

**RURAL WOMEN NEW ZEALAND (INC) STATEMENT
UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review 4th Cycle
Pre-Sessional Meeting for the Review of New Zealand
13 February 2024**

(Slide 1)

Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) welcomes the opportunity to present to delegates ahead of New Zealand's review under the UPR.

RWNZ is affiliated to the Associated Country Women of the World, an NGO with Special Consultative status with ECOSOC. RWNZ is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation that reaches into all rural communities to provide a credible and respected voice on rural environment, health, education, technology, business and social issues. RWNZ strives to ensure that all rural residents, workers and families have equitable access to services, inequalities are addressed by Government, and the wellbeing of rural communities is considered from the beginning of all policy and legislative development.

(Slide 2)

RWNZ encourages and supports policy development by central and local government that includes both a rural impact analysis and a gender impact analysis to identify and mitigate potential adverse impacts of proposed policies on rural communities. RWNZ also champions the use of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing policies that better the lives of rural women, their families, and communities, as well as other relevant UN instruments.

We request that delegates to the Human Rights Council recommend the New Zealand government:

1. Include both a rural impact analysis and a gender impact analysis in all relevant areas of government policy-making, to identify and mitigate potential adverse impacts of proposed policies on rural communities.
2. Incorporate the SDGs in all policy development including giving effect to these goals.
3. Adopt and implement international recommendations that empower women, in particular rural women and communities, such as those issued by UN Treaty Bodies such as CEDAW and those contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Communities.

(Slide 3)

Our concerns regarding health and wellbeing relate to equity and access for all people living and working in rural communities. We are concerned for physical and mental health across rural communities, in particular across the lifespan of women from maternal and child health through to older and elderly persons. We wish to acknowledge the establishment of the Rural Health Strategy and Women's Health Strategy and look forward to their implementation, however concerns remain.

We recommend that the New Zealand government:

1. Invests in and maintains access to equitable healthcare for rural communities including increasing the availability of mobile and local health services and rural health practitioners, particularly midwives, nurses and care workers;
2. Improve access to treatment and support for mental health; disability support workers; drug and alcohol abuse, aged-care and wellbeing services, for rural New Zealanders; and

3. Ensure safe, timely and effective maternity care to all mothers regardless of their location.

(Slide 4)

Rural connectivity and digital exclusion are important and related issues in New Zealand, and we recommend that the government increase rural connectivity and maintain focus on differing needs of rural and remote areas, and support research into new and innovative ways to provide quality, affordable connectivity to rural and remote areas. We also recommend that the government establish and maintain network connectivity in rural areas to provide stable and affordable digital access to health and wellbeing services, as well as education.

(Slide 5)

Aotearoa New Zealand is particularly affected by climate change, and this will significantly impact our rural communities. Finding a balance between urban growth and land use policies which protect our productive land is vital for food production and community resilience. Discussions regarding threats to our environment, and the opportunities to mitigate them, must include rural communities. In addition, the quality, quantity, availability and equitable access of sustainable water supply must be the cornerstone of all decisions relating to water use for rural communities.

(Slide 6)

RWNZ is concerned about equity and access to education for all people living and working in rural communities. Education for rural students is compromised by distance, isolation, telecommunication limitations and workforce recruitment and retention. However, awareness of rural needs in decision-making and allocation of resources is limited by a lack of rural representation on school boards and government advisory committees.

We recommend the New Zealand government ensures rural voices are consulted during the development of education policies, procedures, regulations and delivery for lifelong learning opportunities; and maintains and improves rural schools' access to amenities including reliable and speedy internet connectivity, school property, and health and wellbeing services for students, staff and families.

(Slide 7)

Finally, RWNZ is concerned about a wide range of social issues impacting people's lives including access to community services, community inclusion and engagement, safety and security. In particular, we wish to draw your attention to the way in which the issues of rural women experiencing family violence are exacerbated by rural isolation. Rural isolation is an impediment to seeking and receiving urgent help when it is needed.

We therefore ask for stronger recommendations that address the need to fully resource agencies and communities to protect women and children from violence and provide safe houses and support close to rural communities.