Serving Success 2026 Revision

Opportunities for the Hospitality Industry

Introduction

Hospitality New Zealand (Hospitality NZ) and the Restaurant Association of New Zealand (Restaurant Association) jointly ran the 2026 Hospitality Summit, hosted at Parliament by Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, Hon. Louise Upston.

The Summit built on the inaugural 2024 edition, and brought together industry representatives and government officials to discuss the issues that matter most to hospitality across key areas including immigration and employment, licensing and compliance, alcohol policy, skills and training and the intersection of tourism and hospitality.

Significant progress on the 2024 Summit was made between editions. Of the original 63 recommendations, 21 were completed or awaiting completion. The list of completed actions is included in Appendix 1 at the end of this document.

The below recommendations include new items raised through the update process via an industry survey, feedback during the Summit event and 2024 recommendations that have not progressed or been completed since the first Summit.

It's important to note that this is a set of recommendations from the hospitality industry, and reflects the perspective we bring to policy and regulation. Some of the recommendations set out below may be considered on track, but the industry is focused on when the changes are implemented, and improvements are in place for the day-to-day operations of hospitality businesses.

It's also worth noting that while we may have a view on the solution to some of the issues raised here, we are interested in outcomes that support the growth of the hospitality industry. We recognise that some of these recommendations will take some time to progress – especially if legislative change is needed to enable the desired outcome.

On both fronts, the industry associations and the broader hospitality sector have a long-term ambition for the betterment of the industry, and are committed to working proactively and productively with government ministers and officials, local councils and key stakeholders to progress these issues as raised.

Each issue section is laid out in no particular order of priority, however the recommendations in each section are. To note however, many key recommendations received very similar priority rankings and should therefore be considered of similar importance. All of the recommendations represent issues that are important to resolve for hospitality to continue to grow as an industry, incentivise investment and expand its role as a key employer and economic contributor.

We welcome the opportunity to engage with interested parties on the recommendations as set out below, and look forward to working collaboratively to enable a stronger hospitality industry.

Employment and Immigration

Employment and immigration play an important role in ensuring the hospitality industry can continue to deliver the high quality manaakitanga, service and experiences guests have come to expect. These settings help the sector fill roles, grow their businesses and contribute meaningfully to the industry and the wider economy.

Shifting the approach:

- ***Ensure employment-based immigration pathways place appropriate weight on demonstrated industry experience, career progression and practical capability alongside formal qualifications.*** While the sector doesn't have widespread qualifications, and migrants who do struggle to have their institution recognised, this shouldn't invalidate their work experience in hospitality. Formal recognition should explicitly consider career progression as a metric for work experience, and help streamline job changes and job check processes. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***

- ***Ensure students who choose to study hospitality in New Zealand are eligible to work here in the industry after their studies.*** While the Post Study Work Visa exists, requirements don't fit hospitality qualifications or applicants. Government should implement a study to work visa pathway that enables greater retention of international students with hospitality qualifications in New Zealand.

Adjusting what's in place:

Recommendation	Rationale	Lead / Enable / Partner
Add chefs, head waiters and restaurant and bar managers to the Green List, as recognition of the long term, sustained shortage of skilled workers in these roles in NZ.	These are key roles for the sector, and ones that we are unable to fill solely with a domestic workforce. A lack of realistic residency pathways for the industry hampers our ability to grow and deliver the level of service aligned with the Government's tourism growth aspirations.	**Lead**: Central Govt (MBIE) **Enable**: Central Govt **Partner**: Industry Bodies
Reintroduce industry-specific immigration officers to enhance visa processing. Failing this, MBIE / Immigration NZ should set up industry-specific advisory teams to support industry knowledge and provide a point of contact for employers. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***	Businesses interacting with the immigration system are frustrated by the lack of industry knowledge demonstrated by Immigration NZ processing teams. Industry-specific teams will help build a knowledge base and understand the context of business applications and rationale.	**Lead**: Central Govt (INZ) **Enable**: Central Govt **Partner**: Industry Bodies

Extend the market-rate approach now used for the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) across all employment-based visa pathways, including the Skilled Migrant Category, using independently verified market and industry remuneration data.	Blanket wage thresholds are used as an arbitrary indicator of skill, rather than a protection against exploitation, and are often out of line with industry medians.	**Lead**: Central Govt (MBIE) **Enable**: Central Govt **Partner**: Industry Bodies
AEWV: Remove the job check step for businesses that have proven their reliability (eg HospoCred accreditation).	This would streamline visa and hiring processes, as the third-party verification is already complete, reducing unnecessary delays.	**Lead**: Central Govt (MBIE) **Enable**: Central Govt **Partner**: Industry Bodies
Skilled Migrant Category (SMC): Modify the weighting of the Skilled Migrant Category points system to better recognise practical industry experience and career progression, and to provide experienced hospitality professionals with realistic pathways to residence.	In hospitality, practical experience often outweighs formal education, and recognising this can lead to a more accurate assessment of a candidate's capabilities.	**Lead**: Central Govt (MBIE) **Enable**: Central Govt **Partner**: Industry Bodies
Working Holiday Visa (WHV): Extend the maximum work period for working holiday visa holders to at least six months, with a target of 12 months for all countries.	This would alleviate recruitment and training costs for businesses by allowing more time to onboard and integrate new employees. Specific countries to be targeted are Ireland, Czech Republic, Argentina, Spain, Chile, Hungary, but the objective should be greater consistency across all Working Holiday Visa schemes.	**Lead**: Central Govt (MBIE) **Enable**: Central Govt **Partner**: Industry Bodies
Work with industry to recognise emerging hospitality occupations, such as coffee roasters, within the National Occupation List	Improves classification accuracy and visa processing.	**Lead**: Central Govt **Enable**: Central Govt **Partner**: Industry Bodies

Alcohol Policy

Alcohol is an area where there are numerous opportunities to improve the experience of the hospitality industry, and where improvements can be made to enhance compliance and operational efficiency, while minimising alcohol-related harms.

There are also legislative requirements that do not reflect the practicalities of operating a hospitality business, which lead to unnecessary difficulties for both employers and staff.

Shifting the approach:

- ***Reframe the object of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act (SSAA).*** While the object of the SSAA is focused on minimising harm, the positive impacts of socialisation, particularly in a hospitality context, should be promoted. This would recognise hospitality's role in harm minimisation, and ensure regulation of the sector was proportionate to its broader contributions. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***

- ***Reduce excise tax on kegs.*** Excise tax is one of the largest unavoidable input costs for venues, yet it sits largely outside normal business cost controls. Unlike many other costs, excise automatically increases every year, regardless of trading conditions. Keg excise directly affects on-premise hospitality - beer sold from kegs is overwhelmingly consumed in bars, pubs, clubs and restaurants. High keg excise disproportionately impacts on-premise venues, compared with off-licence retail and reducing this would be a targeted way to support hospitality, not a blanket tax cut.

Adjusting what's in place:

Recommendation	Rationale	Lead / Enable / Partner
Resolve coercion issues for license holders - ie an inspector pressuring an applicant to accept conditions or be taken to hearing.	Ensures licences are issued on their merits and consistent with local alcohol rules and the intent of SSAA.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ, Police) **Enable:** Local Govt, DLCs
Introduce better consistency in decision making across licensing conditions nationally.	Provides certainty for licence applicants.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ) **Enable:** Local Govt, DLCs
Reduce renewal requirements for operators with a positive track record.	Supports operators with no licencing issues through their renewal.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ) **Enable:** Local Govt, DLCs
Review the risk weighting framework in the Sale and Supply of Alcohol (Fees) Regulations.	Aligns costs with actual harm and compliance.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ) **Enable:** Local Govt, DLCs
Establish clear, objective criteria that agencies must	Reduces unnecessary costs and delays, ensuring only	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ) **Enable:** Local Govt, DLCs

meet before sending an applicant for a licence to a hearing.	well-founded objections proceed to the hearing stage.	
Set stricter timeframes on regulatory bodies to receive objections. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***	Prevents indefinite delays.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ) **Enable:** Local Govt, DLCs
Under subpart 7 of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act, legislate to remove the six-month in-country work requirement some territorial authorities require for Duty Manager certification.	Enables competent, experienced and eligible visa holders to complete their duty manager certifications quickly.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ) **Enable:** Immigration NZ
Duty manager registers should be amended to allow for more flexible registering of duty managers across multiple venues.	Many territorial authorities consider a Duty Managers tied to a specific venue. Clarifying requirements for local government allows for flexibility for both the individual and businesses.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ) **Enable:** Local Govt, DLCs
Clarify and standardise through guidance across territorial authorities what is deemed acceptable training for staff.	Standardised training enables certainty for hospitality groups across their training requirements.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MOJ) **Enable:** Local Govt, DLCs

Intersection of Tourism and Hospitality

Strengthening connections between tourism and hospitality policy and funding can help align support for the sector. Greater transparency in how funding is allocated will provide clarity, while boosting tourism will create more opportunities for the hospitality industry to thrive.

Shifting the approach:

- ***Building an internationally facing culinary brand.*** As we grow New Zealand's reputation as a food destination through programmes like Michelin, a dedicated internationally facing culinary brand would enable us to sustain momentum, and show that our unique food and beverage, and hospitality approach, extends much further than our Michelin offering. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***

- ***Encourage and support the collection of Short-Term Rental Accommodation (STRA) data to inform and develop policy options.*** The STRA sector is largely unregulated and competes with commercial accommodation operators without facing the same registration and compliance costs. As the largest accommodation sub-sector in New Zealand, levelling the playing field with commercial accommodation should be a priority. Addressing this should include a national register, and ensure STRA's inclusion in any accommodation regulation.

- ***Implement a Government subvention fund for business events.*** Business events fill key off-season periods and bring delegates into our key hospitality precincts. Supporting the business events sector via a subvention fund directly relates to creating guest nights and meals out for accommodation and food and beverage operators. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***

Adjusting what's in place:

Recommendation	Rationale	Lead / Enable / Partner
Ensure long-term planning and investment is sustained to drive a consistent pipeline of events into the future.	Events bring economic and social value to New Zealand, across tourism and hospitality, but have a long lead-time - ensuring planning and investment into the future enables more businesses to make the most of these opportunities.	**Lead:** Central Govt **Enable:** Local Govt, Industry
Sustain investment in retaining and expanding Michelin's footprint in New Zealand beyond the initial three-year commitment.	Enables New Zealand to maximise the opportunity.	**Lead:** Central Govt **Partner:** Industry

Ensure strong links between TNZ and food and beverage industry - TNZ must be properly resourced to support the inclusion of hospitality. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***	Ensures food and beverage is meaningfully integrated into international tourism marketing.	**Lead:** Central Govt **Partner:** Industry
Better coordinate business events across cities & regions.	Supports smoother demand across the country.	**Lead:** Local Govt **Partner:** Industry
Fund destination management plans that include food and beverage stakeholders.	Ensures food and beverage is meaningfully integrated into the tourism experience.	**Lead:** Local Govt

Data / Licensing & Regulatory Compliance

Reducing the compliance burden is a cross-cutting theme that touches many of the other areas mentioned in this report. It has a dedicated section because of its significance to the industry, and there are opportunities identified that can work overall to ease this burden. Streamlining processes and improving communication between regulatory bodies can significantly reduce the time and resources businesses need to spend on compliance.

When hospitality businesses share information with regulatory bodies and councils, they are often required to submit the same information multiple times. This repetitive process adds significant time and compliance burdens on businesses. The duplication of effort not only increases administrative workload but also diverts resources away from core business activities.

Shifting the approach:

- ***Tier the scale of the Food Levy based on size of business.*** The Food Levy is currently collected from any registered food business with no scalable fee, meaning a takeaway-only coffee shop pays the same amount as a supermarket. A tier system should be introduced to reflect the size of operation, taking into account footprint and revenue.

- ***Introduce reverse sensitivity clauses for residential developments in nightlife precincts.*** Noise complaints related to inner city and late-night venues have been increasing, and sometimes come from neighbours who have moved into the area after a venue has already been established. This results in warnings and confiscations of sound equipment by councils, and extends to requirements for sound proofing of buildings, early closure of outdoor areas and ultimately lost business. Reverse sensitivity clauses would protect venues operating in built up urban entertainment areas. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***

Adjusting what's in place:

Recommendations	**Rationale**	**Lead / Enable / Partner**
Allow 'opt-in' for businesses to share relevant information across agencies and across all regulatory processes.	Reduces duplication for licensing applications and renewals. Business Connect could play a role in reducing this duplication.	**Lead:** Central Govt **Enable:** Local Govt
Implement better consistency in how processes are carried out and rules are applied across the country across all regulatory/compliance processes.	Enables better understanding and certainty when interacting on compliance processes. This must include better and full transparency around cost recovery.	**Lead:** Local Govt

Where appropriate, encourage adoption of nighttime economy strategies. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***	Encourages better use of those businesses open late and their role in destination vibrancy.	**Lead:** Local Govt **Partner:** Industry
Ensure payment regulation enables businesses to recover genuine payment processing costs, and reverse the current proposed surcharge ban, while supporting greater competition and transparency in the payments system. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***	Adds significant costs to end users, and current proposed intervention isn't targeted at the right part of the system.	**Lead:** Central Govt
Review sequencing requirements between alcohol licensing and building consent processes. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***	Liquor licences can't be applied for until a building consent has been issued. This means operators have sunk investments for venue builds and fitouts without the certainty they'll be able to obtain a licence.	**Lead:** Central Govt (MBIE, MOJ) **Enable:** Local Govt
Provide more flexibility in commercial kitchen licensing by streamlining processes for licence variations and reducing associated costs.	Current licensing requirements limit the ability of businesses to test new products or preparation methods, often requiring costly and time-consuming variations for minor changes. Greater flexibility would support innovation and reduce unnecessary compliance costs.	**Lead:** Central Govt (NB: Announced but yet to be implemented)
Streamline processes and adopt digital systems and tools across all regulatory/compliance systems to support businesses to comply, and demonstrate compliance with regulatory requirements.	Small businesses face high compliance costs and long approval times. Simplifying processes and introducing digital systems would reduce administrative burden and improve efficiency.	**Lead:** Local Govt, Central Govt **Partner:** Industry
Include hospitality data on existing platforms like the Tourism Evidence and Insights Centre on an ongoing basis.	While some sales data is available, broader hospitality-relevant datasets include workforce, business performance and visitor expenditure data at national	**Lead:** Central Govt

	and regional levels.	
Integrate formal industry representation on local and national regulatory committees, ensuring hospitality has a voice in decision-making, consultation processes, and priority projects.	Having industry representatives involved in regulatory decision-making helps ensure rules are practical, improves communication between government and industry, and leads to more effective and balanced regulatory outcomes.	**Lead:** Industry **Enable:** Local Govt

Skills & Training

New Zealand's hospitality industry faces the challenge of becoming an industry of choice, necessitating the development of a robust skills pipeline to support more Kiwis in these roles, enhance productivity and profitability, and reduce reliance on migrant workers.

However, the current turbulence created by reduced funding for hospitality courses at secondary school and the Vocational Education and Training (VET) reform process further complicates these challenges, as the sector struggles with a lack of stability and effective outcomes for both learners and businesses. While government collaboration and marketing initiatives are underway, continuous professional development and innovation are crucial for sustainable growth for the industry.

Shifting the approach:

- ***Establish sustainable and consistent pathways from secondary and higher education into employment in hospitality.*** Ensure Hospitality is recognised as an industry-led subject within the future secondary school curriculum, providing clear pathways into vocational education and employment. Constant changes to how hospitality courses are developed, structured and implemented create uncertainty for prospective students. A clear pathway into the sector helps build our pipeline of talent and aligns with the Tourism Roadmap. Programmes should be simplified with clear career progression demonstrated to students.

- ***Establish a structured framework for ongoing consultation between the hospitality industry and vocational education providers.*** This ensures that courses offered are in step with the skills required by operators and allows ongoing innovation across the vocational education system.

Adjusting what's in place:

Recommendations	**Rationale**	**Lead / Enable / Partner**
Fund hospitality courses at Year 11 as a key entry point for students considering careers in the industry. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***	Removing funding for these key entry points impacts the industry's ability to build our pipeline of talent and grow the number of Kiwis in hospitality roles.	**Lead:** Central Govt **Partner:** Industry, Education providers
Develop and implement flexible training models incorporating blended learning, micro-credentials and short courses.	Supports rapid upskilling and recognition of skills learnt on the job.	**Lead**: Industry **Enable**: Central Govt (MOE, NZQA)

Increase availability of scholarships for those enrolled in accredited hospitality courses.	Improves accessibility and incentives for industry training.	**Lead:** Scholarship providers **Partner:** Industry
Review the current hospitality unit standards used in schools and investigate extending their inclusion in the Base Scope of Assessment for Schools.	Improves resilience and uptake.	**Lead:** Central Govt
Introduce food education at entry and intermediate levels through the EATucation programme.	Assists building our pipeline of talent.	**Lead**: Central Govt (MOE) **Partner**: Industry
Support Industry Skills Board's plan to develop a hub sharing resources and case studies of service sector excellence.	Reinforces and consolidates existing initiatives.	**Lead**: Industry Skills Board **Partner**: Industry
Develop modern formal training for hospitality subsectors such as coffee specialities. ***(New recommendation in 2026)***	Addresses niche skills gaps.	**Lead**: Industry, Education providers **Enable**: NZQA

APPENDIX 1

Hospitality Summit Completed Report Recommendations

The solution	Progress	Notes
DATA		
Develop a central online platform (Central Hub) to consolidate relevant information and resources for the hospitality industry from both government and industry bodies.	On track	Industry led; pending deployment.
Support and expand the ongoing data domain project by the Restaurant Association and Hospitality NZ, including leveraging the application submitted to the Tourism Data Partnership Fund.		
Perform a data audit to identify and catalogue all hospitality-specific data currently available.		
IMMIGRATION		
Undertake a comprehensive review and realignment of National Occupation List (NOL) classifications and their associated skill levels to better reflect job roles and requirements in the hospitality sector.	Ongoing	Regular reviews of NOL are undertaken.
AEWV: Review the Ministry of Social Development's role in job checks, particularly regarding candidate skill levels.	Complete	Labour market test amended to a declaration-based model.
AEWV: Increase the maximum continuous stay for the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) from the current two years to a standard three-year duration, with an opportunity to extend for another two – to a five-year total.	Complete	Adopted as part of the AEWV review.
Establish industry advisory groups as feedback channels to quickly raise and address issues as they arise.	Ongoing	Immigration NZ setting up this group.

The solution	Progress	Notes
LICENSING AND COMPLIANCE		
Develop a page within the Central Hub that consolidates information on local government compliance processes relevant to hospitality.	On track	Being developed alongside the central hub.
Ensure hospitality is an area of focus for the Ministry of Regulation.	Complete	Review underway.
Endorse Business New Zealand's Reducing Compliance Report (2024) to strengthen the industry's collective voice and advocate our shared perspectives to government.	Complete	
ALCOHOL POLICY		
Develop and provide training programs and resources for DLC members.	Ongoing	The Ministry of Justice is able to progress this recommendation.
Amend the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act to allow for no-alcohol options alongside low-alcohol options.	Underway	SSAA (Improving Alcohol Regulation) Amendment Bill progressing through Parliament.
Repeal Sections 47 and 48 of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act to remove Good Friday and Easter Sunday as restricted trading days.	Complete.	Member's Bill passed into law.
Repeal the Sale and Supply of Alcohol (Community Participation) Amendment Act to reintroduce more certainty around licence renewals and enable DLCs to hear evidence that is directly relevant to communities.	Underway	SSAA (Improving Alcohol Regulation) Amendment Bill progressing through Parliament.
EMPLOYMENT ISSUES		
Create a dedicated page within the Central Hub (from the data recommendation) to provide comprehensive information on existing mental health resources available to hospitality employees.	On track	Being developed alongside the central hub.
Promote the use of industry specific contract templates for employment agreements within the hospitality sector.		

The solution	Progress	Notes
Support development of wellbeing resources being produced by the hospitality industry, set to launch in May 2025.		
Pro-rata sick leave based on the number of hours worked by an employee, so part-time employees accrue sick leave in proportion to their working hours.	Complete	Progressed as part of the Employment Leave Act.
SKILLS AND TRAINING		
No completed actions or progress to report.		
HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM		
Invest in bringing the Michelin guide to New Zealand, potentially entering negotiations with the Australian government to share the costs of initiating market entry.	Complete	Announced that Michelin Guide will launch their star ratings in 2026, initial investment of three years.
Provide clear and accessible information on the allocation and expenditure of IVL funding.	Ongoing	Greater signaling of IVL funding has been included in recent investments.
Invest in attracting business events, particularly during off-peak seasons, and in marketing New Zealand as an attractive option for international business events.	Underway	