

13 January 2025

**Submission** to the Ministry for Regulation on the ***Regulatory Standards Bill***

As a Catholic Justice and Peace Commission we submit our strong opposition to the **Regulatory Standards Bill**, as currently proposed, based on several concerns grounded in the principles of **Catholic Social Teaching (CST)**, as well as broader social justice principles. While the goal of improving the regulatory process is commendable, there are significant risks that this Bill could undermine human dignity, the common good, solidarity, and environmental protections. If not adequately amended, the Bill could create harm for the most vulnerable populations within our society and fail to uphold the ethical obligations of the government, particularly towards marginalised communities and the environment.

This Bill has the potential to create bureaucratic delays that obstruct the timely implementation of regulations that are vital for public health, safety, and environmental protection.

The Bill's requirement for extensive regulatory impact assessments and reviews may hinder urgent regulatory action needed to protect the well-being of all New Zealanders. CST emphasises the need for governments to act swiftly and effectively, especially regarding issues related to public health, workers' rights, and environmental crises. Delays caused by overcomplicated processes could exacerbate existing problems, particularly for vulnerable groups who rely on the swift delivery of essential services.

**Preferential Option for the Poor:**

One of the key tenets of Catholic Social Teaching that we advocate for is the **preferential option for the poor**, which calls for policies and regulations that prioritise the well-being of marginalised and vulnerable communities. This Bill could disproportionately affect these groups by making engagement harder in regulatory processes or by delaying regulations that protect their rights. This is especially concerning in areas such as healthcare, housing, labour rights, and environmental protections, where the most disadvantaged communities would face the greatest harm from slow or ineffective regulatory changes.

**Our Indigenous Community:**

Moreover, Māori and indigenous communities, whose rights are protected under the Te Tiriti o Waitangi | the Treaty of Waitangi, would be particularly affected by a regulatory process that does not ensure their meaningful participation or consultation. The Bill must incorporate stronger safeguards to ensure that Māori communities and other marginalised groups are not overlooked or disregarded.

The Tiriti o Waitangi | Treaty of Waitangi is the foundational document in Aotearoa New Zealand's legal and political landscape, ensuring the protection of Māori rights and interests. The **Regulatory Standards Bill** does not explicitly incorporate Te Tiriti or ensure that regulatory processes respect and uphold the Treaty's principles.

CST once more emphasises the importance of **solidarity with our indigenous peoples**, and without clear provisions for Treaty considerations, this Bill risks further marginalising Māori communities in critical decisions about land, resources, and cultural heritage. The government's duty to engage in meaningful consultation and uphold Māori interests must be enshrined in the regulatory process.

### **Common Good:**

The **common good** is central to Catholic Social Teaching. This calls for the well-being of all people, especially the most vulnerable, to be placed at the heart of policy decisions. If the **Regulatory Standards Bill** favours the interests of powerful business groups over public welfare, it will undermine the common good. By prioritising efficiency or cost-cutting measures without considering long-term social, environmental, or health impacts, this Bill will weaken essential regulations that protect public health, workers' rights, and the environment.

For instance, if regulations are delayed or diluted because they are deemed economically burdensome, the long-term effects could harm society, especially those who are already at a disadvantage. The Bill must ensure that the regulatory framework always consider broader societal impacts, especially for the most vulnerable.

### **Subsidiarity:**

Furthermore, we advocate for the CST **principle of subsidiarity**, which states that decisions should be made at the most local level possible. The **Regulatory Standards Bill** design is to centralise decision-making and remove local communities' ability to participate in the regulatory process. This will undermine the principle of subsidiarity by limiting local engagement and failing to consider the specific needs and knowledge of communities, especially in sectors such as environmental regulation, healthcare, and local governance.

Local communities, particularly those in rural areas or those affected by specific regional issues, must have a voice in regulatory processes. Centralising regulatory authority risks creating a top-down approach that overlooks local expertise and the lived realities of affected communities.

### **Care for Creation:**

Serious implications for environmental sustainability are anticipated by this Bill's trajectory. CST stresses **care for creation**, which requires a moral responsibility to protect the environment for future generations. The Bill's expectation to delay the implementation of environmental regulations or make them more cumbersome could harm efforts to address climate change, resource conservation, and biodiversity protection.

In particular, the bill prioritises efficiency and cost-cutting without considering environmental sustainability. Therefore, industries will be allowed to bypass critical environmental safeguards. This will result in long-term damage to New Zealand's natural resources and ecosystems, contrary to the Church's teachings on protecting the Earth.

The **Regulatory Standards Bill** places a strong emphasis on cost-benefit analysis and efficiency in the regulatory process. While economic considerations are important, CST focuses on the dignity of the human person and the need for regulations to protect human rights and well-being. If the Bill focuses too heavily on reducing regulatory burdens for businesses or the state, it will undermine regulations that are necessary to protect workers, consumers, and the environment.

For example, by making it more difficult to introduce social or labour protections, the Bill will harm workers and marginalised groups who rely on strong regulations to safeguard their rights and living standards.

### **Conclusion:**

It would be reasonable, if not justifiable to question the logic (or sanity) of attempting to reintroduce a Bill that has historically, with amendment and alteration, failed dismally in previous attempts to have it introduced into law.

As a Commission, we approach this Bill through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching, and therefore urge Parliament to reconsider the **Regulatory Standards Bill** in its current form (and potential future forms). While regulatory reform is necessary, the Bill must

ensure the promotion of the **common good**, respect **Treaty obligations**, and protect the **dignity of the human person**, especially the most vulnerable.

Additionally, the Bill must ensure that **subsidiarity** is upheld, **local voices** are heard, and **environmental protections** are not delayed or undermined. Without these safeguards, the Bill risks being more beneficial to powerful economic interests than to common welfare, and it will harm those most in need of our protection.

We urge the Bill be withdrawn. Far too many amendments would be required to reflect the true values of justice, solidarity, and care for creation that is, not only central to Catholic Social Teaching, but critical to the moral and legal obligations of all people and industries in Aotearoa New Zealand.