



Te Ropu Wahine Maori Toko i te Ora Maori Women's Welfare League Inc

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Social Justice Team,
Australian Human Rights Commission
GPO Box 5218 Sydney NSW 2001

Friday, December 22, 2023

Tēnā koutou

Re: Development of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality and the establishment of a First Nations Gender Justice Institute

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia - their connections to the land, waters, and culture, and I pay respects to their Elders past, present and future.

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to this third stage of the multiyear systemic change Wiyi Yani U Thangani project. I understand the intention of the project is to achieve First Nations gender justice and equality to inform development of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality, and the establishment of a First Nations Gender Justice Institute at the Australian National University in March 2024.

Congratulations on progress to date.

About Our Organisation (the Submitter)

Te Ropu Wahine Maori Toko i te Ora | The Maori Womens Welfare League ("the League") is an Indigenous national charitable Māori Women's organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand ("Aotearoa").

The League established in 1951 to advocate for Māori women experiencing hardship because of discrimination and racist government policies that negatively impacted their ability to obtain housing for their children, employment, adequate education, and health services. This same purpose continues today despite our nation's founding document - Te Tiriti or Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi – signed in 1840 by our tribal chiefs and representatives of the English monarchy that guarantees Māori self-determination over our own land.

The League is organised as local branches within eight regions of Aotearoa and four branches in Australia.

Please note the terms First Nations, Indigenous, and Tangata Whenua (the Māori word for people of the land) are used in this submission interchangeably.

Measuring change outcomes

The League is living through change. The reclamation and revitalisation of our language, our knowledge systems, worldviews, traditions, and practices has been occurring over decades. By way of example, our Constitution is written in English. When it was first developed the members were native speakers. Within their lifetime Māori language was at risk of extinction and the League played a pivotal role in helping the language to survive.



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Increasingly today members are seeking the visibility of Māori language in our Constitution. Ironically, some of the generations of older members who fought for the revitalisation and survival of Māori language but were denied access to it through the education system, are somewhat resistant to change from generations who benefited from their fight. You will only understand this example if you are an active member of the League and are a part of the change.

It is critical that change outcomes are owned by those for whom the changes are intended. First Nations women and girls are best placed to know what change they aspire to, why and how, and when they will know change has taken place.

More often than not, institutions including universities, commissions, infrastructure, systems, and policies, are the perpetrators of intergenerational injustices upon First Nations genders. Every effort should be made to avoid institutions of government being relied upon to reverse intergenerational injustices, because they are incapable of doing so without sustained investment, guidance, governance, ownership, and leadership by First Nations genders themselves.

The worldview that underpins the identified change outcomes, need to be validated by Indigenous peoples, not left to chance to be translated by, operationalised by, nor pillaged by non-Indigenous peoples who report back to First Nations communities. Imported theories and models for change that have come into popular use in public services, serve to delay the reclamation of First Nations intellectual systems.

From 1981 to 1984 the League conducted the first quantitative national Māori research project in Aotearoa, to understand health perceptions of Māori women because of concerns about their health and wellbeing. The League was challenged to conduct a national survey at its annual conference in 1975 by the then Minister of Māori Affairs, Hon Matiu Rata. Although the League had neither the technical skills nor the financial resources, the opportunity to improve the wellbeing of Māori women was compelling.

Active Māori community involvement in all phases of the survey were a priority and community groups in each region provided the interviewers. The full methodology was piloted in 1981 before the main field work began in 1982. The research was based on tikanga Māori (Māori protocols). The main study was completed on schedule and in fewer than 80 days 1177 interviews were completed.

The report from the survey *Rapuora Health and Maori Women* ("*Rapuora*") provided rich information from Māori women who talked about their lives to other Māori women. This seminal study contributed to more directed mobilisation of League activities, revised government policies and funded initiatives, and more importantly, clearer understanding about the status of Māori women and their families.

Rapuora recommended a Decade of Health with some measurable goals, the establishment of Māori health centres, research into Māori men's health, "Stop Smoking" clinics, and government Māori Health Policy that promotes a holistic view of health encompassing the interrelated physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of wellbeing that align to Māori worldviews.



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Responses to Rapuora from League leadership include the establishment of:

1. Aotearoa Māori Netball Oranga Healthy Lifestyles (AMNOHL) Trust – netball as the vehicle to promote healthy lifestyles for the prevention of cardiovascular disease.
2. Māori Womens Development Inc (MWDI) – to support Māori women into and in the business sector.

AMNOHL and MWDI continue to operate independently today albeit reliant on some investment from government. They are legacy examples of self-determination by the League. They compete with other organisations for resources, but government is at arms-length and control is ours.

Ensuring a strong accountability and evaluation approach

Accountability in western terms is often transactional. When our organisation is accountable to our people it means that we are accountable to their mountain, their children, their river, their lake, their sea, their land, their ancestors. This kind of accountability requires much more sophistication than is provided by deductive tools characteristically derived from Western paradigms.

The way we operate is interconnected:

- We are primarily a community-based, community centric voluntary organisation. Our advocacy is informed by the needs of communities locally where our members live. The real authority of our organisation lies at the local level with the branch members who are the champions for their communities. Branches can develop their own strategic plan, and seek their own funding.
- We have a distributed leadership model that is replicated across local, regional, and national levels. For example, of the 140 branches across our organisation there are 140 branch presidents, and they have an executive committee.
- A branch can put forward a remit at our annual conference to raise an issue and get support nationally. Remits are debated, sometimes amended, and voting takes place on the floor. It is one of the most anticipated and lively aspects of our conference.
- Remits provide the mandate for our national body to engage with central government and others, and in return membership expect reports back to them.
- We promote representation of our members on external governance and advisory bodies. This gives individual members experience in governance and spreads the influence we can have on others seeking engagement with our communities.
- We are committed to Strategic partnerships that appreciate our value as Tangata Whenua. We are action-oriented, and we need to see benefit for our people locally. When we enter contractual arrangements we have two main models of working – either resources are



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directed to branches, or contracts are administered nationally. Our accountabilities are dual – to our people (members included) and to the funders.

- We engage with other Māori organisations including tribal leadership to build on collective strength. Most recently, we collaborated on a joint national media statement in response to the direction of political parties that have now formed the current coalition government in our country.
- We historically engage with non-Maori womens organisations in Aotearoa on mutually beneficial matters that impact women and girls.
- Our leadership began attending international womens forums in 1980. In 2021 we obtained accreditation as a non-government organisation (NGO) with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC status) of the United Nations.
- We continue to build on our international networks and develop opportunities for cultural exchange with sister organisations where we can learn from and support each other. I look forward to being able to connect with First Nations women in Australia if the opportunity arises.

Protecting and strengthening data sovereignty and governance

Protecting and strengthening our data sovereignty and governance is a work in progress.

Data we collect from our communities belongs to them. Data we collect for and about our organisation belongs to us.

Rapuora was published by our organisation. Another book titled: *Nga Perehitini - The Presidents of the Maori Womens Welfare League 1951-2001*, was also published by our organisation.

Another book project, *Te Tīmatanga Tātau Tātau Early Stories from Founding members of the Māori Womens Welfare League*, was a collaboration with a publishing company.

Previously, information found online about the League, was written by others.

Now that our government has a major digital project taking place, documents donated to the National Library by past members have now been digitised and are retrievable online. Coincidentally, we have initiated a history programme that includes sorting our paper records so that we are the primary narrators of our own story. We have drawn inspiration from another context to create our own "Guidelines for the Care and Preservation of Records and Archives of Te Ropu Wahine Maori Toko i te Ora."

Trying to move from a mostly a paper-based organisation to a paper-less organisation has brought a set of new and emerging matters, how:

- we manage, store, archive, digitise and protect our data nationally, regionally, and locally.
- we ensure our members are skilled and have access to the tools for this digital age.



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- we uplift the ability of our communities to have access to online environments.
- we implement digital security and protections that are sustainable and free from mining and abuse.

In the digital age, governments are increasingly dependent on data and data analytics to inform their policies and decision-making. However, Indigenous Peoples have often been the unwilling targets of policy interventions and have had little say over the collection, use and application of data about them, their lands, and cultures. At the heart of Indigenous Peoples' demands for change are the enduring aspirations of self-determination over their institutions, resources, knowlege and information systems.¹

Establishment of Institute at the Australian National University

The following are questions and observations based on a search of the ANU website where the First Nations Gender Institute is to be established.

There are a number of Colleges at the ANU, but none are dedicated to First Nations. Is the ANU intending on an Institute that has equivalence or greater to a College?

What plans and policies will be implemented to ensure the First Nations Institute is sustainable?

The ANU-Executive organisational structure identifies a First Nations Office and portfolio. Without understanding more about the purpose of the portfolio, it looks similar to approaches by Universities in Aotearoa whereby the Indigenous peoples are recognised as a discreet subject area rather than an integral part of the University and the Nation.

How many of the ANU Council will be First Nations women? If the ANU aims to respond to First Nations peoples then it needs substantial representation by First Nations genders at the governance level for strategic planning and policy development.

The Strategic Plan should prioritise a commitment to increase the number of First Nations staff at the University.

Recruitment of Indigenous students is noted. It is critical that ANU plans for First Nations students to complete. This means ensuring a whole raft of support initiatives is in place and students are not alone in their quest. The worst case scenario is that students are harmed by their experience of ANU.

In Aotearoa in 2010, six staff of Waikato University wrote a 13-page letter alerting the Ministry of Education to their concerns. Allegations included Māori expertise being ignored, tokenism, lower pay for Māori staff and no meaningful commitment to the founding document of Aotearoa, the Treaty of Waitangi. More than 2500 people signed an open letter calling for the University of Waikato to eliminate structural racism, and protect academics who raised the issue publicly. The University initially

¹ <https://www.temanararaunga.maori.nz/> accessed 20 December 2023



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disputed the allegations, but later announced an independent review (see [report](#) here) that did find a case for structural, systemic and casual discrimination. Waikato is not alone, but this highlights learnings for establishment of the Institute at ANU.

Concluding Comments

On behalf of Te Ropu Wahine Maori Toko i te Ora, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your national submission process. We look forward to hearing of the long-term reconciliation this will bring to First Nations Gender Justice and Australia as a whole.

Nāku noa, nā

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