



MFAT stakeholder research 2026

Research report

verian 



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Key findings

Stakeholders are confident MFAT can handle new challenges.

In recent years, the global and domestic operating environments have shifted rapidly, creating a level of uncertainty, including...

- New/ongoing geopolitical tensions
- Evolving US tariff policies
- Supply chain disruptions
- Changing domestic policy
- Cost pressures, etc.

There are early signs that stakeholders feel MFAT are well equipped to respond to this change, saying MFAT's flexibility in the face of changes, and understanding of what matters to New Zealanders globally have improved.

There is a level of trust that MFAT can handle these challenges, and some stakeholders are seeing change, however many haven't yet seen practical changes to how MFAT supports them on the world stage. As a result, **stakeholders tend to want more clarity around MFAT's direction** or specific actions being taken.

"MFAT is clearly working hard to be more engaged with the business community, and we've seen new or different ways of engaging particularly in Auckland in response to the more challenging international outlook which has been very welcome."

"Manatu Aorere has maintained its commitment to Māori at a time when policy and legislation is being scrubbed of Māori references. And in this, MFAT has earned respect."

Perceptions of MFAT remain mostly positive.

As in previous years, the majority of stakeholders are satisfied with MFAT overall, outperforming KPIs and Verian's stakeholder satisfaction benchmark.

Individual staff continue to be the biggest driving force behind satisfaction. This is not uncommon in stakeholder research as staff are the face of the organisation, however satisfaction is especially high for MFAT staff who are often seen as professional, knowledgeable, helpful, responsive, etc.

Frustrations with MFAT typically stem from a view that internal processes are complex or slow moving. In some cases, stakeholders feel this inhibits staff from being as effective as they could be.

But it's important to continue working to ensure stakeholders feel heard.

In 2024, we identified a risk that, as a very stable organisation, some stakeholders were becoming frustrated, feeling they had suggested similar improvements over many years, while seeing little change.

This pattern is continuing...	...but there are signs this is changing
In 2024, many stakeholders were on the fence, seeing both the good and bad. This year, some stakeholders are becoming more polarised , with more seeing only positives, or only talking about improvements needed. Note, however, this has not yet impacted overall positive sentiment.	This sentiment is often backed up by a feeling that stakeholders are not being listened to. This year we are seeing slight improvements around communication, and the idea that MFAT are open to ideas/perspectives. This may suggest that more stakeholders are feeling heard.

Note, in both cases, these are early signs of change. This could progress in ether direction and it will be important to continue to make stakeholders feel their views are being listened to.



Background

MFAT aim to better understand stakeholders

To do this, Verian undertook a survey to gauge perceptions of how well MFAT...

- Performs overall
- Performs as a treaty partner
- Supports trade
- Advocates for Aotearoa
- Builds relationships

As well as stakeholders' familiarity and understanding of MFAT's...

- Strategy
- Direction overall
- Navigating its processes

This enables MFAT to make informed decisions

By providing insights and feedback on stakeholders' experiences and expectations, the research identifies areas for improvement. The survey is also repeated over time, allowing us to track what has changed or improved since previous rounds of surveying.

Method



The survey was conducted with 281 of MFAT's stakeholders



Surveying was done from 30th March to 28th April 2026



Surveying was online. Verian invited a range of stakeholders to take part (contact details were provided by MFAT)



Surveys took about 11 minutes on average



The maximum margin of error on a sample of 281 is +/-4.6% (at the 95% confidence level, assuming simple random sampling)

Statistically significant changes year-on-year are shown throughout, calculated at the 90% and 95% confidence level.

	Stakeholders contacted	Surveys complete	Response rate
2017	526	205	41%
2019	1250	325	26%
2022	1,343	268	20%
2024	622	192	31%
2026	1,318	281	21%

A note on base sizes

Base sizes (the number of responses a result is based on) are shown throughout. Some results are based on a smaller number of stakeholders e.g. where showing results for a subgroup or when a question was not asked of everyone. These give an indication of sentiment but should be treated with caution, especially where differences may appear different but are not statistically significant. A blue dot identifies results based on 30 or fewer stakeholders: ●

A note on rounding

Some percentages may not always add to 100% either because stakeholders could choose more than one answer or due to rounding.

Stakeholders' perceptions of MFAT

Most stakeholders are positive about their interactions with MFAT, with satisfaction exceeding Verian's stakeholder norm.

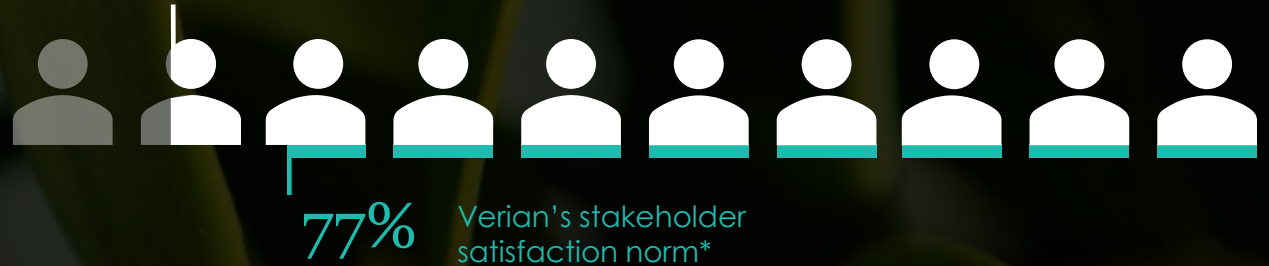
"MFAT staff are excellent, they represent NZ very effectively.

Many New Zealanders may not realise what a valuable role MFAT plays and how important the work they do is for NZ and our exporters.

As a business working globally and exporting to multiple markets, we are grateful we have such exceptional people in MFAT representing and assisting us.

Thank you!"

87% say they are satisfied
with their recent interactions with MFAT



84% think MFAT are effective
at representing/advocating for NZ

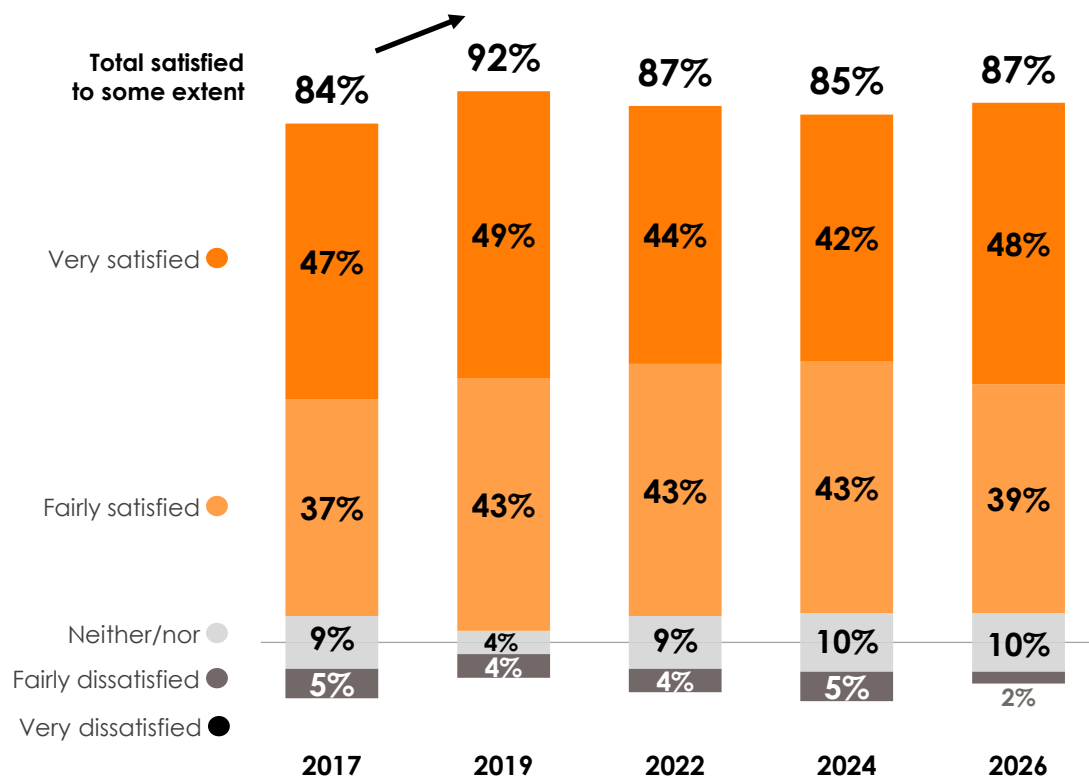


*The satisfaction norm is an average rating across 8 similar public sector stakeholder studies. This is the property of Verian and is not to be distributed outside of MFAT.

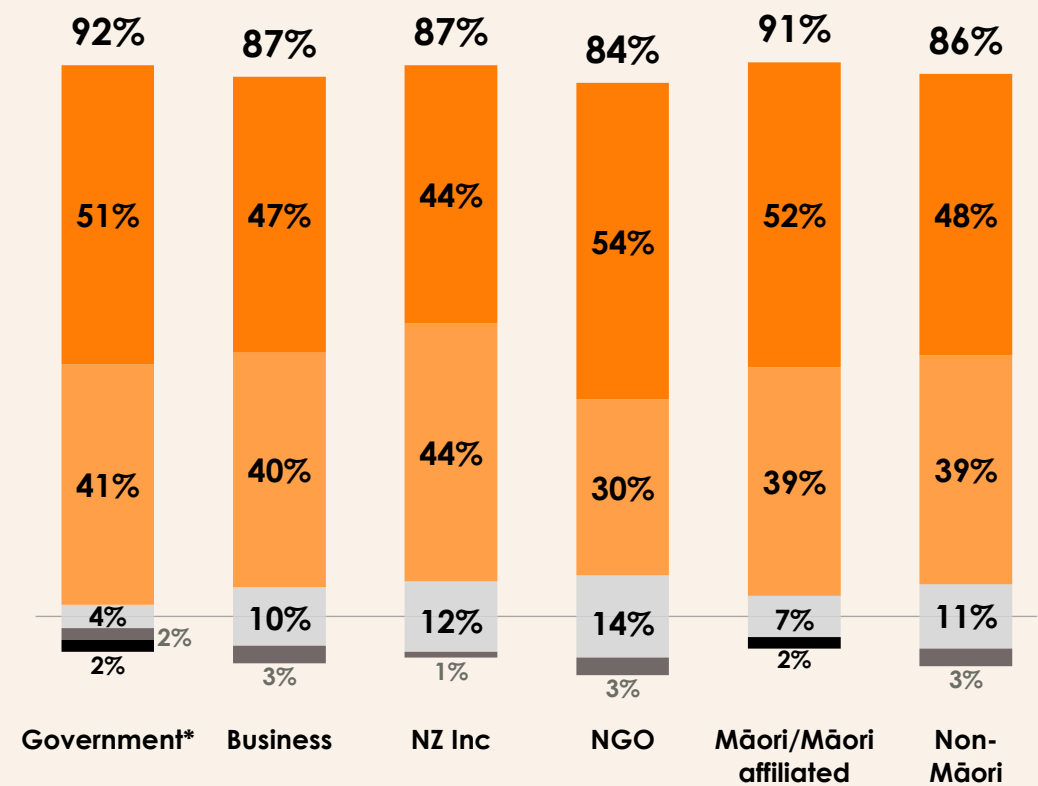
Satisfaction has remained high over time.

Only 2% said they are dissatisfied, and satisfaction is high across the board, with similar levels across different types of stakeholders.

Stakeholders' satisfaction with recent interaction with MFAT



2026 results by stakeholder type

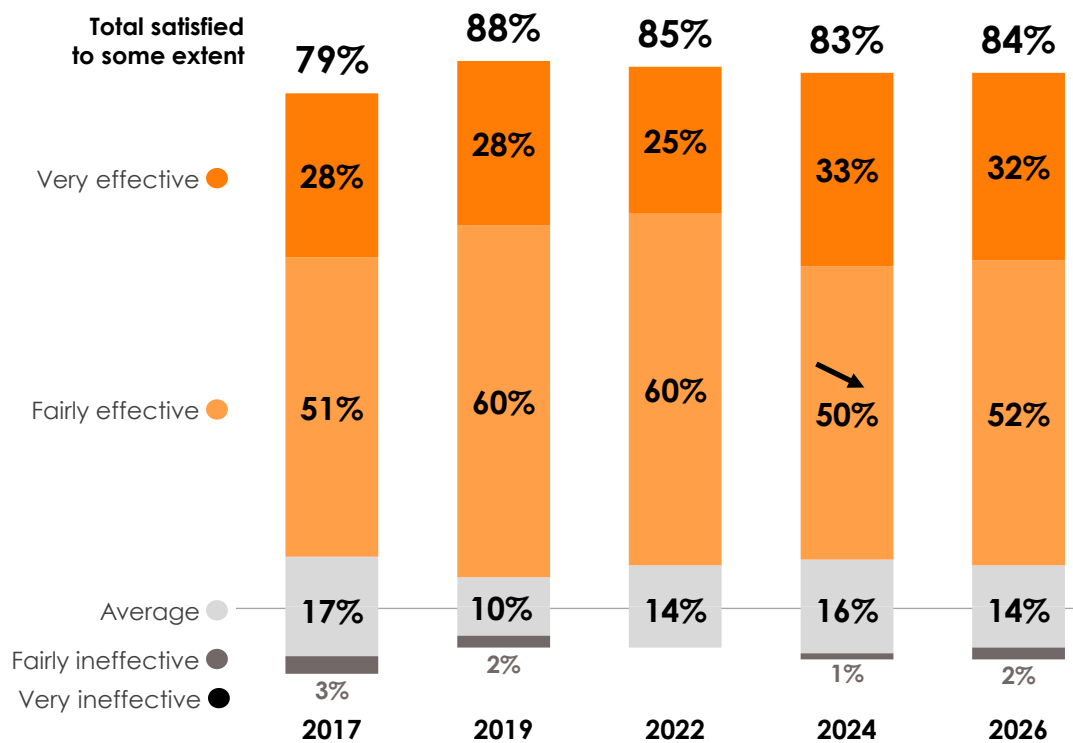


Source: M4B. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the interactions you have had with MFAT staff recently?
Base: 2017 n=184, 2019 n=300, 2022 n=255, 2024 n=187, 2026 n=272.
Note: Excludes 'don't know' responses. Not showing results for groups with fewer than 10 stakeholders *Excludes Government NZ Inc stakeholders

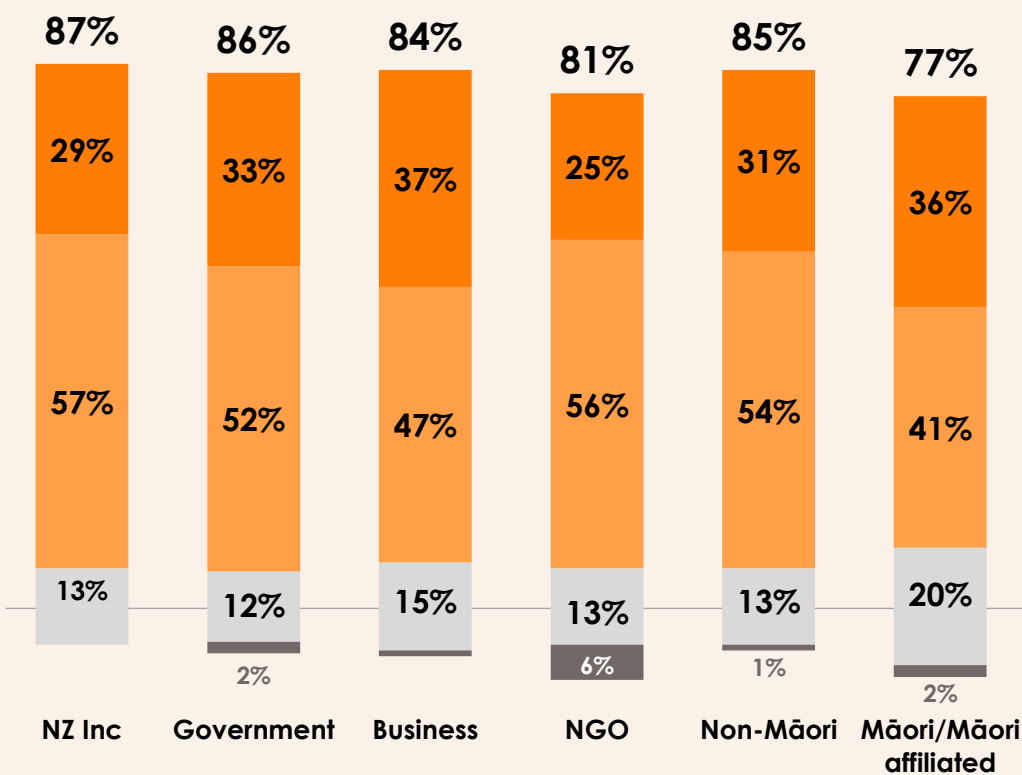
Significantly higher than last survey at 95% confidence ↗
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% confidence ↘

High satisfaction is also reflected in the perception that MFAT are effective at advocating for New Zealand on the world stage.

Stakeholders' perceptions of MFAT's effectiveness
in advocating for/representing NZ's interests internationally



2026 results by stakeholder type



Source: M10. Overall, how effective do you think MFAT is at representing and advocating for New Zealand's interests internationally?
Base: 2017 n=118, 2019 n=292, 2022 n=234, 2024 n=172, 2026 n=256.
Note: Excludes 'don't know' responses. Not showing results for groups with fewer than 10 stakeholders

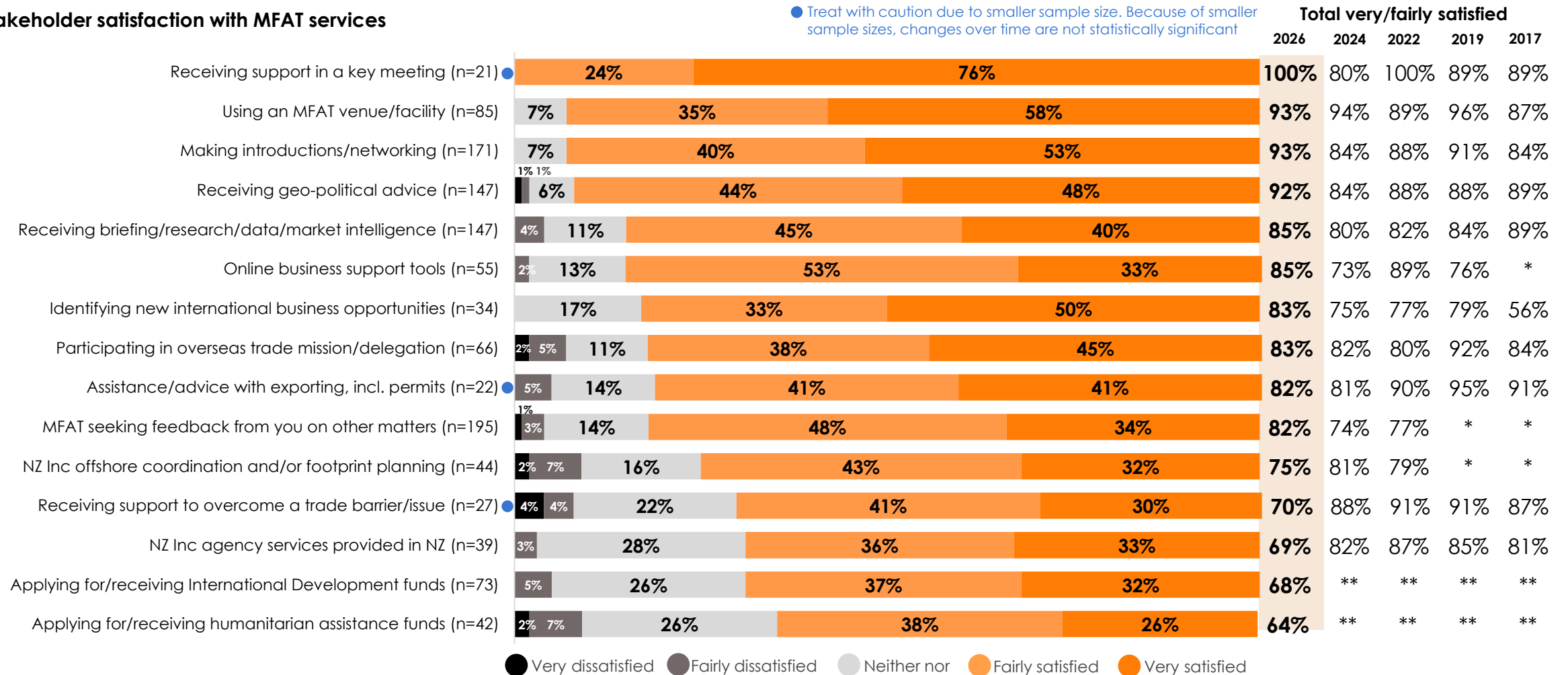
Significantly higher than last survey at 95% confidence
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% confidence

Stakeholders also continue to be mostly satisfied with the services MFAT offer.

Although, they are slightly less satisfied with the process of applying for/receiving funds.

Stakeholder satisfaction with MFAT services

● Treat with caution due to smaller sample size. Because of smaller sample sizes, changes over time are not statistically significant



Source: M1G. You mentioned that you have received a service or services from MFAT in the past year. Overall how satisfied, or dissatisfied are you with the overall quality of service delivery for each of the services you've received? **Base:** Stakeholders with experience of each service. Excludes 'don't know' responses. *New to 2022, so no data is available prior to 2022. **In 2026, this has been split into two statements (previously it was 'applying for/receiving funds'), so results before 2026 are not directly comparable.

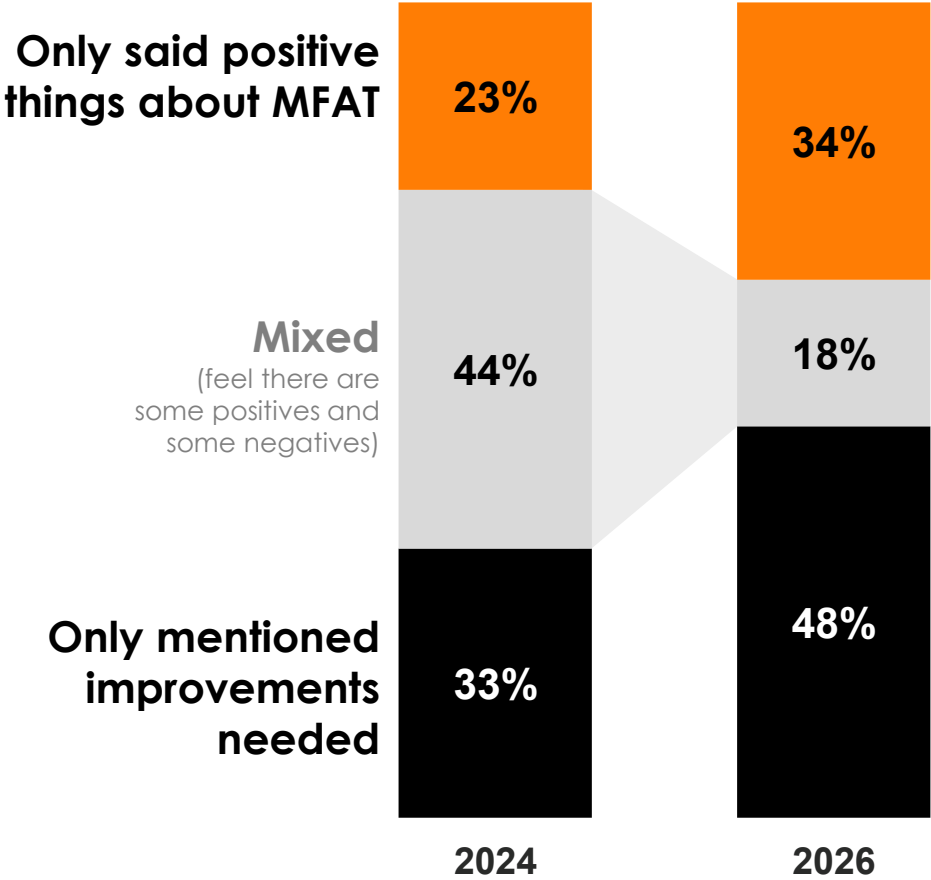
While views of MFAT overall are mostly positive, beneath the surface, opinions are becoming slightly more polarised and entrenched.

In 2024, there was more nuance to people's views and it was more common for stakeholders to talk about both the good and the bad, e.g.

“MFAT has highly skilled individuals, however, the overall culture of the organisation is insular and inward focused...”

In 2026 however, fewer have mixed views. This has been positive for some who now only see the positives, but on the other hand, others are only talking about improvements they would like to see (and no positives).

This may be a continuation of a trend identified in 2024 where some stakeholders felt MFAT is too slow to change, becoming frustrated after recommending similar suggestions for improvements over several years.



Source: F1 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with, or your perceptions of, MFAT?

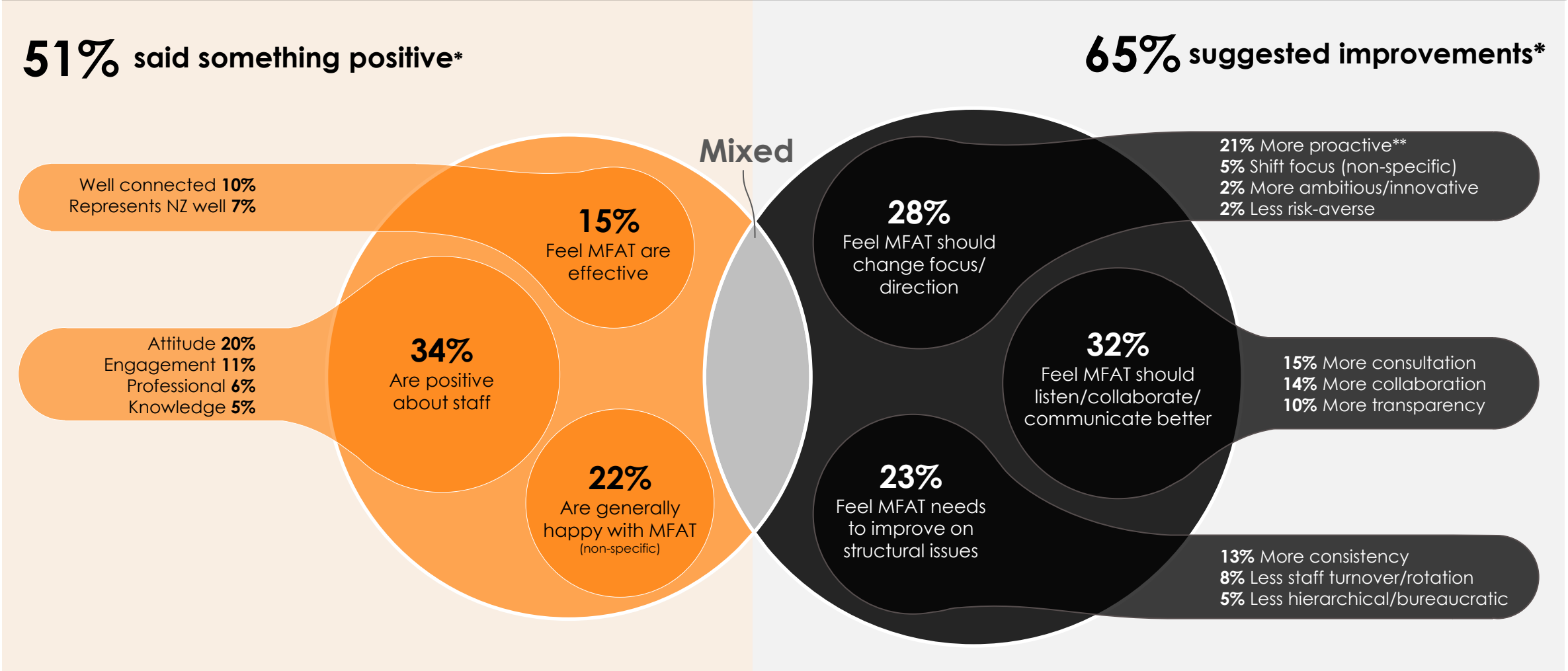
Base: All stakeholders who chose to provide a comment. 2026 n=134.

A man with a beard, wearing a white hard hat and an orange safety vest over a grey shirt, is smiling and looking off to the side. He is holding a white coffee cup with a silver lid. The background is a blurred industrial or construction site with tall poles and structures.

Underlying tensions between MFAT's staff and processes

Individual staff are the main driver behind stakeholders’ positive views of MFAT.

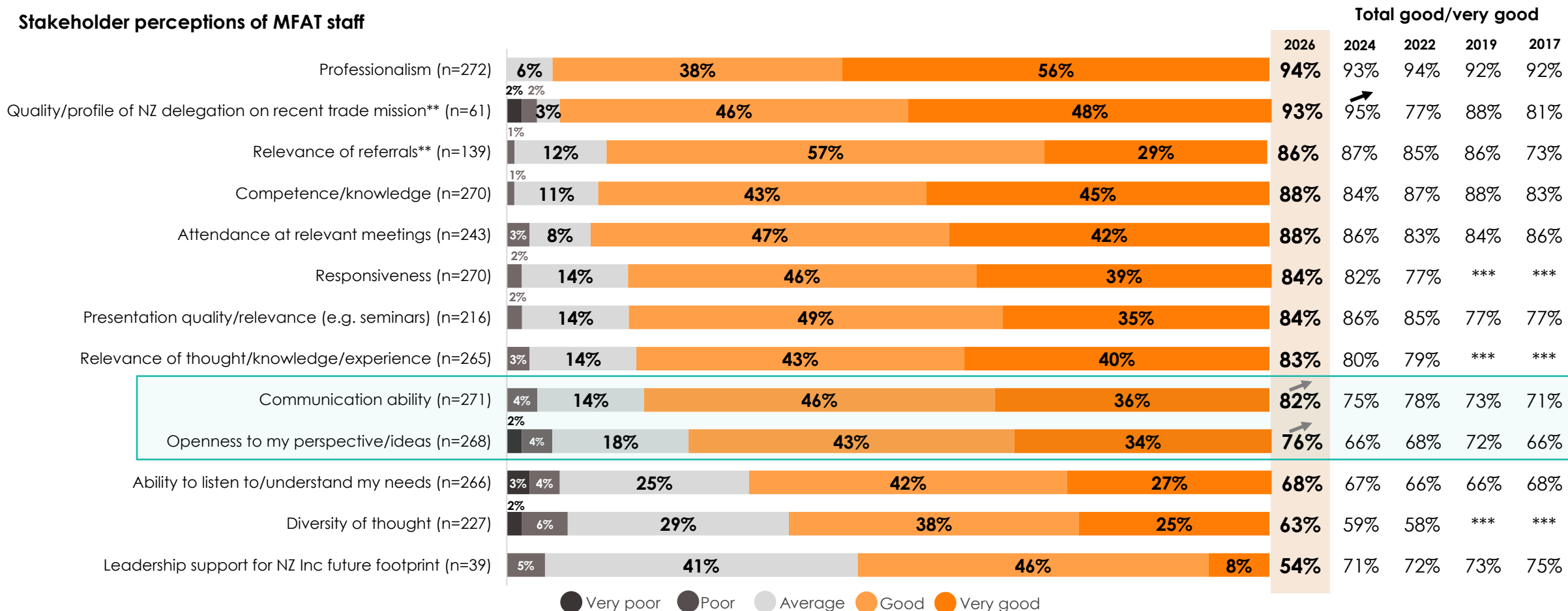
However, some also feel MFAT’s processes, systems or overall focus can negate the good intentions of staff.



Source: F1 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with, or your perceptions of, MFAT? Base: Only on those who chose to give feedback, n=134. Note: *Includes some who mentioned both positives and improvements, whereas pg13 shows those who only mentioned one or the other. Not showing any with 2% or fewer (e.g. comments about general difficulties MFAT faces/faced like COVID/changing international relationships **E.g. more proactive in actively seeking new opportunities, being less inward-looking, more responsive etc.

There are also early indications staff are getting better at communicating/listening.

While some views may be becoming more entrenched, due to a feeling they haven't been listened to, there are signs this is starting to improve, with more stakeholders* saying staff are open to others' ideas/perspectives.

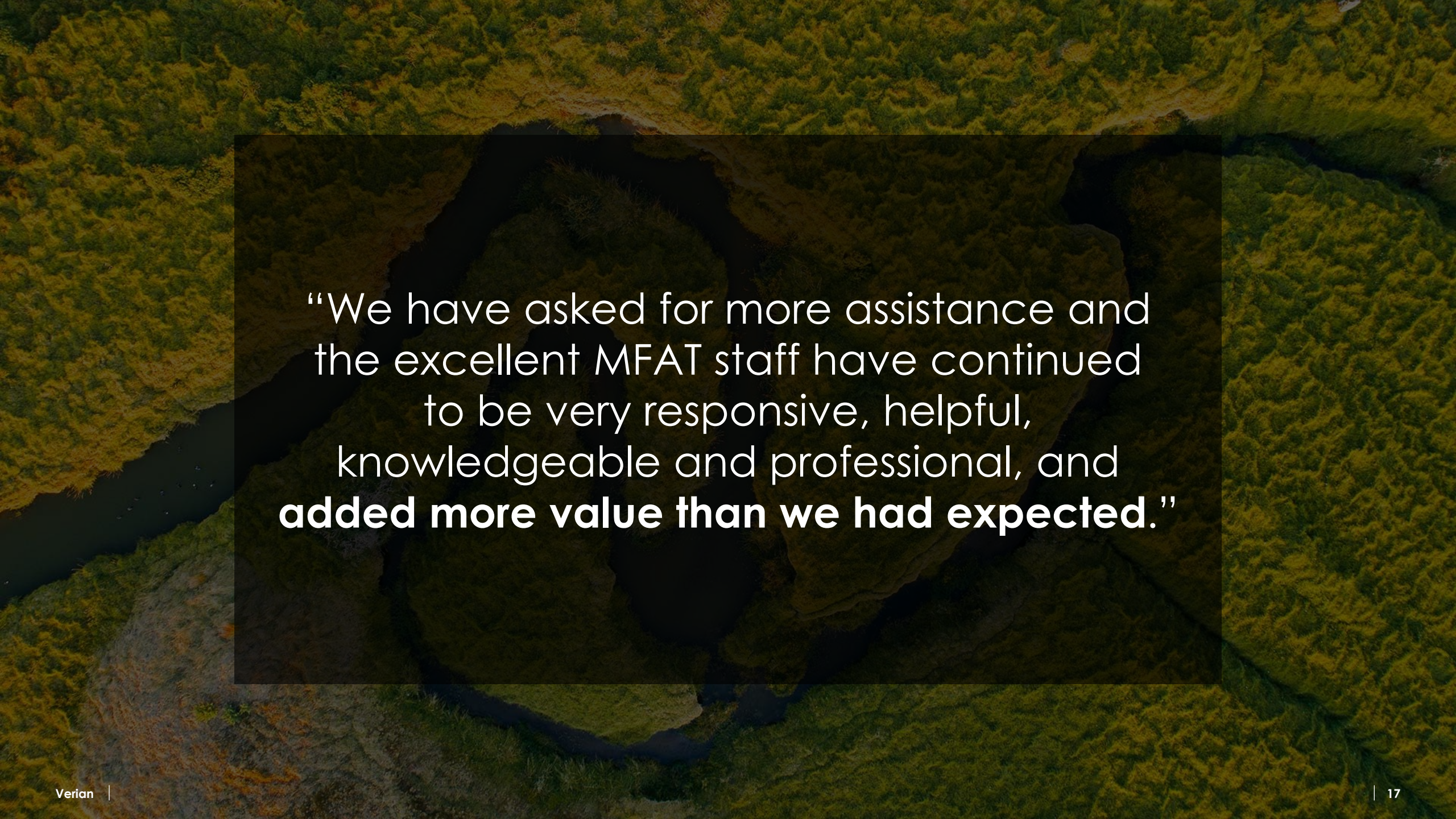


Source: M1: Thinking about recent interactions you have had with MFAT, how do you rate each of the following?

Base: Stakeholders who have had any interaction with MFAT in the past year. Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant' responses

Note: * This increase is significant at the 90% confidence level. **Only asked of stakeholders who had a relevant interaction ***Not asked prior to 2022

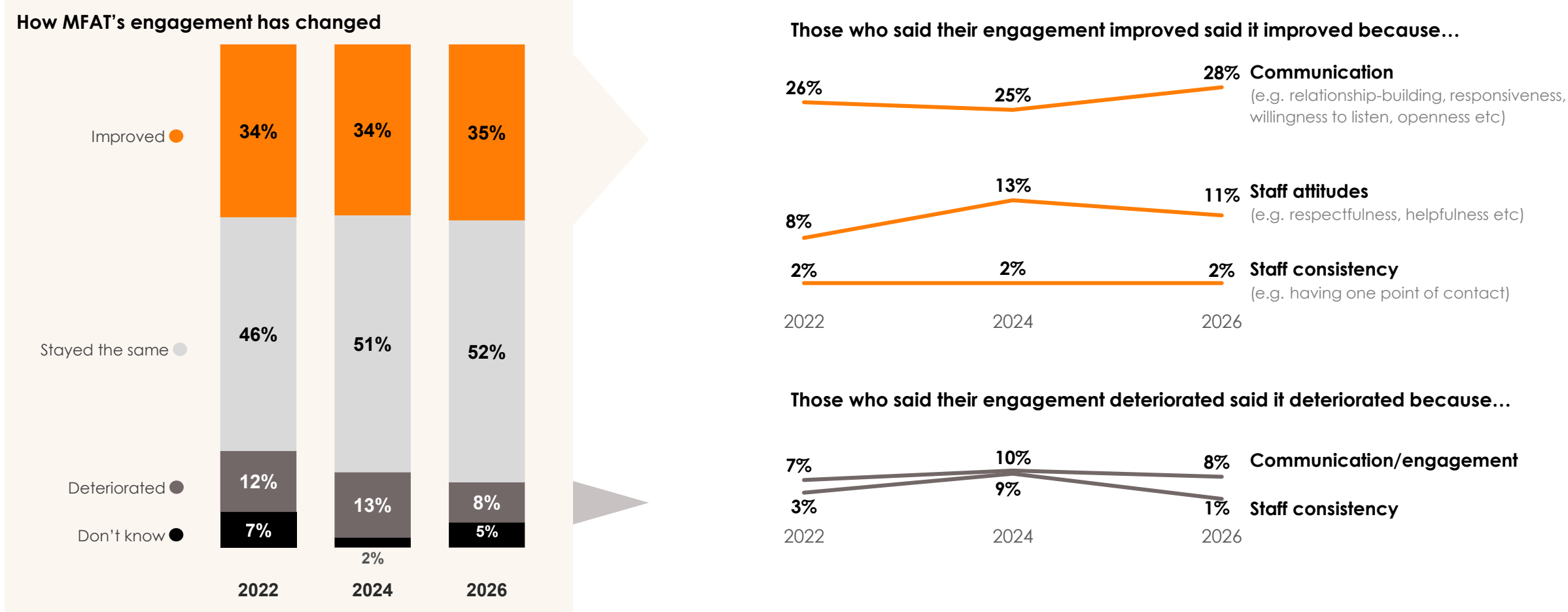
Significantly higher than last survey at 95% confidence
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% confidence



“We have asked for more assistance and the excellent MFAT staff have continued to be very responsive, helpful, knowledgeable and professional, and **added more value than we had expected.**”

Communication is also a key driver in shifting perceptions, positive or negative.

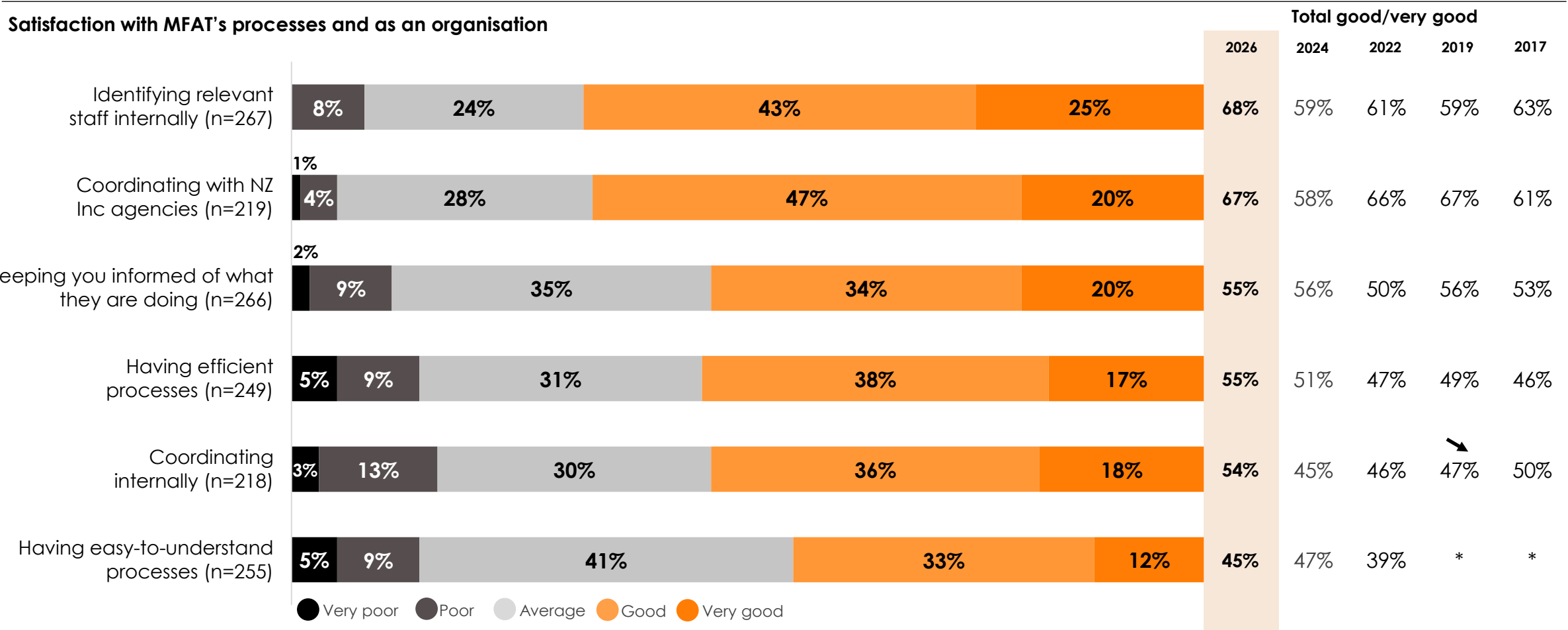
About a third say their engagement with MFAT improved over the last couple of years, and few (almost one in ten) feel it has got worse. Communication (or lack thereof) is the main reason stakeholders give for both views.



Source: J4 Would you say that the way MFAT engages with your entity/organisation has improved, deteriorated or stayed the same over the past two years?
J5 Why did you say that the way MFAT engages with your entity/organisation has improved/deteriorated?
Base: J4 All stakeholders 2022 n=267, 2024 n=193, 2026 n=281. J5 Stakeholders who've experienced improvement/deterioration 2022 n=124, 2024 n=91, 2026 n=119.
Note: These questions were added in 2022, so no data is available prior to this

Compared with staff, stakeholders are less positive about MFAT's processes.

This has remained comparatively low over time, with no significant improvements. In particular, stakeholders are least satisfied with MFAT's efficiency, updates, internal coordination, or the ability to understand MFAT's processes.



Source: M1: Thinking about recent interactions you have had with MFAT, how do you rate each of the following?
Base: Stakeholders who have had any interaction with MFAT in the past year. Statements only asked of stakeholders who have had a relevant interaction. Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant' responses *Asked for the first time in 2022, so no data is available prior to 2022

Significantly higher than last survey at 95% confidence ↗ / 90% confidence ↗
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% confidence ↘ / 90% confidence ↘

“Still excellent people but feels like systems are poorer/non-existent. Overall coordination feels very reliant on individual personalities without underlying systems hard-wiring coordination.”

“MFAT is full of very bright and enthusiastic staff, but is very siloed and at times other agencies need to coordinate between parts of MFAT as they don't seem able to do this themselves.”

“Individual staff at MFAT are great, and generally there is a high level of professionalism and expertise. Internal dynamics at MFAT can sometimes get in the way.”

“People remain top notch and willing to help. Though it feels occasionally like they lack supporting processes, systems, tools and strategic direction.”
(dissatisfied with NZ Inc's coordination/services)

Over time, MFAT's staff rotation policy has been another ongoing source of frustration, which continues into 2026.

"The way staff are rotated in and out of roles can be frustrating when working on issues that span years."

"High turnover of staff in roles that require specialist knowledge is very disruptive to relationships and workflows."

"A lot of variation in approaches based on individuals and **loss of institutional memory when people change**"

However, there are signs that some stakeholders are starting to notice improvements here.

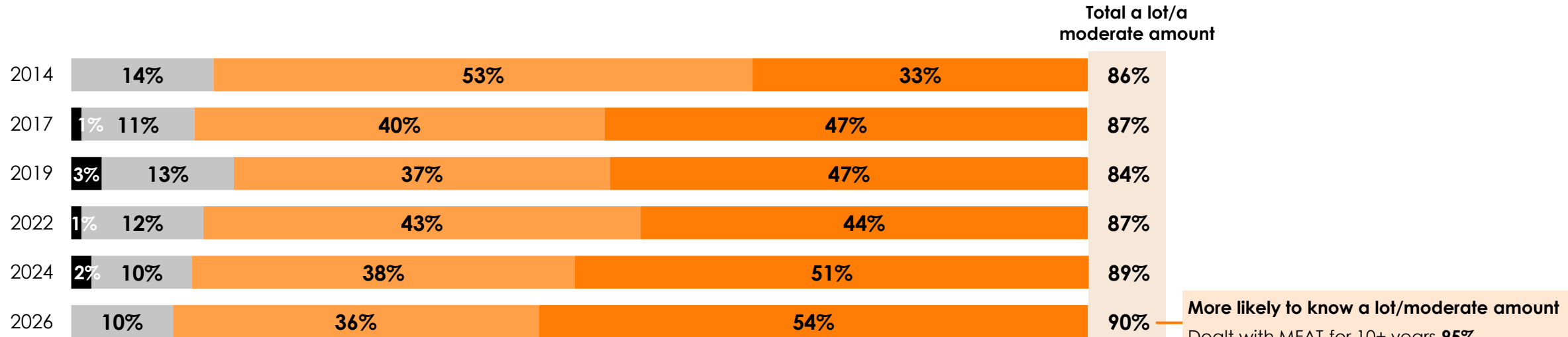
"Minimal staff churn at MFAT, meaning engagement and understanding has improved."

"MFAT is more responsive and there is **greater continuity of personnel**"

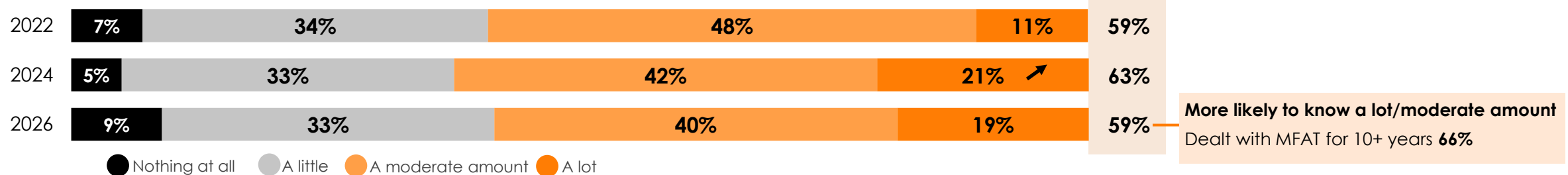
Understanding of MFAT's strategy and approach

Almost all stakeholders feel they have some understanding of what MFAT can offer them, but have less understanding around where MFAT is heading.

Knowledge of what MFAT can offer



Knowledge of MFAT's direction/strategy*

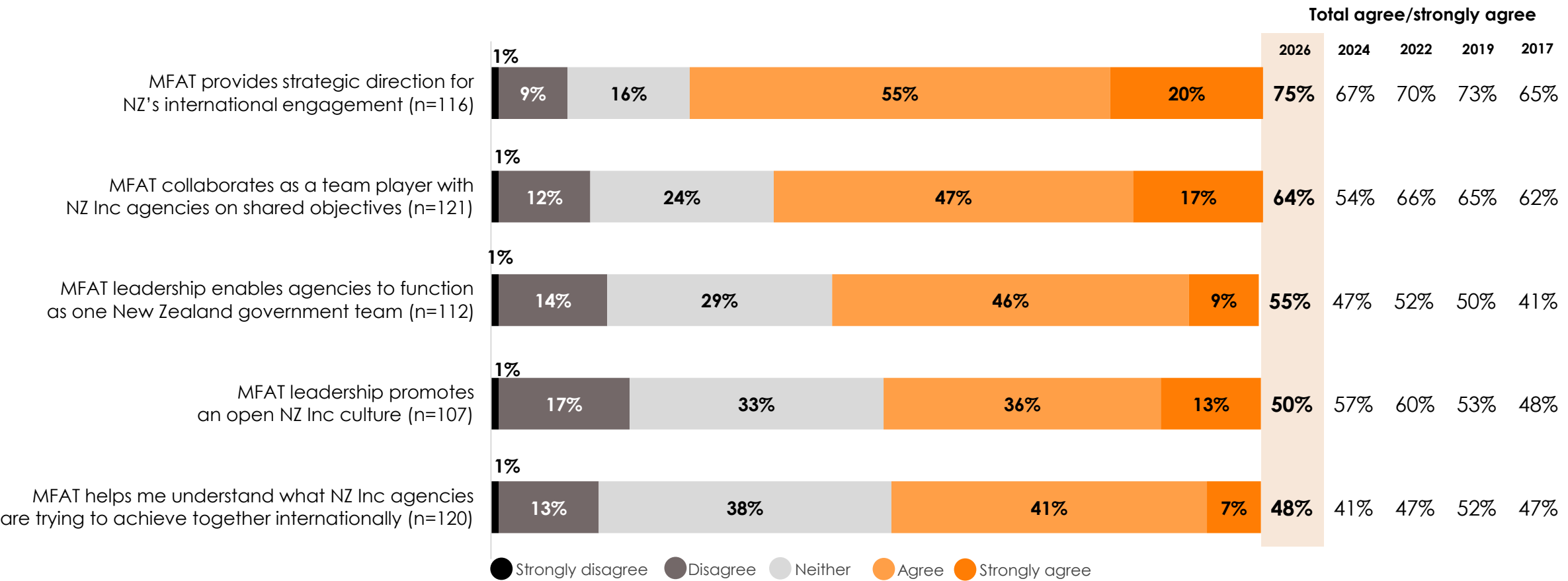


Source: I2. How much do you feel you know about what MFAT can offer your organisation? J1 How would you describe your awareness and understanding of MFAT's strategy and future direction? **Base:** I2 All stakeholders 2014 n=36, 2017 n=205, 2019 n=325, 2022 n=267, 2024 n=193, 2026 n=281. J1 2022 n=263, 2024 n=190, 2026 n=276. J1 excludes 'don't know' responses. **Note:** *J1 was asked for the first time in 2022, so no data prior to 2022 is available

Significantly higher than last survey at 95% ↗/90% ↗ confidence
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% ↘/90% ↘ confidence

Some also lack understanding around NZ Inc and it's aims.

Perceptions of NZ Inc



Source: M8. Where the New Zealand Government's objectives have international engagement dimensions, MFAT collaborates with partner NZ Inc. agencies to deliver them. MFAT is expected to provide strategic leadership, lead integrated NZ Inc. international efforts and contribute to collaboration across the public sector. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about NZ Inc? **Base:** Government stakeholders. Excludes 'don't know' responses.

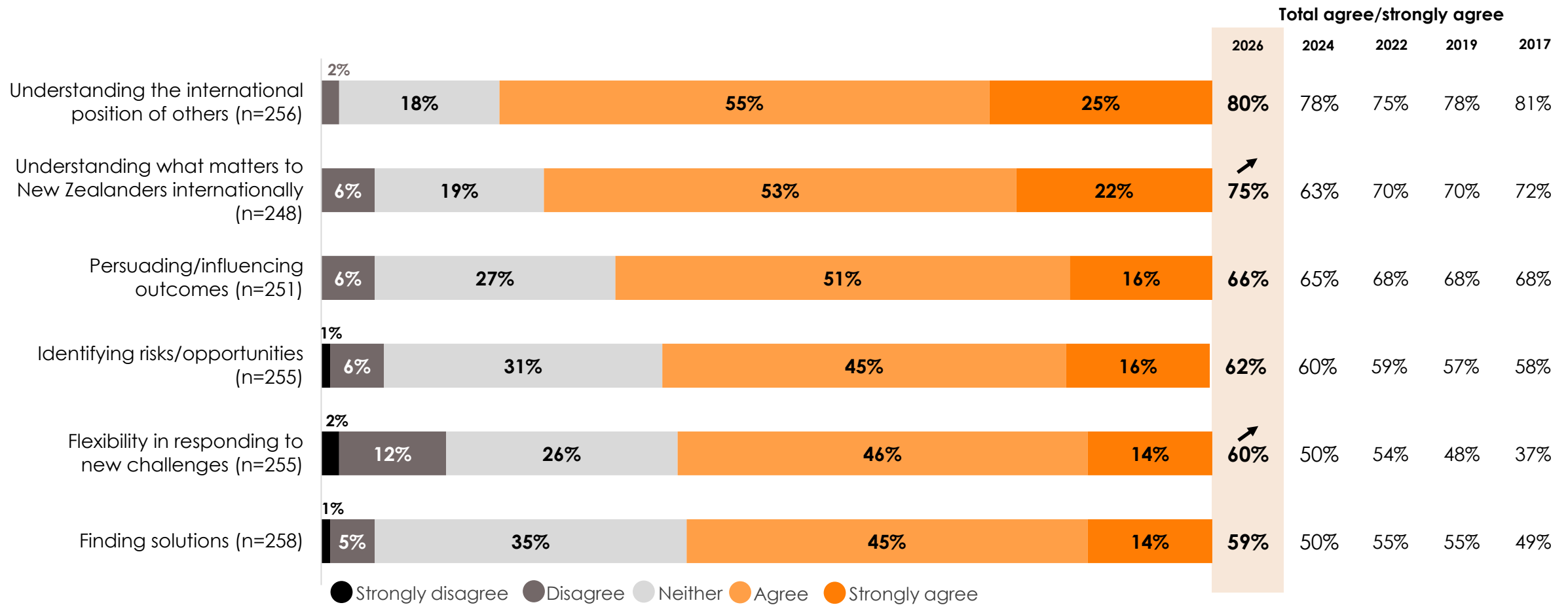
A man with grey hair and a blue striped t-shirt is leaning over a table in a workshop, looking at a laptop. He has a tattoo on his right arm and is wearing a tool belt. The background shows wooden beams and various tools.

Supporting trade

MFAT are becoming better positioned to respond to shifting global norms.

MFAT are seen as more flexible, underpinned by an improving understanding of what matters to New Zealanders.

Perceptions of MFAT's ability to advocate for NZ internationally



Source: M9: Thinking about MFAT's role in the area of representing and advocating for New Zealand's interests internationally, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: All stakeholders. Excludes 'don't know' responses

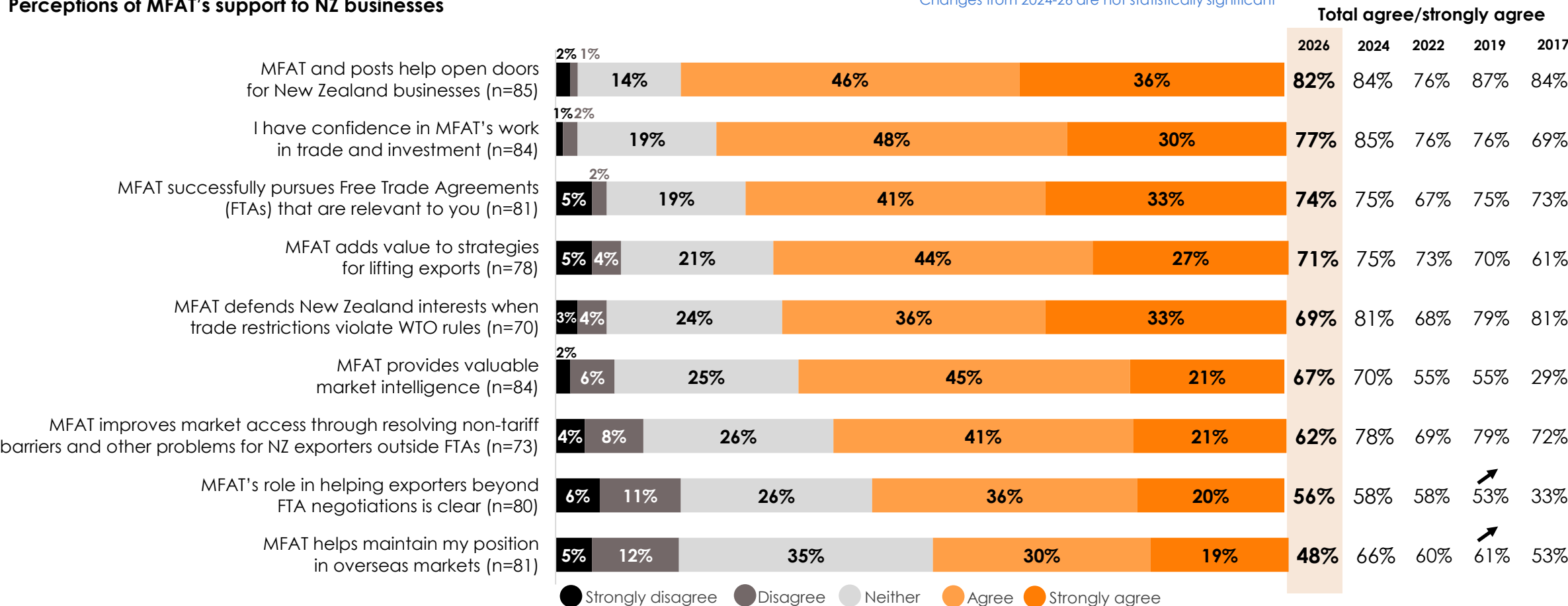
Significantly higher than last survey at 95% ↗/90% ↗ confidence
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% ↘/90% ↘ confidence

But, this hasn't yet translated to more practical support for businesses.

While stakeholders feel MFAT's understanding of what matters to New Zealanders is improving, they aren't seeing changes to MFAT's ability to support NZ businesses internationally (although this hasn't declined either).

Perceptions of MFAT's support to NZ businesses

Changes from 2024-26 are not statistically significant

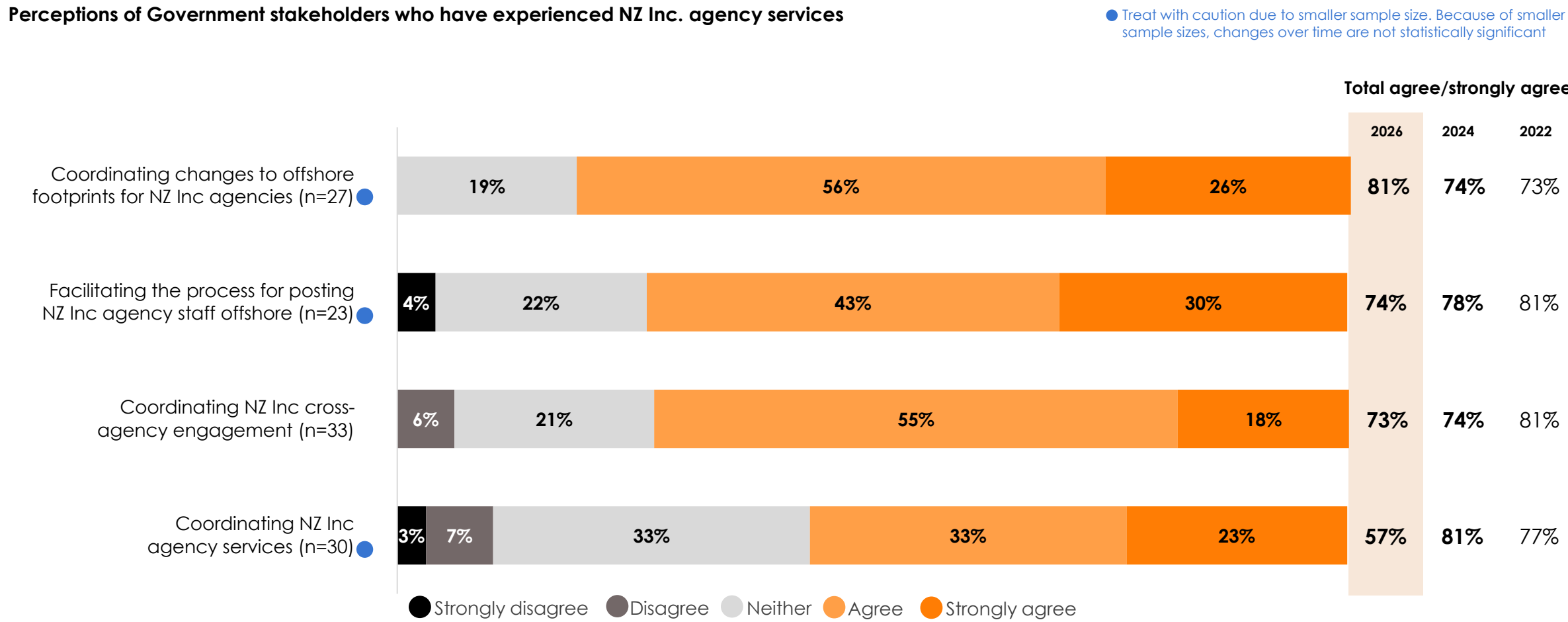


Source: M6: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about MFAT's role in supporting New Zealand businesses....?
Base: Stakeholders who are businesses or trade organisations. Excludes 'don't know' responses

Significantly higher than last survey at 95% confidence ↗
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% confidence ↘

Perceptions of MFAT’s coordination around NZ Inc have mostly remained stable.

Perceptions are lowest for coordination of NZ Inc agency services (although, treat this with caution due to smaller sample sizes).



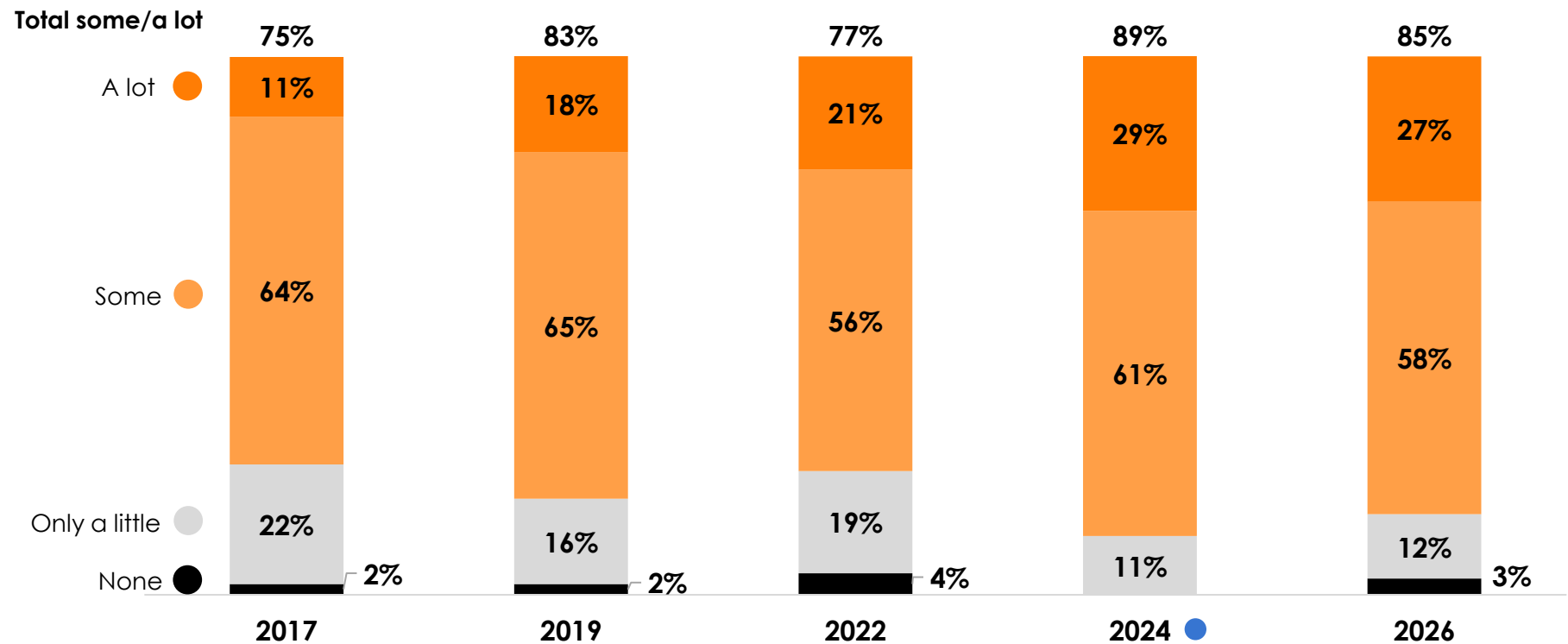
Source: M1B. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall quality of service delivery regarding the following?
Base: Government stakeholders who have experienced NZ Inc. agency services provided at an overseas post. Excludes 'don't know' responses
Note: These statements were asked for the first time in 2022, so no data prior to 2022 is available

Significantly higher than last survey at 95% confidence ↗
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% confidence ↘

Most stakeholders also continue to feel there is joint planning among NZ Inc.

Extent to which there is joint operational planning in NZ Inc. team

● Treat with caution due to smaller sample size



Source: M1F. To what extent do you feel there is joint operational planning in the NZ Inc. team?
Base: Government stakeholders who have experienced NZ Inc. agency services provided at an overseas post 2017 n=48, 2019 n=62, 2022 n=52, 2024 n=28, 2026 n=33. Excludes 'not applicable' and 'don't know' responses

Significantly higher than last survey at 95% confidence
Significantly lower than last survey at 95% confidence

Focus on exporting

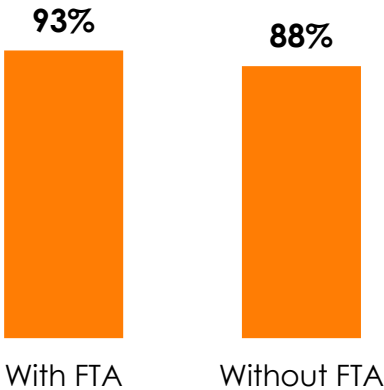


The majority of exporters have experienced issues when exporting in the last year.

48% Of business/trade stakeholders have exported in the last year

(an additional 14% did so more than a year ago)

And in the last year, they exported to countries...



79% of those who exported to countries with FTA said they experienced issues. Their issues were with...



Source: Q59 Which of the following best describes your business/organisation? Q60 In the last year, where have you exported to? Q61 Still thinking about the last year, have you experienced any problems or challenges when exporting? **Base:** Q59 All business/trade stakeholders n=281, Q60 Stakeholders who have exported in the last year, n=42 Q61 Stakeholders who exported to countries with FTA n=39 Q62 Stakeholders who had issues exporting to countries with FTA n=31
Note: This was asked for the first time in 2026, so no data is available prior to this *Note, some stakeholders have exported to both countries with and without FTA

Of exporters who've had issues exporting, 39% said they would like MFAT's help.

**Many feel MFAT are already helping
(i.e. 'keep doing what you're doing')...**

"Already are helping with market access to China."

"Continue to provide good intelligence and information sharing."

"Encourage MFAT to continue to proactively engage with the business community and industry organisations (early advice is always welcome, even informally, rather than waiting for full or formal advice.)"

...others who want additional help are mostly seeking clarity around what MFAT are doing/MFAT's direction

"Identifying NZ's long term strategic interests, 'which way we want the wind to blow'"

"Briefings on the US trade tariffs, US/Iran conflict, Russia/Ukraine conflict, global freight disruptions and FTAs"

"Re-assess the Export Controls program. MFAT claims to be about removing red tape, yet this program is not fit for purpose, cumbersome and overly restrictive. Based on Criteria we have been presented, the US should not be exempt. Yet all of south America and Singapore are examples where more exemptions should apply."

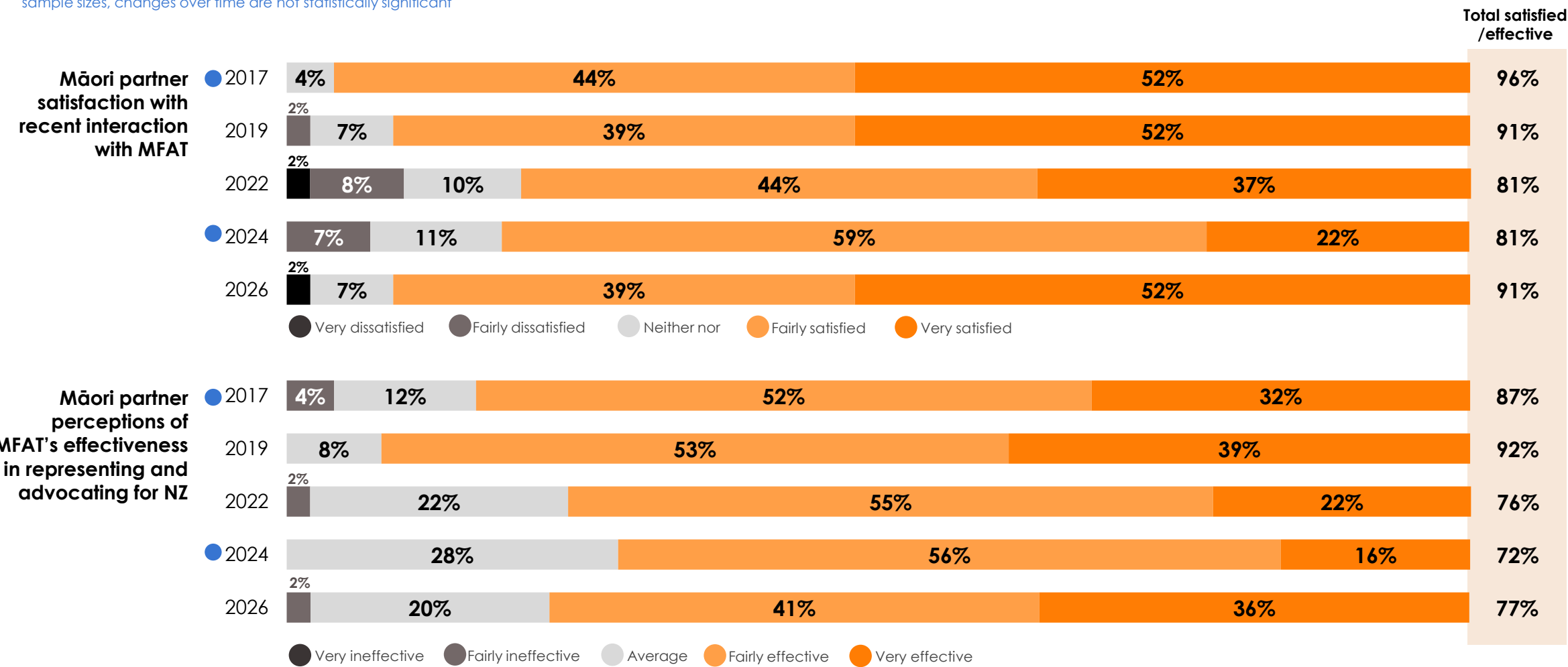
Source: Q63 Would you like MFAT to provide any help or assistance with the problems or challenges you have experienced? If yes, please tell us how you would like MFAT to help



Perceptions of MFAT as a Treaty partner

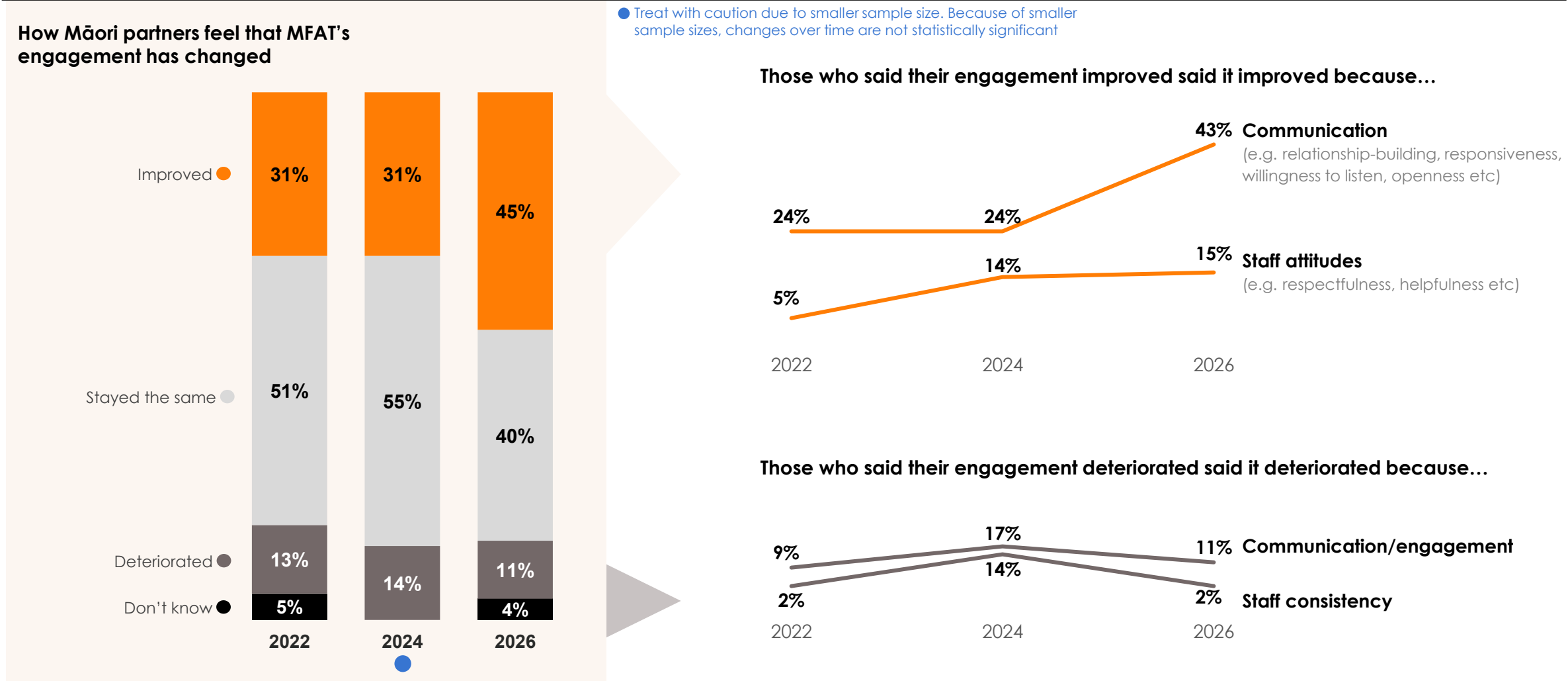
Perceptions of MFAT have remained fairly stable among Māori partners.

● Treat with caution due to smaller sample size. Because of smaller sample sizes, changes over time are not statistically significant



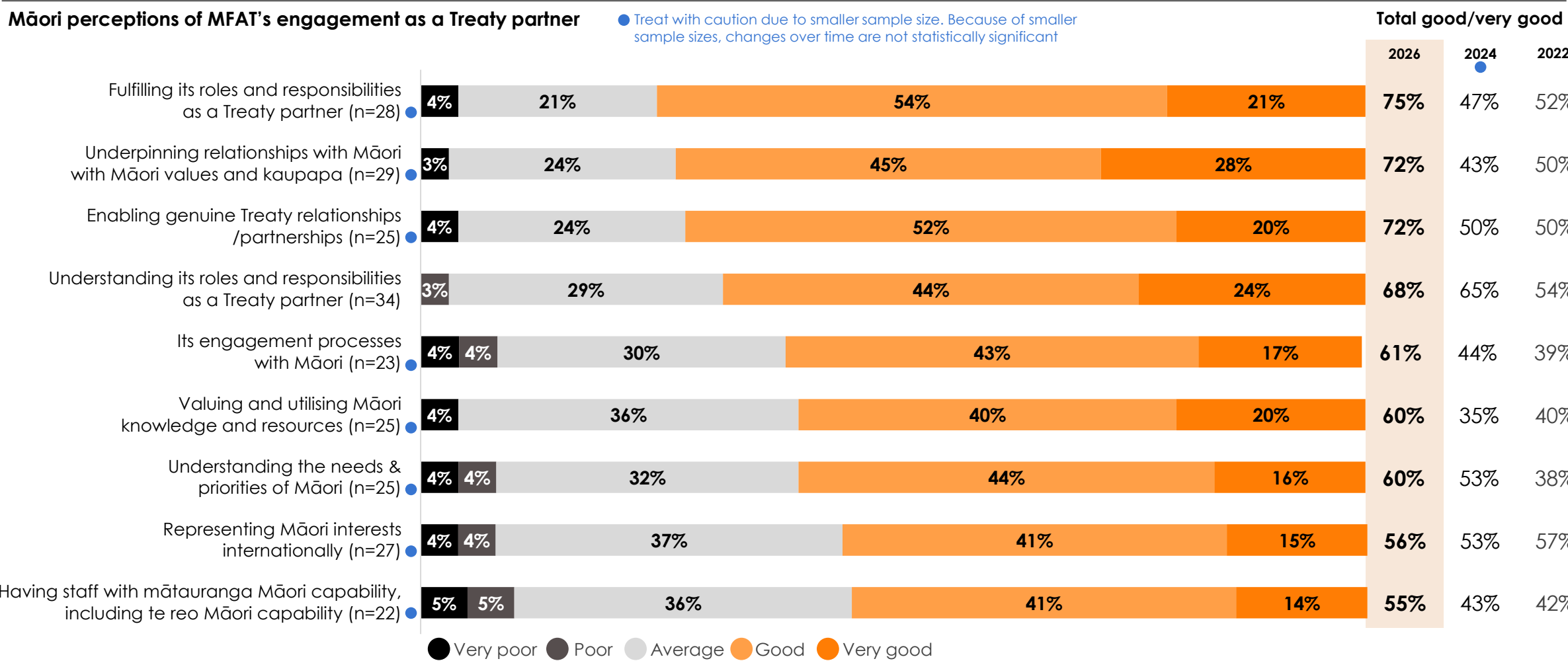
Source: **Satisfaction:** M4B. Now please think about interactions you have had with MFAT staff recently. Although your views on staff are likely to vary depending on the staff members, the context, and the particular interactions, overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the interactions you have had with MFAT staff recently? **Effectiveness:** M10. Overall, how effective do you think MFAT is at representing and advocating for New Zealand's interests internationally? **Base:** Māori stakeholders only. **M4b** 2017 n=25, 2019 n=44, 2022 n=52, 2024 n=27, 2026 n=46. **M10** 2017 n=25, 2019 n=38, 2022 n=51, 2024 n=25, 2026 n=44. Excludes 'don't know' responses

In the last two years, almost half of Māori stakeholders have seen improvements.



Source: J4 Would you say that the way MFAT engages with your entity/organisation has improved, deteriorated or stayed the same over the past two years?
J5 Why did you say that the way MFAT engages with your entity/organisation has improved/deteriorated?
Base: Stakeholders who personally identify as Māori, work for a Māori business/organisation, or for a business/organisation with strong Māori ownership or values base.
J4 2022 n=55, 2024 n=29, 2026 n=47. J5 2022 n=55, 2024 n=29, 2026 n=47. **Note:** These questions were added in 2022, so no data is available prior to 2022.

Māori partners tend to feel MFAT understands its role as a Treaty partner, but falls short on internal capabilities or understanding, as well as representing Māori interests internationally.



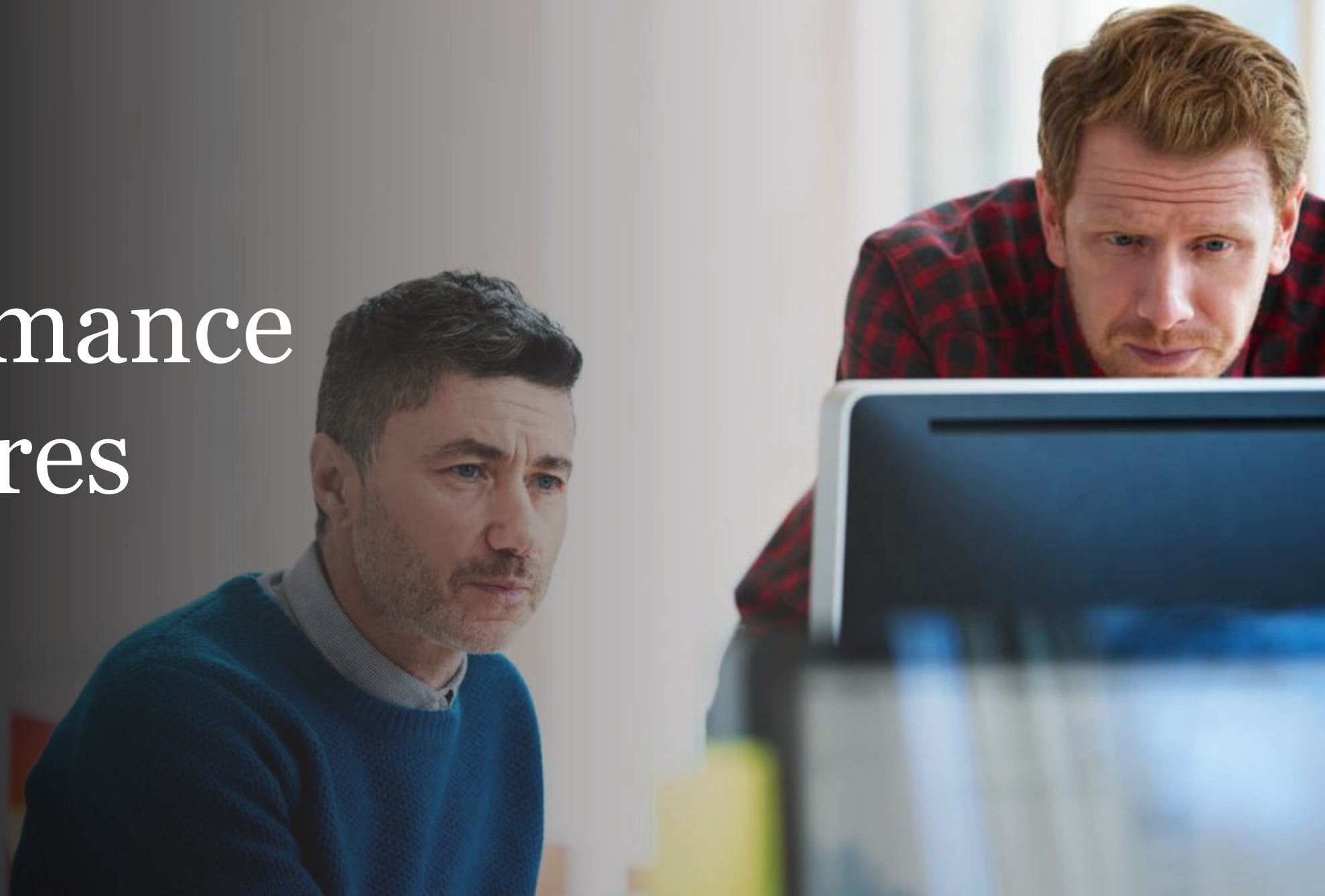
Source: J3 Thinking about MFAT and its roles and responsibilities to Māori and as a Treaty Partner, how would you rate each of the following?
Base: Stakeholders who personally identify as Māori, work for a Māori business or organisation, or for a business or organisation with strong Māori ownership or values base.
Note: Don't know responses are excluded. This question was added in 2022, so no data is available prior to 2022.

“Less proactive support for indigenous collaboration. MFAT realigned quickly around current government views of role and value of indigenous diplomacy in international outreach and influence.

A highlight has been continued momentum to position Māori interests in FTA, from EU to UAE etc.

But it is hard to see concrete evidence of MFAT support for Māori business leverage of FTA. Have we really delivered on the potential? EU diplomats seem more interested and engaged than our own.”

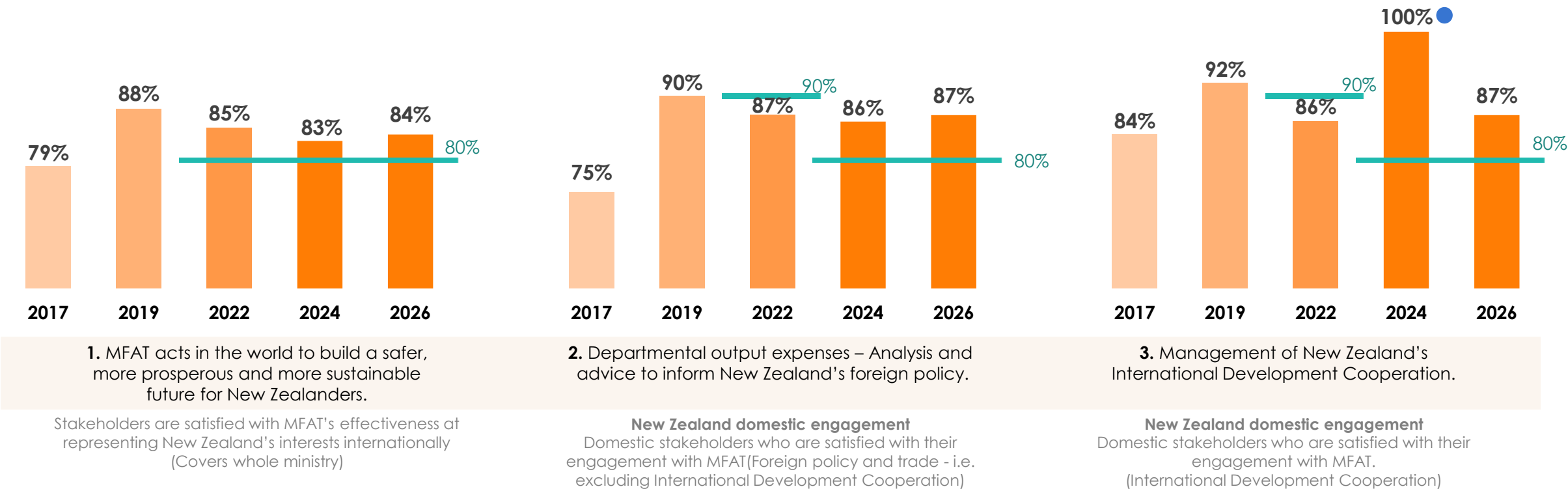
Performance measures



MFAT has met exceeded targets for all three KPIs this year.

Key performance indicators

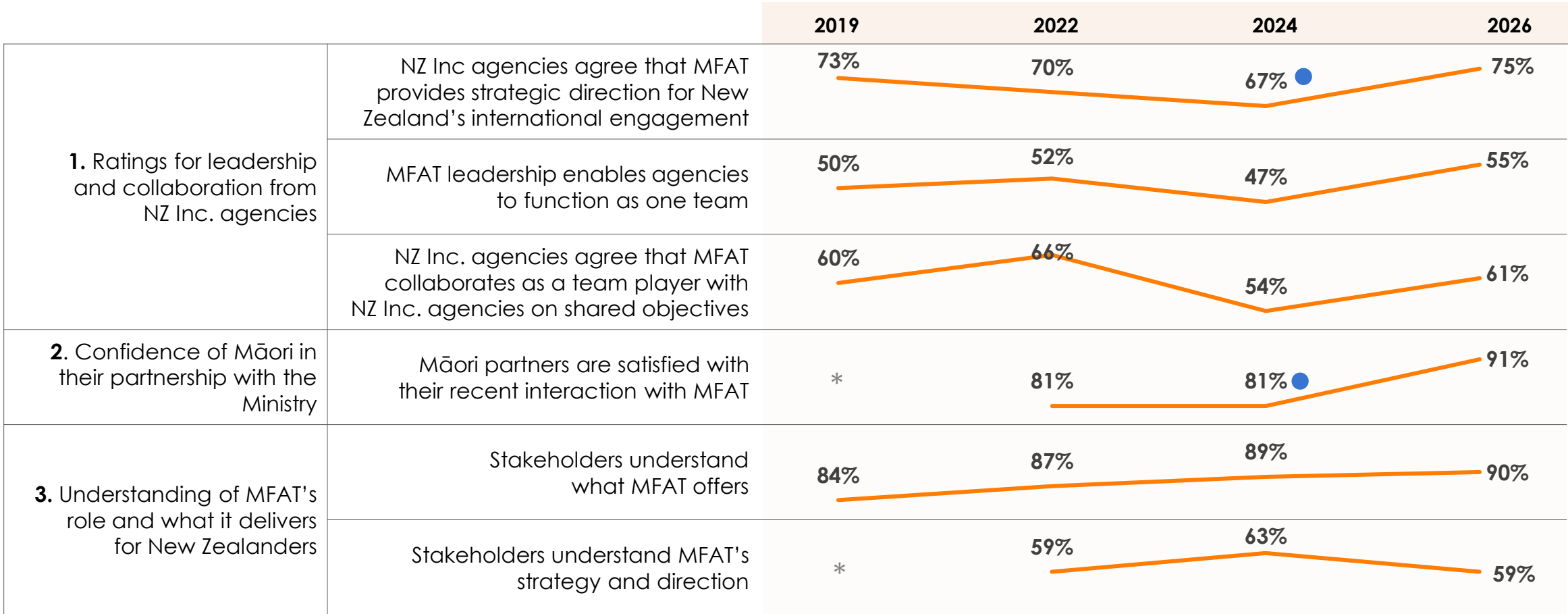
● Treat with caution due to smaller sample size
— Target



Source: 1 M10 - Overall, how effective do you think MFAT is at representing and advocating for New Zealand's interests internationally? –All stakeholders (2026 n=256).
2 M4b - Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the interactions you have had with MFAT staff recently? – Non-International Development Cooperation stakeholders (2026 n=206).
3 M4b - Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the interactions you have had with MFAT staff recently? – International Development Cooperation stakeholders (2026 n=67)
Note: All results exclude 'don't know' or 'not applicable' responses. A fourth KPI about delivery of services to other NZ agencies overseas was removed the questionnaire in 2026

Additional performance measures

The target is to increase or maintain the trend below, rather than a specific target set for the year.



● Treat with caution due to smaller sample size

Source: 1 M8 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about NZ Inc?
2 M4b – Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the interactions you have had with MFAT staff recently?
3 I2 How much do you feel you know about what MFAT can offer your organisation? (a moderate amount/a lot)
J1 How would you describe your awareness and understanding of MFAT's strategy and future direction?

Statement 1 n=54, statement 2 n=112, statement 3 n=47
n=46
n=281
n=276

Appendix - Funding

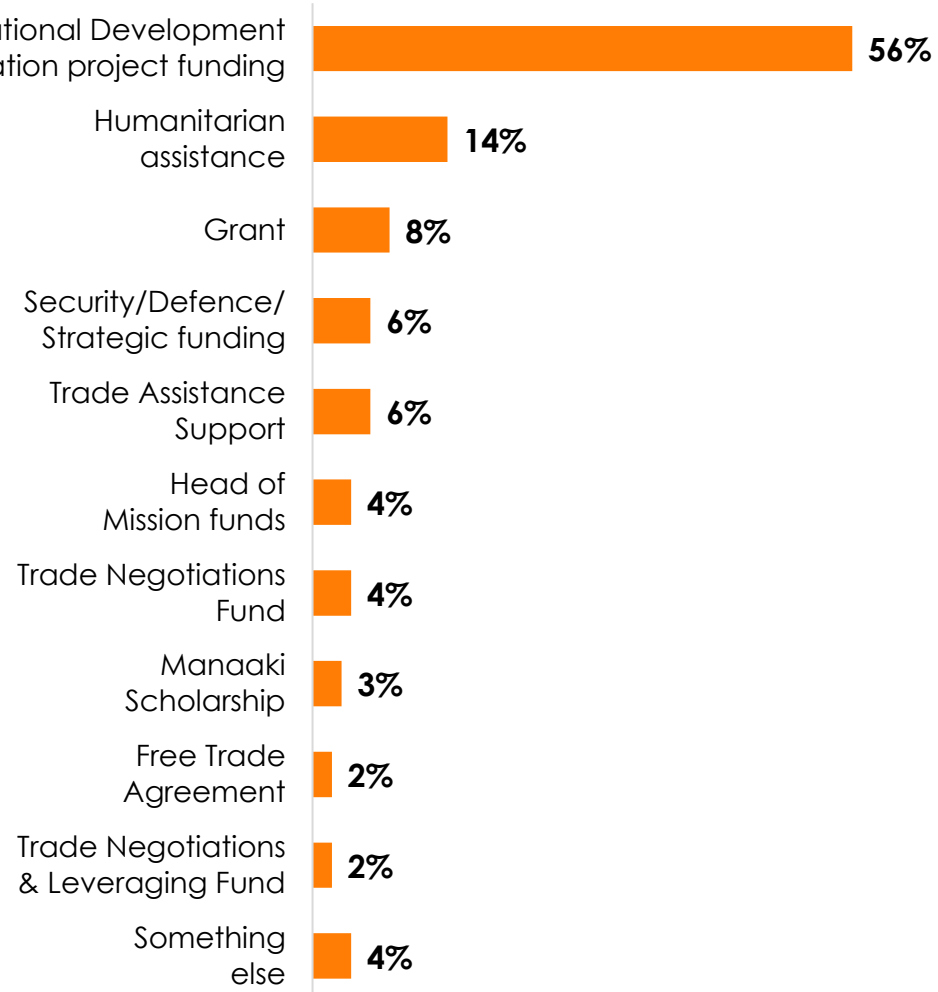
40% Of stakeholders received funding from MFAT in the last two years

Interestingly, funding has very little impact on satisfaction:



Those who are fairly/very satisfied

Stakeholders who have received funding say they received...



Source: Q55 Has your organisation received funding from MFAT in the last two years? Q56 What kind of funding have you received in the last two years? **Base:** Q55 All stakeholders n=281, Q56 stakeholders who have received funding in the last 2 years n=113
Note: This was asked for the first time in 2026, so no data is available prior to this

Ngā mihi



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