

Waitangi Tribunal created MCH, 2020sss 10 October 1975

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1985
P.186

The Labour government created the Tribunal to hear Māori claims of breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. It has evolved ever since, adapting to the demands of claimants, government and public.

The Tribunal was created to report on and suggest settlements for contemporary Māori claims, and to ensure that future legislation was consistent with the treaty. Claims were relatively rare in its first decade, and most of the Tribunal's early inquiries addressed local environmental and planning issues.

In 1985, a new Labour government extended its jurisdiction to claims about any alleged breach of the treaty since 1840. This resulted in a huge increase in the number of claims and an expansion of the Tribunal's activities. The Tribunal concluded that governments had breached the treaty on countless occasions since 1840, and that Pākehā New Zealand had been built on many broken promises and bad deals. These conclusions were highly controversial, and a public backlash followed.

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Despite these controversies, the Tribunal has made a major contribution to remedying some of the more unsettling aspects of New Zealand's colonial legacy.

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