

(New Zealand Institute of
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Science Inc, n.d.)

P The Listener letter: 70 fellows express concerns at Royal Society's handling of complaints

Seventy academics have sent a motion of no-confidence to the Royal Society of New Zealand over its handling of the letter signed by seven University of Auckland professors and published in the Listener last July.

In the letter – headed “In defence of science” – the professors said they regarded indigenous knowledge as valuable, both “for the preservation and perpetuation of culture and local practices” and in “key roles in management and policy”. But

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they contended that mātauranga Māori is "not science" and therefore should not be included in the NCEA science syllabus.

Three of the professors, Robert Nola, Garth Cooper and Michael Corballis (who has since died), were Fellows of the Royal Society of New Zealand. After complaints were laid about the letter, disciplinary action was instigated against them but last month the Initial Investigation Panel concluded that the complaints should not proceed to a Complaints Determination Committee.

(<https://www.royalsociety.org.nz/news/statement-in-relation-to-complaints-about-a-letter-to-the-new-zealand-listener/>)

Professors Nola and Cooper have subsequently resigned both as members and fellows of the society, and the letter published here has been sent to the society's chief executive...

To Paul Atkins (CEO RSNZ)

The Fellows, listed below as co-signatories, wish to express their deep concern about what has been happening within the Royal Society of New Zealand over the last year, by moving and seconding the motions below for discussion at the at the 56th hui ā-tau o Ngā Ahurei Annual Fellowship on 28th April.

Many of us have lost confidence in the current Academy Executive and Council, whose actions seemingly have brought the society into disrepute, shutting down useful debate and bringing international opprobrium from leading scientists. We are further concerned about the lack of agency that Fellows have following the many restructures of the Society over the last several years, and the spending of fellowship fees to cover lawyers' costs and, presumably, public relations consultants to defend the Society's very poor processes and actions.

In particular:

1. We believe that the content of the initial statement posted by the RSTA on its website in August 2021 about the controversy generated following the Listener letter on the relationship between mātauranga Māori and Science was ill-conceived, hasty and inaccurate in large part.
2. We are appalled at the mishandling of the formation of the initial committee set up by RSTA to investigate the complaint, the length of the process, and the handling of the publication of the outcome, which suggests both that the RSTA cannot decide whether mātauranga Māori is or is not Science, and impugned the integrity of two eminent Fellows.
3. It is extremely unfortunate that this process has led to the resignation from this Academy of two of its distinguished Fellows. One is a renowned philosopher of science, and the other is perhaps the strongest scientist of Māori descent in the society and is someone who has been active in supporting Māori students in education for decades, and who, along with other experts in Science, offered an expert opinion that was rejected by the Society

as being without merit, and characterised as racist by members of the Academy Executive (and current and former Councillors).

We therefore move that:

1. Both the Society and Academy write to Professors Cooper and Nola, and to the Estate of Professor Corballis, and apologise for its handling of the entire process.
2. The Society reviews its current code of conduct to ensure that this cannot happen again, and in future the actions of the Academy/Council are far more circumspect and considered in regards to complaints concerning contentious matters.
3. The entirety of the RSNZ/RSTA entity be reviewed, examining structure and function and alignment with other international academies, and the agency given its Fellows upon whom its reputation rests.

Moved: Gaven Martin (Massey University)

Seconded: Marston Conder (The University of Auckland)

Cosignatories: (in alphabetical order)

Marti Anderson (Massey University)

Geoff Austin (University of Auckland)

Edward Baker (University of Auckland)

Debes Bhattacharyya (University of Auckland)

• Dick Bellamy (University of Auckland)

Douglas Bridges (University of Canterbury)

Gillian Brock (University of Auckland)

Linda Bryder (University of Auckland)

Alan Bollard (Victoria University of Wellington)

• Brian Boyd (University of Auckland)

John Caradus (Grasslanz)

Howard Carmichael (University of Auckland)

Garth Carnaby (University of Auckland)

• John Chen (University of Auckland)

Mick Clout (University of Auckland)

Jill Cornish (University of Auckland)

Grant Covic (University of Auckland)

Dave Craw (University of Otago)

Max Cresswell (Victoria University of Wellington)

Fred Davey (retired)

Stephen Davies (University of Auckland)

Alison Downard (Canterbury Univeristy)

Rod Downey (Victoria University of Wellington)

Geoffrey Duffy (University of Auckland)

Joerg Frauendiener (Otago University)

Rob Goldblatt (Victoria University of Wellington)

Stephen Goldson (Agresearch)

Rod Gover (University of Auckland)

Russell Gray (Max Planck/UoA)

Frank Griffin (University of Otago)

John Harvey (University of Auckland)

Bruce Hayward (Geomarine Research)

Janet Holmes (Victoria University of Wellington)

Peter Hunter (University of Auckland)

John Harper (Victoria University of Wellington)

Bruce Hayward (Geomarine Research)

Manying Ip (University of Auckland)

Mac Jackson (University of Auckland)

Geoff Jameson (Massey University)

Estate Khmaladze (Victoria University of Wellington)

Bakh Khoussainov (University of Auckland)

Matt McGlone (Victoria University of Wellington)

Neil McNaughton (University of Otago)

Miriam Meyerhoff (Oxford University)

Michael Neill (University of Auckland)

Eamonn O'Brien (University of Auckland)

John Ogden (Emeritus Fellow)

Jenni Ogden (Emeritus Fellow)

Paul Rainey (Max Planck/Massey)

Raylene Ramsay (University of Auckland)

Ian Reid, (University of Auckland)

Mick Roberts (Massey University)

Viviane Robinson (University of Auckland)

Clive Ronson (University of Otago)

Peter Schwerdtfeger (Massey University)

Barry Scott (Massey University)

Charles Semple (Canterbury University)

Vernon Squire (Otago University)

Mike Steel (Canterbury University)

ATS (name withheld until 28 April)

✓ Kim Sterelny (Australian National University)

Rupert Sutherland (Victoria University of Wellington)

Jeff Tallon (Victoria University of Wellington)

Matt Visser (Victoria University of Wellington)

Jack Vowles (Victoria University of Wellington)

Joyce Waters (Massey University)

Geoff Whittle (Victoria University of Wellington)

Chris Wild (University of Auckland)

Colin Wilson (Victoria University of Wellington)

- *AgScience* posted an earlier report (here (<https://agscienceblog.wordpress.com/2021/12/08/richard-dawkins-is-among-eminient-scientists-who-have-written-to-nzs-royal-society-in-defence-of-two-professors/>)) after British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and other eminent overseas scientists had written to the Royal Society in defence of Professors Nola and Cooper.

