



Submission on the petition of Sam Fisher

To the Petitions Committee

3 March 2026

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on this petition. We are concerned about the impact of abuse and harassment on all elected members but we recognise that women receive more and different kinds of abuse. Research by Shannon Zhan has revealed that women elected members in New Zealand are significantly more likely than their male colleagues to experience gendered abuse, sexualised comments, threats to their family, and threats of sexual violence.¹

All threats and violence directed at elected members have an impact on people's willingness to stand and be involved in democracy. The gendered split, where women are disproportionately subjected to harassment, risks undermining the representative quality of representative democracy.

LGNZ notes that Sam Fisher's petition was submitted in early 2024. Since then, New Zealand political discourse has been influenced by international trends and become notably more polarised. This was evident in the local government elections in late 2025. Many experienced Mayors and councillors have told us that the 2025 election campaign was the most divisive and nasty they had participated in.

Data about the extent of abuse and harassment

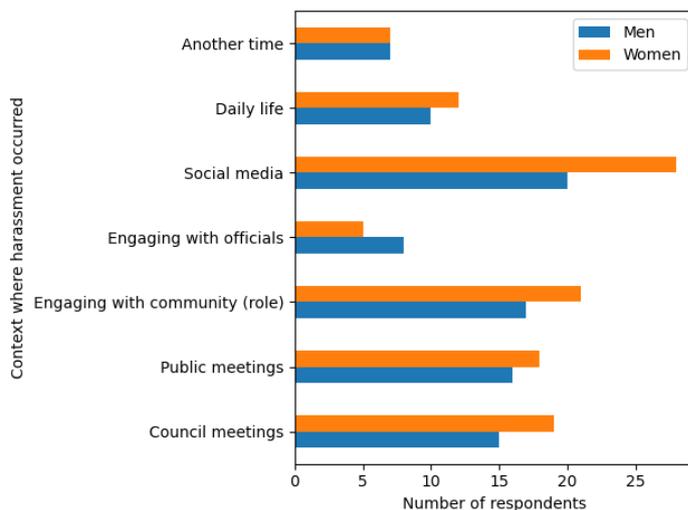
2025 abuse and harassment survey

In mid 2025, LGNZ invited members to fill in a survey about their experiences of abuse and harassment. This survey was completed by 88 elected members. It showed that:

- Bullying/harassment is very common for both genders. Women report it slightly more frequently than men (91% vs 83%)
- 31% reported experiencing bullying, harassment or abuse while performing their role as an elected member.
- Women report more harassment outside formal council settings, particularly in everyday interactions. They also report more harassment on social media.

¹ Shannon Zhan, "From Harm to Harassment: Understanding and Combatting Online Gender Based Violence" (2024).

- Members of the public are the most common source of harassment for both genders.
- Most respondents take no formal action.



LGNZ is about to embark on our triennial census of elected members and we are considering including some questions about the experience of abuse and harassment.

Other LGNZ data

In 2024, an LGNZ poll of Mayors and Chief Executives at one of our events showed that nearly two thirds had faced aggressive and abusive behaviour online; 74% had experienced this behaviour during public, in-person meetings. A third of respondents said abuse and aggression happened during everyday activities like shopping or collecting children from school – and 39% said it happened at community events. Furthermore, 53% said the aggressive, abusive or offensive behaviour was worse than a year ago.

When we surveyed members at an event in 2022, we found 43% had experienced harassment, prejudice, threatening or derogatory behaviours in their role. Half had experienced harassment while working in the community, while a third said abuse occurred while they had been shopping or collecting children from school.

Anecdotal data from our members

We know from conversations with Mayors, Chairs, Chief Executives and councillors that abuse has increased. Everyone is experiencing more abuse regardless of gender or where they sit on the political spectrum. While elected members are higher profile, abuse can also be directed at staff, particularly Chief Executives.

While everyone is experiencing more abuse, women report gendered abuse, sexualised comments, threats to their family, and threats of sexual violence – and we receive the most anecdotal comments about abuse from women, with wāhine Māori particularly targeted. We suspect this had a chilling effect on women standing for the 2025 local government elections,



although we have no hard data (and this would be very difficult to gather). Women elected members have told us that, when asked if they would recommend standing for public office, many have felt in good conscience they must say “no”, particularly when the question is asked by a young woman with a family, given that family members can also be targeted by abuse or harassment.

Much of this abuse is online. Politicians cannot avoid social media as a campaigning tool, which means they cannot avoid being exposed to abuse.

However, not all the abuse is online and in-person abuse has a dramatic effect on elected members’ sense of safety. We have first-hand accounts of women elected members having their children followed home from school. Many elected members talk about being abused in the supermarket or at public events, including when they have their children with them. The rise of so-called sovereign citizens has seen people being “served” with documents at their home address in the weekend, including at night. Many elected members have had to install home security systems, and many councils have been forced to increase physical security at their offices. Last year the Remuneration Authority introduced a security system allowance for elected members after we provided information to support this decision.

When LGNZ holds online meetings or in-person sessions on how to deal with abuse and harassment, we always get a strong turnout and high engagement with the material.

Support for local government elected members

In May 2025, LGNZ launched a “How to stay safe” guide for elected members, as part of a session on addressing abuse against elected members.

Our Ākona professional development platform contains modules on how to look after your physical and online safety, and these have been well received.

We will be running workshops on safety at our upcoming SuperLocal26 conference in Rotorua in July.

We connect women elected members via an annual pre-conference event and online, and offer informal mentoring.

Others working in this space

Last year at an LGNZ event, the Minister for Women Nicola Griggs launched a toolkit to help women to combat abuse. This toolkit has been well received, which is an indication of need.

We engaged with the Ministry for Women’s recent long-term insights briefing process, which was focused in this area.

We are aware of the imminent launch of [Face Forward](#), a non-partisan initiative funding social media monitoring for women elected officials and candidates, and we will be promoting this service to our members.



Conclusion

LGNZ is concerned about the increasing abuse and harassment of all elected members, including the targeting of women, and the potential chilling effect this is having on New Zealand's democracy. Our focus is on supporting our members and advocating for change. While we would potentially support an inquiry, we are more interested in practical change and solutions.

We would recommend the following actions:

- That a central agency is tasked with monitoring and reporting on data and trends around the harassment of elected members.
- That both local and central government elected members facing abuse and harassment receive focused support, including centrally led engagement with social media platforms and police support.
- That the useful work done by the Ministry for Women in creating resources specifically for elected leaders is built on.
- That any relevant opportunities are taken to strengthen legal deterrence of abuse and harassment (for example, LGNZ has strongly supported legislation intended to prevent stalking, and to prohibit protests outside people's homes).