



Report of the Petitions Committee

Petition of Stuart Prossor: Change New Zealand's official name to "Aotearoa New Zealand"

Petition of Danny Tahau Jobe: Aotearoa New Zealand, officially

August 2022

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Hon Jacqui Dean
Chairperson

Petitions of Stuart Prossor and Danny Tahau Jobe

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petitions of Stuart Prossor—Change New Zealand’s official name to “Aotearoa New Zealand”—and Danny Tahau Jobe—Aotearoa New Zealand, officially—and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Request to change the official name of New Zealand

The petition of Stuart Prossor was presented to the House on 3 August 2021. It requests:

That the House of Representatives urge the Government to hold a referendum on changing New Zealand’s name to “Aotearoa New Zealand”.

The petition of Danny Tahau Jobe was presented to the House on 1 March 2022. It requests:

That the House of Representatives pass legislation to make “Aotearoa New Zealand” the official name of the country.

Comments from Stuart Prossor

We received a short written submission from Mr Prossor, who would like the Government to hold a binding referendum on whether to adopt the name “Aotearoa New Zealand”. Mr Prossor said it is important that “New Zealanders are given the choice rather than a random parliament governed by any political party”.

He noted that Te Pāti Māori has a similar petition (requesting to change the country’s official name to “Aotearoa”), and suggested that option be incorporated into the referendum.¹

Comments from Danny Tahau Jobe

Mr Tahau Jobe is passionate about incorporating the name “Aotearoa” into New Zealand’s official name. His submission covered several arguments in favour of adopting the name “Aotearoa New Zealand”.

Aotearoa

Mr Tahau Jobe said that the name Aotearoa is unique, meaningful, and historical; it asserts this country’s identity as a Pacific nation, and represents its language, culture, and identity.

He told us of the story of Hine Te Aparangi, who was travelling with Kupe. Seeing clouds in the distance, she called “he ao, he ao, he ao tea roa”—“a cloud, a cloud, a long white cloud”.

¹ The [Petition of Te Pāti Māori: Change our official name to Aotearoa](#) has been presented to the House and referred to us for consideration.

The petitioner said that, since then, “the name has been in continual usage and has not changed”. He said the name “Aotearoa”

has been used since the time of Kupe as a name for the North Island with Te Ika-a-Māui, has been used for the whole of the Country at various times and has grown over time to its current use and acceptance for the whole of the Country.

New Zealand

Mr Tahau Jobe submitted that the name “Nieuw Zeeland” was originally chosen by a Dutch map-maker and was derived from a province in the Netherlands, Zeeland (meaning Sealand). James Cook anglicised it to “New Zealand”. The petitioner noted that the transliterations Nu Tireni and Nu Tirani were used in *Te Whakaputanga o ngā Rangatira o Nu Tireni—The Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand*, and in *Te Tiriti o Waitangi—The Treaty of Waitangi*.

Mr Tahau Jobe submitted that, since the mid-1800s, the name “Aotearoa” has been used more than “Nu Tireni”. He said it is in use by government agencies and across New Zealand society “as the accepted alternative name for this country. Nu Tireni/Nu Tirani is, however, not being used.”

Tiriti o Waitangi

Mr Tahau Jobe also raised the legal principle of *contra proferentem*. He said it applies where there are two versions of an agreement, and requires preference to be against the drafter of the text. He said that, because the Crown drafted te Tiriti o Waitangi, a Māori name for the country should be given preference; he advocated that the name should be Aotearoa.

Mr Tahau Jobe also argued that te Tiriti requires te reo Māori to be “treated and valued the same as the English language”. He submitted that one effect of colonisation has been the degradation of te reo Māori. He said that te reo Māori would be thriving:

if there had not been an agenda of assimilation and language domination by previous Colonial Governments... If the language had not been forcefully taken, we would already have a bilingual Country name as bilingualism is a foundation of te Tiriti o Waitangi—the Treaty of Waitangi.

Current usage

Mr Tahau Jobe acknowledged that te reo Māori is an official language and that the Government has strategies to revitalise it. However, he said:

It will only be seen to have real value and worth when it is seen and heard consistently at the highest of levels, and a Country name is one of the highest that can be achieved.

He pointed out that the two names are often already used together. For example, New Zealand’s pavilion at the Dubai International Expo in 2021 is named “Aotearoa New Zealand”. Both names are also used on birth certificates, passports, money, citizenship certificates, and in the national anthem. Many government agencies use the word “Aotearoa” in their name.

Yet, despite these portrayals and appearances of nationalism, only New Zealand has official status... It is inconsistent with our documents of identity and the way in which we sell ourselves to the world as a country of equality, and a protector of indigenous rights.

He said this creates confusion about “who we are”. Mr Tahau Jobe said that research has found that:

people who have a sense of self, who feel their culture and language is valued, are secure in their identity are more likely to have better outcomes and wellbeing than those who do not have the same sense or feeling of self-worth. The addition of Aotearoa must therefore, surely lend to better outcomes for our society.

Mr Tahau Jobe also believes that adopting a bicultural name would fit in well with the requirement for Aotearoa New Zealand’s histories to be taught in schools from 2023.

He added:

It is poignant to add here that 50 Years ago a petition was presented to Parliament to make Te Reo Māori an official language, and here we are still today, petitioning Parliament for the right for our words to be official and for them to have equity.²

Comments from Manatū Taonga

We invited and received a submission on the petition of Stuart Prossor from Manatū Taonga—Ministry for Culture and Heritage. The submission outlines the historical context for the names “Aotearoa” and “New Zealand”.

The ministry said it is impossible to briefly summarise the different Māori stories about place names. It noted the view of some, including Ngāi Tahu leader Edward Ellison, that the name “Aotearoa” was not used in the south, and that “Aotearoa me te Wai Pounamu” was the common term for the two main islands.³

It said that newspapers’ use of the word “Aotearoa” gradually increased over the decades. In the 1870s, it was used about 300 times; in the 1940s, it was used about 3,500 times.

The ministry confirmed the history given by Mr Tahau Jobe for the name “New Zealand”: that the name “Nieuw Zeeland” was chosen by a Dutch map-maker and was later anglicised. The ministry said that the spelling of transliterations (such as “Nu Tirene”) varied.

The ministry quoted the Government’s chief historian, Neill Atkinson, pointing out that, although New Zealanders think about the two traditions of Māori culture and then British, “what’s interesting is New Zealand’s name actually comes from a different source, it’s a Dutch name”.

² The “reo” petition, presented to the House on 14 September 1972, requested that courses in Māori language and culture be offered in New Zealand schools. More information about the petition is available in a feature on the [Parliament website](#).

³ RNZ (first published in the Otago Daily Times), 2021: [Ngāi Tahu leader: Let’s not rush name change](#).

The ministry concluded:

The singing of the national anthem in te reo Māori, named 'Aotearoa' (translated in 1878) has never been formally authorised but has become commonplace. Today, government departments often use 'Aotearoa', and it appears on the national currency and on drivers' licences. Within education, the new history curriculum uses the words Aotearoa New Zealand. The report into the Wai 262 claim is entitled *Ko Aotearoa tēnei* (This is Aotearoa). One of the commonest expressions of personal and national identity is the 'Uruwhenua Aotearoa New Zealand' passport.

No single Act of Parliament or authority makes 'New Zealand' an official name. Rather, it is the consistent use of 'New Zealand' in constitutional documents such as Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the British Parliament's New Zealand Constitution Act 1852 that has created its official status. Our lengthy pre-colonial history and traditions are reflected in the increasing day-to-day use of the name 'Aotearoa', which has since the late 19th century been the most widely accepted te reo Māori name for New Zealand.

Our response to the petitions

We thank the petitioners for raising this topic.

We note Manatū Taonga's comment that no single law makes "New Zealand" the official name; instead, the consistent use of it has created its official status. We have also observed that the use of "Aotearoa" is increasing in many different contexts. Many people now use the name "Aotearoa" or "Aotearoa New Zealand" without any official change at this time.

We suggest that the petitioners may wish to consider starting a citizens-initiated referendum. To hold a citizens-initiated referendum, a person has to get signatures from at least 10 percent of eligible voters.⁴

⁴ More information on citizens-initiated referendums is available [on Parliament's website](#).

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition of Stuart Prossor was referred to us on 3 August 2021. We met between 18 November 2021 and 11 August 2022 to consider it. We received written submissions from the petitioner and Manatū Taonga—Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

The petition of Danny Tahau Jobe was referred to us on 1 March 2022. We met between 7 April and 11 August 2022 to consider it. We received a written submission from the petitioner.

Committee members

Hon Jacqui Dean (Chairperson)
Rachel Boyack
Shanan Halbert
Nicole McKee
Todd Muller
Sarah Pallett
Teanau Tuiono

Evidence received

The documents we received as evidence in relation to these petitions are available on the Parliament website:

[Submissions on the petition of Stuart Prossor.](#)

[Submission on the petition of Danny Tahau Jobe.](#)