



WORKING FOR WORLD CLASS PERFORMANCE; APPROACHES TO ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE IN WORKSAFE NEW ZEALAND

Ross Wilson

Chair of Worksafe New Zealand and
former President New Zealand Council of Trade Unions

The Pike River Mine Disaster in 2010, which claimed 29 lives, shook all New Zealanders. Worksafe New Zealand, a stand-alone regulator, governed by a Board, was established in 2013 as one of several Government measures to achieve 'an urgent, sustainable step-change' in our workplace health and safety performance.

The 2011 Royal Commission into Pike River, and the subsequent Task Force, identified serious weaknesses in many aspects of the existing system. Recommendations included a new OSH law, the new regulatory agency and strong visible leadership from the Government, business and unions, a stronger focus on occupational health and major hazard facilities, and greater use of high-quality data to support more effective harm prevention and a more risk aware national culture.

As a start-up WorkSafe NZ spent much of its founding years building core capacity, visibility, and respect as an effective regulator. This included developing a base operating model, policies and procedures, assisting with the development of a new legislative and regulatory framework based on the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 and leading its implementation, building capability for regulatory functions by training new and existing staff, and building relationships across the health and safety system with business, union and other partner organisations in the private and public sectors. A range of tripartite groups and senior leadership fora have been established across industry sectors and government to enable unions, industry and regulators to work collaboratively in developing solutions to sector health and safety issues.

In our 5 years since inception, good progress has been made in reducing harm.

We are on target to achieve the Government target of a 25% reduction in work-related fatalities and serious harm by 2020. These reductions have been driven largely by improvements in the performance of Worksafe's priority sectors; forestry, agriculture, construction and manufacturing.

There is no doubt that the new agency model, led by a Board from diverse backgrounds, has been a key aspect of this success, but there has been a very strong commitment from all levels of the organisation and from players across the national system. The relatively small organisation of 545 people has responded enthusiastically to the mission to transform New Zealand's health and safety performance to world class, and our vision of ensuring 'that everyone who goes to work comes home healthy and safe'. People feel proud of the work we do and as an organisation we remain committed to making the changes necessary to build performance and achieve our mission.

The Challenges

But, while Worksafe has established itself as a credible regulator and system leader, there are major challenges ahead in working to achieve our mission of world class performance. There is evidence that the improvement in health and safety performance achieved over the past 5 years is levelling off and more systemic initiatives are required, capacity to address chronic exposures and health issues (including mental health, bullying and harassment) is immature compared with many other comparable countries, and further work needs to be done to ensure that the catastrophic harm potential of some high hazard organisations is adequately regulated.

And this needs to be done in the context of an ageing and growing population with increased numbers of vulnerable workers, growth in higher risk sectors, changing business models and employment relationships, the changing nature of work, and an increasing prevalence of work-induced psychological harm.

The Step Change

To achieve the next 'step change' in sustainable performance, the Worksafe 2018-22 strategy is focused on harm prevention through improved regulatory effectiveness, increased harm prevention capacity and growing effective strategic relationships across the national system. Underpinning this will be a programme to drive our organisational excellence; strengthening capacity and culture by ensuring that we are a learning organisation, and making the investment in ICT capability and infrastructure to create a high performing organisation. An important aspect of our approach will be building our Te Ao Māori (Māori world view) capability to inform our work with our indigenous people who suffer higher fatality and injury rates.

New Initiatives

Worksafe aspires to be a data and intelligence led regulator able to aggregate and analyse data to target injury prevention initiatives to the highest risk areas and to enable regulatory interventions including enforcement and prosecutions to be more effectively and efficiently directed, thus reducing the costs to society and the economy of workplaces that don't adequately protect against harm. Subject to Government funding, such a system will be progressively developed and implemented over the next few years alongside an organisational modernisation programme, and a modern regulatory practice model appropriate to the challenges of modern workplaces.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 provides a framework of duties and regulatory tools, the potential of which have yet to be realised. The strong duties on Officers and Persons Conducting a Business or Enterprise (PCBUs), along with the rights supporting worker participation and the powers of health and safety representatives provide a core to this modern version of the Robens model.

The greatest emphasis to date has been on education and an impressive resource of guidance and information, in many formats, has been developed. A very popular innovation has been 'Safe+', an online self-assessment improvement tool. An independent onsite assessment and advisory service was launched last year, along with the free online self-assessment tool which is particularly targeted to small and medium-sized enterprises.

A joint Harm Reduction Plan with our Accident Compensation Corporation will aim to shift behaviours through researched and targeted interventions. This will be supported by enabling investment in projects such as building worker engagement, participation and representation, and a stronger focus on vulnerable workers and work-related health protection.

Worker participation and representation is another major challenge in a country where union density in the private sector has fallen below 20% and is even lower in high risk sectors such as agriculture, forestry and construction.

This has led Worksafe, working in tripartite planning workshops, to look at the development of alternative models of support and representation for workers, particularly vulnerable workers in high risk sectors. The first pilot will begin this year in the forestry sector and will work, under the auspices of the new tripartite Forest Industry Safety Council (FISC), with unions and Māori communities in the North Island of New Zealand to develop a community-based model of support and representation for forestry workers, many of whom are Māori. This project will build on the Te Ao Maruiti Project which brought employers, workers and their families (whanau) together in a workshop based on a Māori approach and values.

The final key part of the Worksafe strategy is to build more, and more effective, relationships across the national health and safety system. We already have close working relationships with our business and union social partners, and sector councils in forestry, agriculture and construction. We know that working with all players in the system is the key to sustained performance improvement.
