

Immediate Release
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Lady Tureiti Moxon warns new Treaty Bills put Māori lives at risk

Te Kōhāo Health and National Urban Māori Authority urge Parliament to reject the [latest proposed changes to Treaty obligations](#), warning of preventable deaths and further damage to Māori health services.

Lady Tureiti Moxon is warning that [three proposed Bills to change references to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in legislation](#) could have serious consequences for Māori health and wellbeing and is calling on Parliament to reject them.

In a submission to Parliament's Justice Committee on behalf of Te Kōhāo Health and the National Urban Māori Authority, she said the Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi ([Standardisation](#)), ([Strength of Legislative Obligations](#)) and ([Repeals](#)) Amendment Bills would weaken protections for Māori and make it easier for the Crown to disregard its obligations.

"The consequences of weakening Te Tiriti are not theoretical. We have seen in real life what happens when Māori health and the Crown's obligations to Māori are treated as a lower priority. Whānau suffer, inequities persist, and lives are lost that could have been saved," said Lady Tureiti.

"We cannot afford to weaken those protections even further. These Bills should definitely not proceed."

The submission draws on the experience of Māori health providers, and two examples of decisions Moxon believes clearly demonstrate the human cost of deprioritising Te Tiriti.

The first was a 2006 Ministry of Health letter directing District Health Boards not to refer to Te Tiriti in new policies, action plans or contracts. In the years that followed, Te Kōhāo Health and other Māori providers lost contracts, had funding reduced and were forced to work as subcontractors to mainstream providers Moxon said were less equipped to meet the needs of Māori communities.

"That experience showed us how quickly the environment can change when decision-makers are given the message that Te Tiriti is no longer a priority," she says.

"Māori providers have demonstrated time and time again that they can deliver effective, culturally grounded care for whānau. Yet instead of backing that success, the system has too often undermined the very services that are making a difference."

The second example was bowel cancer screening. In March 2025, Cabinet changed the planned expansion of screening, using funding originally set aside to begin screening Māori and Pacific people 10 years earlier to instead favour screening the wider population two years earlier.

According to the modelling cited in the submission, the decision means an estimated 273 Māori and Pacific people who would otherwise have been saved will die prematurely.

"Māori develop bowel cancer younger and die from it at higher rates. A fair health system recognises those differences and responds to them. Treating everyone the same, when people face unequal risks and unequal outcomes, does not deliver equity," she said.

The Standardisation Bill would change the wording in section 6 of the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 from a commitment to "give effect to" the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi to a commitment to "recognise and respect" those principles.

Lady Tureiti says that change must be understood in the context of wider health reforms, including the disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora Māori Health Authority, and the removal of statutory requirements intended to support equity, Māori participation and accountability within the health system.

“Changing the language of the law matters because it shapes the decisions made by governments, agencies and funders,” she said.

“If the law no longer clearly requires the Crown to give effect to te Tiriti, what assurance do Māori have that their rights, their health needs and their future will be given the weight they deserve?”

Her submission argues that all three Bills are inconsistent with Te Tiriti and raise serious concerns about the quality of the lawmaking process. It points to Ministry of Justice advice that the proposals did not meet responsible regulation standards, with no apparent benefits identified from lowering existing Treaty standards, as well as Waitangi Tribunal findings describing the proposed changes as a significant constitutional regression.

“These Bills raise fundamental questions about the relationship between Māori and the Crown. Decisions of this significance cannot be made without meaningful engagement with Māori and then presented as legitimate simply because a parliamentary process follows.”

Her view is it follows the wider pattern of changes affecting Māori representation, language, education, child wellbeing and customary rights. Lady Moxon says the cumulative effect risks undoing decades of progress towards a more equitable relationship between Māori and the Crown.

“The last 50 years have seen hard-won steps towards recognising Te Tiriti and addressing the damage caused by generations of Crown decisions. We are now seeing those protections stripped away, often despite evidence of harm and warnings from the Waitangi Tribunal.”

Ultimately Lady Tureiti is asking the Justice Committee to recommend that all three Bills do not proceed, that existing Treaty provisions and their strength be retained, and that the Crown work with Māori before considering any changes.

“Te Tiriti is not an optional extra. It is fundamental to how the Crown must work with Māori. If we are serious about improving health outcomes, we must strengthen the conditions that ensure Māori providers succeed and whānau can access the care they need,” she said.

“We should be moving forward together, not going backwards at the expense of Māori health and wellbeing.”

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