



**National Council of
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Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa

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S18.07

Submission to the Social Services and Community Committee on the Families Commission Act Repeal Bill

0. Introduction

- 0.1. The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 245 organisations affiliated at either national level or to one of our 19 branches. In addition, about 350 people are individual members. Collectively our reach is over 350,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ's vision is a gender equal New Zealand and research shows we will be better off socially and economically if we are gender equal. Through research, discussion and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realise its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right. This submission has been prepared NCWNZ Public Issues Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee.
- 0.2. NCWNZ is making this submission to the Social Services Select Committee regarding the Families Commission Act Repeal Bill which passed its First Reading on 20 February 2018 (sponsored by Hon Carmel Sepuloni). This Bill is largely a technical piece of legislation that disestablishes the Families Commission that was set up in 2004 following the passing of the Families Commission Act 2003. Most of the clauses in the Bill relate to the vesting and transfer of assets, liabilities, agreements, leases, license arrangements and information in the Ministry of Social Development and the status of individual employment agreements or appointments. The Bill disestablishes the position of the Families Commissioner, membership of the Families Commission and members of the Social Science Experts Panel. The Bill includes consequential amendments to other Acts and removes the Commission from the list of organisations in Part 2 of Schedule 1 of the Ombudsmen Act 1975. This legislation is directed at ensuring that this is done before the end of the 2017-2018 financial year.
- 0.3. **NCWNZ supports the Families Commission Act Repeal Bill as a necessary practical piece of legislation following the decision to abolish the Families Commission, temporarily set up the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu), and allocate the functions of the Families Commission to other agencies.** It notes that these practicalities are addressed in Part 2 of this Bill and that much of this reallocation has already taken place. This submission does not offer comments on specific clauses of the Bill.

- 0.4. **NCWNZ has some concerns about ongoing action relating to the main purpose of this legislation “to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiencies in the provision of social science research and advocacy for families generally”.**¹ Concerns with respect to advocacy for the needs of children and families, effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of social science research, coordination and collaboration among NGOs and government agencies are outlined below.
- 0.5. In summary, NCWNZ supports government investment in research-informed policy relating the well-being of families/whānau and children. This entails attention to diversity in families/whānau; the gender diversity of parents and children; and connections between government agencies and the community and voluntary sector. NCWNZ considers that action is necessary to enhance the capacity of non-governmental organisations and government agencies to generate and use relevant research in their provision of services to children and families/whānau following the disestablishment of the Families Commission/Superu.
- 0.6. This submission was prepared by the NCWNZ Public Issues Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee. The short time frame for submissions meant that it was impossible to consult with all NCWNZ branches, individual members and member organisations. Previous submissions by NCWNZ relating to the Families Commission² and the Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Social Development from the Families Commission, operating as the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu)³ have been consulted in preparing this submission.

1. Advocacy for the needs of children and families

- 1.1. NCWNZ has argued in a number of submissions that families/whānau appear to be increasingly under stress and that children are too often at risk. Members have been particularly concerned about increasingly levels of child poverty.⁴ NCWNZ has submitted that a focus on families should not take priority over attention to children’s needs and rights.⁵ NCWNZ has argued for collaboration between

¹ Families Commission Repeal Bill, General Policy Statement, 23-1.

<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2018/0023/latest/LMS11591.html>

² NCWNZ Submissions relating to the Families Commission:

- Families Commission – Proposed Scope, Functions and Structure, 2003 [S03.15 Families Commission – Proposed Scope, Functions and Structure](#)
- Families Commission Bill, 2003. [S03.56 Families Commission Bill](#)
- Families Commission Amendment Bill, 2012 [S12.27 Families Commission Amendment Bill](#)

³ Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Social Development, Families Commission, operating as the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu)

<http://www.superu.govt.nz/sites/default/files/Superu%20BIM%20to%20Min%20for%20Social%20Development%2026%20Oct%202017%20PUBLIC.pdf>

⁴ Families Commission Bill, 2003, p. 1. [S03.56 Families Commission Bill](#)

⁵ Ibid.

the Families Commission and the Commissioner for Children, as well as the need for its networking with other government and non-government agencies.⁶

- 1.2. At its inception members of NCWNZ were concerned that the Families Commission would become another “bureaucratic body” with little power or “teeth” that “merely contributes to policy development and acts as an advocate” rather than being effective in changing the situation of children and families/whānau in need.⁷ In this respect, NCWNZ has been critical of the effectiveness of the Families Commission while recognising the need for advocacy for families/whānau and better understanding of their diverse needs.
- 1.3. Attention by the Families Commission to diversity in families/whānau has been widely appreciated by NCWNZ. Its submissions have welcomed “the broad and inclusive approach to families” adopted by the Families Commission and its inclusion of families of same sex couples with children, and grandparents raising children.⁸ The autonomy of the Families Commission and the Families Commissioner was valued by most NCWNZ members. The first submission NCWNZ made on the Families Commission stated that: “It is important to ensure the Commission retains a certain independence from government in order to carry out its role as critic of government policy”.⁹ There has not been sufficient time to consult NCWNZ members on the issues associated with the end to the Families Commission as an independent advocate for families/whānau.

2. Effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of social science research

- 2.1. The purpose of this Bill is to repeal the Families Commission Act 2003 in order to disestablish the Families Commission in order to achieve greater effectiveness in the provision of social science research and advocacy for the interests of families generally. NCWNZ has consistently supported the need for family policy to be informed by relevant research. This includes the funding of research that provides information about diversity in families, their composition, needs and dynamics that may not be available through other forms of data collection. For this reason, **NCWNZ welcomes the continuing funding for the longitudinal study Growing Up in New Zealand which involves data collection and management by the University of Auckland and notes that this is now being managed by the Ministry for Social Development.** Continued funding for this research is consistent with NCWNZ advocacy of family and child-focused research that is independent.¹⁰

⁶ Families Commission Amendment Bill, 2012, p. 1. [S12.27 Families Commission Amendment Bill](#)

⁷ Families Commission Bill, 2003, pp. 2-3. [S03.56 Families Commission Bill](#)

⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

⁹ Families Commission – Proposed Scope, Functions and Structure, 2003, p. 2. [S03.15 Families Commission – Proposed Scope, Functions and Structure](#)

¹⁰ Families Commission Amendment Bill, 2012, p. 1. [S12.27 Families Commission Amendment Bill](#)

3. Connections between government agencies and non-governmental organisations

- 3.1. NCWNZ recognises that responsibility for the welfare of families does not just rest with government agencies but is a community responsibility. It notes that in its Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Social Development in October 2017 the Families Commission/Superu recognised that community and societal interventions are necessary to support families as well as those focused on individuals and families.¹¹ The Families Commission/Superu played a role in connecting government agencies and the community and voluntary organisation sector. **NCWNZ submits that, if the purpose of the Families Commission Act Repeal Bill is to be realised, it is important that other agencies such as the Ministry for Social Development and the Social Investment Agency actively build on this work of the Families Commission/Superu.** NCWNZ notes that the Social Investment Agency is starting to enter into partnerships with some NGOs and welcomes the development of such partnerships.¹²
- 3.2. NCWNZ notes that in its Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Social Development in October 2017 the Families Commission/Superu also indicated that Superu has invested in good practice tools and guidance to support community and voluntary sector organisations so that they can use evidence and evaluation in their decision-making.¹³ At the time of the Briefing to the Incoming Minister, no provision had been made for another agency to pick up this work. **NCWNZ submits that it is important for non-government organisations working with and for families to access research findings relevant to their work. It is also vital that these research findings are delivered in formats that are clear, accessible and relevant to non-governmental organisations.** People working for NGOs, whether in paid or voluntary positions have little time to devote to accessing new information and considering its relevance for their work. Continued government funding for relevant family related research and the consolidation of expertise in the delivery of that information is necessary if the main purpose of this Bill is to be realised. **NCWNZ seeks reassurance that these components of the work of the Families Commission/Superu will continue after the repeal of the Families Commission Act 2003.**
- 3.3. It is also important that government agencies engaged in developing policy and advising on service provision draw on knowledge within the community and voluntary sector. In the October 2017 Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Social Development, The Families Commission/Superu indicated that government agencies need to be better at accumulating and sharing knowledge, and that “NGOs are important for generating and gathering information”.¹⁴ The Briefing noted the need to improve capacity in both government agencies and the community sector to use evidence and evaluation and

¹¹ Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Social Development, Families Commission, operating as the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu), p. 11.

<http://www.superu.govt.nz/sites/default/files/Superu%20BIM%20to%20Min%20for%20Social%20Development%2026%20Oct%202017%20PUBLIC.pdf>

¹² Briefing on the Social Investment Agency to the Incoming Minister for Social Development, October 2017.

<https://sia.govt.nz/assets/Documents/BIM-Final-SIA-31-Oct-OIA.pdf>

¹³ Ibid. p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

share knowledge on both sides. **NCWNZ submits that achieving the purpose of this Bill requires that the Ministry for Social Development and the Social Investment Agency develop this capacity.**

4. Coordination and collaboration among agencies

- 4.1. In the Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Social Development in October 2017 the Families Commission/Superu outlined what they had learnt about improving outcomes for families and whānau. They advised that “agency culture is critical and can work against improving outcomes”.¹⁵ Among other things, they advised the Minister that it is important to “shift the burden of navigating the system off families and require the services to ‘join the dots’”.¹⁶ **NCWNZ submits that collaboration among agencies/services/providers that ensures that families in need do not have to ‘join the dots’ is important if the purpose of this Bill - “to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiencies in the provision of social science research and advocacy for families generally” – is to be achieved.**



Gill Greer
Chief Executive



Rosemary Du Plessis and Judith Sutherland
Convenors, Public Issues Standing Committee

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁶ Ibid.