

# Minister's aid program

As a former director of a non-governmental organisation, I was distressed to read the *NZ aid programme fails with "quality not quantity" creed* (Opinion, May 16) by Peter Adams, a former executive director of NZAID.

New Zealand's aid programme was regarded internationally as a leading light in what is a complex and difficult arena. Unfortunately, under Foreign Affairs Minister Murray McCully's stewardship, it appears that the light has well and truly gone out.

The dismantling of a robust funding scheme, reduced transparency, the appointment of political personnel rather than those with the necessary expertise, and the ballooning cost of overheads are a few of the examples that Adams gave. There were more.

Future international attention is likely to focus on how something so good could be transformed into something so ineffectual in such a short time. None of this would be so bad if these changes didn't affect the lives of real people who are living in poverty and hardship.

They have the same rights as all of us: the right to food, shelter, education and an adequate standard of living. Given the changes the minister has implemented, the possibility of these basic rights being attained has become much less likely.

**TIM O'DONOVAN**  
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## That's not as I understand it

Peter Adams conveys a somewhat misleading impression of Foreign Affairs Minister Murray McCully's approach to gender issues when he quotes him as saying that gender is "not a preoccupation" for him.

One has only to visit the minister's office or note his regular visits to the islands to appreciate his abiding interest in gender issues.

**ROSS MACFARLANE**  
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## A lamentable waste of taxpayers' money

Peter Adams is correct - changes to New Zealand's aid programme are embarrassing. Replies to Official Information Act requests suggest the foreign affairs minister was responsible for funding delays recently experienced by non-governmental organisations undertaking overseas development in the Pacific and elsewhere.

Officials had decided what projects held merit by October, yet the minister wasn't convinced. The process, including the possibility of complete reassessment, took months. In the end, the original decisions were accepted.

The documentation includes detailed assessment criteria for applications, as well as indicative guidelines that suggest the minister expected 50 per cent of funding to go to the Pacific. NGOs weren't told this.

They might have further wasted time with the second funding round, where documents suggest that only Pacific projects would get funded. Again, this hasn't been communicated to applicants. "Accountable" and "transparent" are two words thrown out with NZAID's bathwater.

Many good projects have been radically degraded or abandoned since the changes to aid. We consider this a lamentable waste of past taxpayers' money, as well as years of investment by mum-and-dad donors across New Zealand. The real problems, however, will be felt in communities overseas.

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