the staff of community organisations or the people who used these services but for the wider public. This due in large part to the increased sense of safety and community cohesiveness that people should feel when working with community based organisations, which undertake the use of volunteers who work one on one with vulnerable people or children.
14. Below is a sample of responses from submitters:

*“At the Wellington Timebank we vet every new member who joins. This is very important as members often end up going into each other's homes and meeting each other's family members. Timebanking builds community through the exchanging of skills and services. It builds trust at the local level and allows people to get their needs met within their local community. Having the preliminary police check allows members of the Timebank a level of safety and trust when engaging with each other. This leads to a greater level of engagement and community building at a very local level. It has been proven that streets are safer when people know each other in their neighbourhood. The Timebank facilitates people to build relationships with their neighbours, making safer and more resilient neighbourhoods.”*

*“The main benefit is to the public and community – the users of our organisation. Our volunteers either work with precious taonga that the museum has a duty to protect and conserve for future generations, or they interact with members of the public – and often vulnerable members of the public. For that reason alone, it would be irresponsible to take on volunteers with a history of dishonesty or criminal behaviour.”*

*“...All our drivers need to be vetted as they are often in situations whereby they are transporting vulnerable people – often at times of stress, picking them up from their homes so therefore learn intimate knowledge of the persons circumstances. As an organisation we need to know that we are not connecting the vulnerable, infirm or mentally/emotionally unwell people with unsuitable persons.”*

*"We have had a number of instances over recent years where volunteers with convictions for violent or sexual crimes have applied to be volunteer tutors. It is only through the vetting process that concerns have been raised and these volunteers have been refused access to the organisation. This will minimise risk for those involved with organisations dealing with vulnerable people, that are largely community based and operate for the benefit of the wider community."*

15. VNZ also notes that public consultation for the *Cost Recovery for Certain Police Services* conducted by the Police in 2012 found that the majority of submitters were opposed in principle to cost recovery for vetting on the basis that "vetting serves to protect vulnerable people and the wider community, thereby providing a predominantly public benefit".
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### **Impact of a paid vetting system**

16. Following the consultation period for the *Cost Recovery for Certain Police Services* paper, a round of additional targeted consultation was undertaken by the Police from 23 August to 8 September for the 147 organisations and individuals who made a submission to the initial consultation paper.
17. Submitters to this additional targeted consultation favoured an exemption for the vetting of all volunteers. The submissions to VNZ reflect this line of thinking also.
18. An assessment was made by the Police regarding the extent to which Police guidelines should provide for exemption from vetting charges for volunteers. Each option involving volunteers was assessed against the principles of efficiency, fairness, legitimacy and cost effectiveness. The assessment supported an exemption for some volunteers in Police guidelines based on a "particular type of service perceived to have an important need for vetting as a priority for Government" or "organisations that may suffer financial hardship as a result of paying for vetting". Further analysis is needed based on the numbers involved.
19. All of those who submitted to VNZ strongly expressed derision at payment for vetting for volunteers. All submitters stated that if no exemption is offered for volunteers, a large financial burden would be put on already cash-strapped and resource-poor community groups. This is due to the higher level of administration required internally to apply for exemptions or the additional funds.
20. Organisations that relied heavily on volunteers to carry out their core business felt that paying to vet them would affect them to the point where they would have to dramatically reduce the service they provide or in some cases completely stop their service.
21. Below is a sample of responses from submitters:

*We are a charity and attempt to keep our expenses at a realistic minimum. It would impact our finances detrimentally to have to pay for the police vetting service. As police vetting is a*

*requirement by the government and we are making marked contributions to community development, we would love it if the government or police service were able to cover these expenses for us. The charity space is becoming more and more difficult to work in financially, yet makes massive contributions to the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders.*

*Given our limited budgets I'm not sure we could afford keeping up the level of vetting we currently do. We would have to consider other forms of "vetting" prior to police vetting and might have to either limit the number of volunteers we take on or be more selective in our recruitment process i.e. only take on people others can personally vouch for etc.*

*Apart from a part time Coordinator at 25 hours a week, the Timebank is entirely volunteer run. Our resources are limited and we work within our means. The cost incurred for police vets would have a significant impact and likely result in our inability to continue to vet new members. This would seriously impact the community work being achieved by our organisation.*

*We would still need to continue giving all volunteers a police vet, and cut back somewhere else in order to pay for it. As a large part of our revenue comes from Auckland ratepayers, it would be fair to say that the community we serve who would ultimately pay the price.*

*Since the introduction of on-line vetting in 2011 the organisation's national office staff has had the additional task of submitting approximately 900 checks per year. Looking at the online vetting data we note it takes an average of 2-3 minutes to submit each check, resulting in the equivalent of one week of a full time staff members work on vetting checks annually. This has already created a cost to the organisation. Looking at 2012 data and the cost range proposed under the Police vetting service example (section 3) of the consultation paper English Language Partners would be required to source approximately \$4,500 – \$6,300 a year to continue the process of running police checks on new volunteers and new staff. The culture of a volunteer organisation such as ours is to acknowledge the time and resources our volunteers offer to the service and to minimise any expense that may occur in their volunteer role. Therefore the cost of Police vetting checks would be carried by the organisation alone, not passed on to our volunteers.*

*"This area of volunteering is a 'public good' and is mandated by legislation. It cannot be opted out from. If it becomes untenable to undertake response duties using these volunteers then the only other option is to encourage response from community agencies and make them responsible for all costs associated with vetting. That is hardly moral when these people are volunteers, doing what they do for nothing and most agencies that have relationships with volunteers are cash-strapped themselves."*

## Alternatives to police vetting

22. While submitters agreed with some form of exemption for community sector groups and volunteers, some alternatives were suggested. We have included the most practical ones here, which centre on individual volunteers requesting they are vetted themselves and sharing that information annually with community groups that they work with.

*"The White paper for Vulnerable Children released by The Hon Paula Bennett in 2012 says, "we believe every child deserves the chance to thrive, belong and achieve but not every child gets that opportunity in NZ." The paper highlights the need for organisations to work across a number of fronts, to develop new integrated solutions and to find a non-partisan solution. As an organisation we work alongside many other organisations whose staff or volunteers have recently been police checked. Currently there is no ability to share these results from organisation to organisation. I see that the ability to share the information would save a huge number of duplicate requests for vetting. Perhaps there could be a national database in place to access such information or simplify the ability for one organisation to share results with another – given the approval of the person involved."*

*"Perhaps it could be made free to individuals and they could get the check done annually and share it with organisations, rather than having several organisations do the same police check for one individual."*

*Best thing is an exemption for [Not for Profits] that meet certain criteria, be enshrined in the legislation so we don't have the same arguments every time new regulation is being developed.*

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