

Submission: Select Committee Hearings into Maori Wards / Ammendments



Te Kaunihera Māori o Aotearoa
New Zealand Māori Council

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Paper: Local Electoral Act 2001 (the
Act)



Transcript of the Verbal Submission to the Maori Affairs Select Committee hearings into the amendments of the Maori Wards legislation legislation placed under urgency in the House.

About the bill?

This bill seeks to amend the Local Electoral Act 2001 (the Act) to improve Māori representation in local government. It aims to do this by removing provisions in the Act that allow for the use of binding polls in the decision to establish Māori wards or constituencies. It would also remove the use of binding polls in decisions about whether a local district or region should be divided into multiple Māori wards or constituencies. These provisions do not apply to general wards and constituencies, and have been used by electors to overturn some decisions made by local authorities. The bill also seeks to amend the part of the Act which gives local authorities the ability to require a referendum on a wide range of proposals, policies, services, objectives and issues. Consequently, any referendum on the establishment of Māori or general wards and constituencies could not be binding.

It would set out a transitional period to give local authorities the opportunity to make or revoke resolutions about these polls, their outcomes, and any decisions to hold them, in time for the 2022 local elections. This transitional period would end on Friday, 21 May 2021. After the commencement date in the bill, no such binding poll could be held, regardless of any actions taken before the commencement date.

Tena a koutou Katoa, good to see you all I want to reassure you that my ZOOM camera is working and I in fact am proud to be Maori and show my face to you all, even my home, rather than hide behind the jackboot comments of a previous presenter from my home town of Tauranga Moana where lets be frank angry old men go to retire, find themselves at loose ends, join the same angry man old man club and rail against Maori – a District who's Council was sacked recently because A the didn't know how to work together and financially they couldn't manage a rat out of a trap. The New Zealand Maori Council is the oldest of all of the Maori organisation with a whakapapa going back to the 1800's – of course led previously by Sir Turi Carroll, Sir Graeme Latimer and Sir Eddie Durie. We encompass 16 Districts and hundreds of Maori Committees across the country and have often, through history, held the Crown to account on a number of fronts, from water and forests, to state owned enterprises to the recognition of Te Reo Maori as an official language of Aotearoa.

I want to first thank the Parliament for its urgency on this matter – it is something that many Maori and many New Zealanders have called for over many years. It has been a blight on our democracy that the foundation partner of Te Tiriti and the first nations people have been excluded in a way that no other ethnic group had. The 5% rule is more one of exclusion than inclusion. This process has been ugly – the advent of organisations such as Hobsons Pledge has done more to divide the lines than it has join them together and lets be frank it has seeded a form of racism in this country that has perpetuated itself not just in our letterboxes through pamphlet drops but in the new world of social media. We know some common truths that Maori are excluded and disadvantaged – and I remind members that before anyone else arrived here we were 100% of the population, 100% of the landowners, 100% of the representative base of Aotearoa. Today I hear arguments that Maori representation in Local Government is about 13+% which is consummate to the Maori population im told. And yet what Mr Smith and others fail to recognise is that at the time of the Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi there was an expectation of equity through representation. Pretty much straight away we became strangers in our lands – lands that were systematically taken meaning our representative voice from the start was taken. How do you explain a population that goes from a culturally rich society, trading with each other, building strong links, taking care of the wai and the whenua ending up going from 100% to 13% in the space of less than two hundred years?

At the Local Government level decisions are made every day that impact Maori and yet the reality is we do not trust Local Government – why? Because over many years we have seen our rights in water and land depleted, there are any number of cases where non-payment of rates has seen our homes taken. That trust was further ruined by the 5% rule. I have then heard the irony of some pushing the line around consultation and the fast pace of this amendment – why not move fast to rebuild faith and trust by Maori in the system of local government after suffering years from the indignity of campaigns by organisations whose proponents include Don Brash and Margaret Murray Benge and Hobsons Pledge. On behalf of the New Zealand Maori Council and the National Maori Authority I say clearly that those who have campaigned for this, Andrew Judd, Toni Boynton, Riki Nelson and the thousands of others are thankful that this job is getting done – the true test will come down to those who have railed against Maori representation being consigned to history along with the amendment.

Let me just cover off some important points to ensure you all get to dinner with your whanau on time.

1. Is the current law racist – yes

2. Am I aware of the other parts of the Local Government Act that also need to be considered – yes I am including Parts 57 – 64 – 136 – 137 and my list goes on – it is an imperfect law like so many are – the RMA, the Education Act and so on. Many of which need overhauls but has this one been rushed – no. the truth is Maori have been calling for it for years, those in opposition to amendments have been campaigning to retain them for years. You would be living on a rock think otherwise and the sheer number of submissions even at pace is an indication that many were prepared to move quickly.

Some of the submissions today I do not agree with – and yet the more they say this is somehow a risk to our democracy it is proof, through their voices being heard the last two days, this process is working. At the end of the day I am tired of being governed by a group of the same gender, the same age and the same privileged attitude that has done more to hold my people and people of colour back than it does to push us forward – in actual fact we could have a whole conversation about the lack of representation and equity when it comes to women on our business and industry boards, state owned enterprises and so – but kei te pai lets get this job done and get on with gender equity as well. Lets have a conversation about increasing the number of Maori electorates based on the growing Maori population and better yet lets get a better representative voice going for whanau living with a disability and the voices of our rainbow community too while im at it.

It does though give me heart that the National Party are finally going to re run in the Maori seats which is why I know they surely will support the Maori Wards.

Finally – hasn't it been wonderful that Maori and New Zealanders have come on line in their cars and bikes, god forbid lycra kids in the back seat on the way back from a birthday party – Nick don't be afraid to whip that tie off and pull out a good run and coke when the day is done – the sun will still go down this evening and still come up in the morning.

No reira Tena Kotou Tena Kotou Katoa

Matthew Tukaki