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Submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee on the New Zealand Day Bill

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 40 nationally organised societies. It has 33 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of these societies and some 150 other societies. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action.

The membership was asked questions on the New Zealand Day Bill via *The Circular* and email. It generated considerable debate. This response has been prepared by the Public Issues Standing Committee.

NCWNZ Policy

NCWNZ has the following policy related to the Treaty of Waitangi which could be considered of relevance to this Bill:-

That as a Statement of Policy NCWNZ:

- (i) Acknowledges the Treaty of Waitangi as New Zealand's founding document which created a bicultural partnership with rights and responsibilities for both partners;*
- (ii) Recognises that many ethnic groups have contributed to the cultural diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand and*
- (iii) Is committed to the development of an harmonious multicultural society. (1992)*

Summary

Based on the many responses received to change the name from Waitangi Day to New Zealand Day NCWNZ supports the ambit of the New Zealand Day Bill, but opinion was evenly divided on whether the date of 6 February should be changed.

Specific Comments

Clause 4 New Zealand Day to be day of commemoration

Those who supported the change to New Zealand Day gave the following reasons:

The general feeling is that Waitangi Day creates division in the country and there is a need for change – a chance to move forward and the need to celebrate the positive aspects of being a citizen of New Zealand. It should be a day of celebration rather than division.

There is discontent with the way the Waitangi Day is used as a protest occasion. It has become an unhappy divisive experience due to connotations of negative behaviour and images the public (nationally and internationally) receives from the media, of protests, demonstrations and other violent behaviour.





By celebrating Waitangi Day as New Zealand Day, it is felt that the political issues associated with Waitangi Day may not be as contentious. A name change might serve to lower the level of violence and passion associated with Waitangi Day.

New Zealand Day reflects the true nature of our population make-up; so many years have passed since the Treaty was signed and times have changed. As New Zealand is increasingly becoming a multi-cultural society, made up of many different ethnic groups, New Zealand Day could have a unifying effect and be more inclusive of all people and cultures.

We are all New Zealanders; New Zealand Day would be more inclusive and meaningful in reflecting this. It should be promoted as a celebration of national pride which all New Zealanders can enjoy celebrating together, not so focused on Waitangi.

New Zealand Day would be more widely understood by overseas students and new settlers which would make it easier to arrange events and celebrate together.

Those who do not support the change consider Waitangi Day should remain as the name, as the Treaty of Waitangi is our founding document. Its signing should be treasured as a unique and important New Zealand historical occasion. Waitangi Day is specific to the Treaty, part of our history and culture, with special significance and a change of name will lose that significance.

By signing the Treaty with the Crown, Maori gave the British settlers the right to live in their country; it applies to everyone, both those already in the country and those who have settled later. The moves in recent years to feature different community groups and celebrate in a variety of ways help to build that concept. It deserves a day of recognition, remembrance, and focus.

Changing the name would be denigrating the importance of the Treaty. It is considered to be a covenant or sacred document by many Maori and the honouring of its significance should not be lightly cast aside. It is respectful of our bi-cultural identity and it is not up to Pakeha to push for the change, which was described by one member as an unnecessary backhanded insult to Maori.

As New Zealanders we need to acknowledge our history. More time is needed for relationship building between non Maori and Maori to work out the issues addressing the spirit of the Treaty document.

So that Waitangi Day becomes a day of genuine celebration, not protests, as a country we have got to work at it and retain the name. We need to challenge the media focus on emphasising the negative aspects of Waitangi Day celebrations.

Clause 5 Observance of New Zealand Day

As with a previous submission on a review of the Holidays Act, those of NCWNZ's membership supporting 6 February for Waitangi Day considered it to be a very important day which should remain special.

It is better having a fixed day for our celebrations, and having it on 6 February makes it distinctive and significant for remembrance.

If the day is changed to the Monday closest to 6 February it could become just another summer holiday weekend.



If it is permanently on a Monday some employees would always have to work on that day. In accordance with its submission on the Holidays Bill, NCWNZ still has concerns about how, from an employment payment perspective, Waitangi Day is treated if it falls on a weekend.

Those supporting the change considered Waitangi Day just another holiday, which causes problems at the start of the school year as there are too many holidays in the first term. The first Monday in February was considered as a better idea because 6 February often breaks into the beginning of the school year.

A Monday observance saves interruption of work during the week and it allows people to plan a long weekend. A mid-week holiday is of little use.

An Alternative National Day

Members commented there could be a New Zealand Day as a national day which is observed on a Monday and is separate from Waitangi Day. These days should be promoted as a celebration of national pride which all New Zealanders can enjoy celebrating together. New Zealand could do away with provincial holidays if there was a concern over the addition of another public holiday.

To change to a completely different time of the year could give meaning to New Zealand Day. It could be associated with ANZAC Day or with New Zealand becoming a Dominion. New Zealand became a Dominion on 26 September 1907 and in the past Dominion Day was celebrated on that day.

Conclusion

The National Council of Women of New Zealand supports the change of name of Waitangi Day to New Zealand Day, but wishes to retain 6 February as the date of celebration.

Christine Low
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Anne Todd-Lambie
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