



(Dexter, G., 2022)

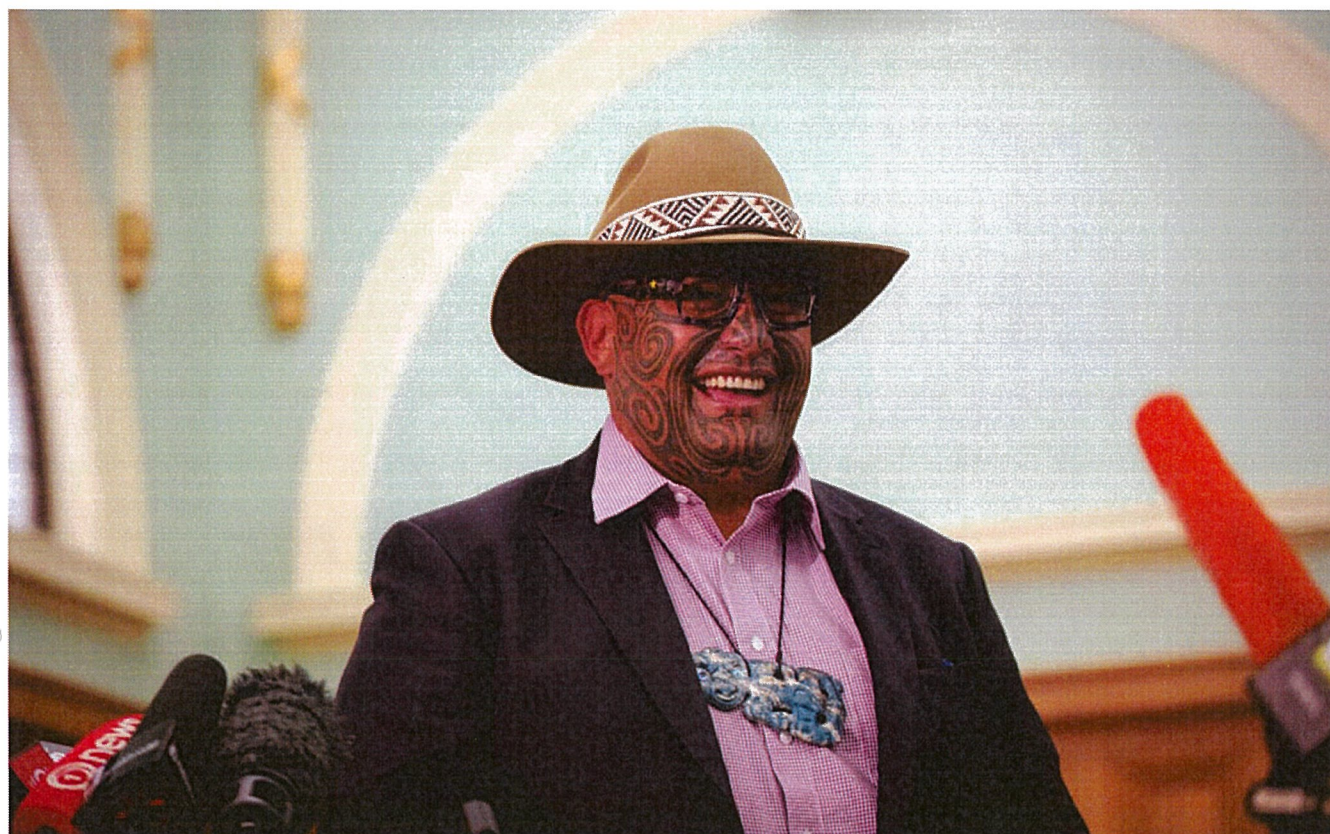
POLITICS (/NEWS/POLITICAL) / TE AO MĀORI

Petition to officially name country Aotearoa delivered to Parliament

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✉ [giles.dexter@rnz.co.nz \(mailto:giles.dexter@rnz.co.nz?subject=Petition%20to%20officially%20name%20country%20Aotearoa%20delivered%20to%20Parliament\)](mailto:giles.dexter@rnz.co.nz)

Te Pāti Māori has handed over its petition calling for the country to officially be named Aotearoa.



File photo: Te Pāti Māori co-leader Rawiri Waititi Photo: RNZ / Angus Dreaver

P It collected 70,000 signatures backing the change.

It is on our passports, on our money, and in our national anthem. But Aotearoa is not our official name, yet.

P The petition was delivered to Parliament this afternoon. It calls to change the country's official name to Aotearoa, and begin a process to restore te reo Māori names for all towns, cities, and places by 2026.

"Whether you're for or against, the thing is everyone knows that Aotearoa is a legitimate name on to this country by Kupe, not by Governor Grey or any written book, this is well before any these things," Te Pāti Māori co-leader Rawiri Waititi said.

5th

Te Reo fluency amongst Māori dropped from 90 percent in 1910 to 26 percent in 1950.

Today, just 20 percent of the Māori population speak it. That's three percent of the whole country.

Waititi said the only way to restore the language was to make it visible in as many places as possible.

"This is the pebble being dropped in the water, the initial pebble hitting the water. And what it'll do, from now for many years to come, is those ripples will continue to get bigger and bigger."

The petition now goes to a select committee, which will decide what to do next. Whether that was a bill or even a public referendum, it already succeeded, Waititi said.

"It's starting the dialogue, it's building awareness. It has started a wananga across the country."

P National leader Christopher Luxon said changing the name was a constitutional issue.

P "I think those are decisions for the New Zealand people, if there's widespread report it should go to referendum and it should be a decision that they get to make. It's not something the government makes," he said.

But just last week Luxon posted a tribute to kaumatua Joe Hawke in te reo Māori on social media, resulting in a tirade of anti-Māori comments from Facebook users.



National Party leader Christopher Luxon Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

Waititi brushed off any backlash the petition, and by extension he, received.

"If they're getting their undies in a twist, that's their undies, not my undies," he said.

P Government ministers said it was time for a discussion over changing the name, but were not actually committing to one.

"These things evolve over time, but it's up to every New Zealander to be part of the debate," Andrew Little said.

"I'm mindful that representatives from Ngāi Tahu have pointed out that Aotearoa tends to focus on the North Island, but that's a debate that can rightly happen," David Clark said.

Associate-Health Minister Ayesha Verrall admitted she had not given it any thought.

"But I'm very comfortable having the country referred to as Aotearoa-New Zealand," she said.

Deputy Prime Minister Grant Robertson said it was not something the Labour caucus had discussed, while Michael Wood called for open-mindedness.

"I think any question like that needs to be worked through really carefully. It's the name of our country, the identity of our country," he said.



File photo: Deputy Prime Minister Grant Robertson Photo:

P Labour's Māori caucus was somewhat divided on the issue.

"I think we should have a good conversation about it. I've personally got no problems with us using Aotearoa but it's a question for the whole country," Kelvin Davis said.

Minister of Māori Development Willie Jackson supported the use of Aotearoa, but said he had recently been travelling around the country, speaking to Māori communities, and changing the country's name never came up.

"We have other kaupapa more important right now," he said.

Peeni Henare believed the country was ready.

"I'm encouraging one and all to have a very mature debate over what I think is a pretty cool kaupapa," he said.



Minister of Māori Development Willie Jackson Photo: RNZ / Angus Dreaver

Artist Hohepa Thompson, also known as Hori, backed the petition.

Hori's Pledge is a response to billboards popping up around the country saying "New Zealand, not Aotearoa", funded by lobby group Hobson's Pledge.

Thompson had been driving across Te Ika a Maui, with his own billboard in tow, to call for change.

He believed a hyphenated 'Aotearoa-New Zealand' would not go far enough.

"Māori have taken the backseat for many, many times. So when it comes to Aotearoa-New Zealand, let's have this. Aotearoa, boom."

The most positive conversations on his trip came from people who did not even know Pākehā history, he said.

"The only renaming that happened here was from that side. So we're not trying to create 'change', were just re-instating what was already here."

He pointed out a similar subject that took place recently.

Three years ago, some said a national holiday for Matariki would never happen. Later this month, it will be officially celebrated for the first time.