



## Report of the Petitions Committee

# Petition of Bill Wollerman: Modernise the national anthem wording

February 2022

---

### Contents

|                                                           |   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Recommendation.....                                       | 2 |
| Request to replace the words in the national anthem ..... | 2 |
| Background .....                                          | 2 |
| Comments from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.....  | 2 |
| Process for updating the national anthem.....             | 3 |
| Our response to the petition .....                        | 3 |
| Appendix.....                                             | 4 |

Hon Jacqui Dean  
Chairperson

## Petition of Bill Wollerman

### Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petition of Bill Wollerman—Modernise the national anthem wording—and recommends that the House take note of its report.

### Request to replace the words in the national anthem

The petition was presented to the House on 18 August 2021. It requests:

That the House of Representatives urge the Government to replace the 5 verses of God Defend New Zealand with:

Every creed and every race,  
We are one in freedom's place,  
Friends to all, both near and far,  
AOTEAROA.  
Equal status for us all,  
Under fair and honest law,  
Helping those who need a hand,  
Forge ahead New Zealand.

### Background

The original five verses of the national anthem, from a poem by Thomas Bracken, date from 1876. Mr Wollerman says his proposed new lyrics would rectify criticisms that the existing lyrics are racist, sexist, unduly religious, and too long.

The petitioner considers that a national anthem should describe the beliefs and behaviour expectations of the people it represents. He submitted that his words achieve this.

He also submitted that a national anthem should inspire unity, loyalty, and patriotism. He said that, as time passes, lyrics may need updating in line with changing beliefs, attitudes, and objectives. In his view, the current wording no longer reflects the kind of people New Zealanders are.

He also pointed out the religious character of the existing words, which he submitted is no longer appropriate. Mr Wollerman submitted that his new words “reflect today’s beliefs and attitudes, and thus ensure continued public support”.

Mr Wollerman believes the national anthem should celebrate unity, behaviours that underpin New Zealanders’ daily existence, and a sense of togetherness. He said these form the basis of New Zealand’s egalitarian society: “equal legal status, fairness for all, and friendliness”.

### Comments from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage said that the popularity of *God Defend New Zealand* grew in the 19th century and it entered the 20th century as one of this country’s most popular hymns. It was made New Zealand’s national song in time for the 1940 centenary.

In 1976, a century after the first performance of *God Defend New Zealand*, a petition was presented to Parliament asking for it to be made the national anthem. The petition was signed by 7,750 people.

In 1977, *God Defend New Zealand* received Government approval and the Queen's consent for use as a second national anthem. *God Save the Queen* has been a national anthem of New Zealand since 1840.

### **Process for updating the national anthem**

The ministry advised that there is no legislative or other established process for changing the country's national anthems. It noted that reviewing or changing *God Defend New Zealand* would be at the discretion of the Government. It said that, because of the national anthem's national, historical, and constitutional significance, changes would not be made lightly. A considerable groundswell of support and significant public consultation would be needed.

It suggested that, if significant public interest in changing the anthem was demonstrated, the Government could consider a referendum process similar to the 2015–16 New Zealand flag referendums.

### **Our response to the petition**

We agree with the ministry that, in order to change a symbol of national identity such as the national anthem, there would have to be a groundswell of support.

We note the ministry's comment that a referendum could be considered. The petitioner may wish to consider starting the process for a citizens-initiated referendum. To hold a citizens-initiated referendum, he would have to get signatures from over 10 percent of eligible voters.<sup>1</sup>

The committee notes and supports the trend for increased use of the Māori lyrics. More and more people now expect to hear those lyrics. The Māori translation dates from 1878. We have noticed that it is common to sing the Māori translation of verse 1 followed by the English version.

We thank the petitioner for bringing this petition to Parliament and sharing his suggested lyrics for the national anthem.

---

<sup>1</sup> More information on citizens-initiated referendums is available [on Parliament's website](#).

## **Appendix**

### **Committee procedure**

The petition was referred to us on 18 August 2021. We met between 30 September 2021 and 17 February 2022 to consider it. We received written submissions from the petitioner and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

### **Committee members**

Hon Jacqui Dean (Chairperson)  
Rachel Boyack  
Dr Liz Craig  
Shanan Halbert  
Nicole McKee  
Todd Muller  
Teanau Tuiono

### **Evidence received**

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are available on the [Parliament website](#).