

CASE NO: 3018

**RULING BY THE NEW ZEALAND MEDIA COUNCIL ON THE COMPLAINT OF
[REDACTED] AGAINST STUFF**

FINDING: INSUFFICIENT GROUNDS TO PROCEED

DATE: APRIL 2021

On 17 February 2021, Stuff published an opinion piece headed *Learning history not only teaches us our past, it makes us think critically and look at the way in which those stories are told*, which said that the draft curriculum for New Zealand history in schools had been released. Two MPs, one National and one Labour, expressed their opinions about the new direction.

One of those was Arena Williams, Labour MP for Manurewa, who said as a 12-year-old she had researched Ōtāhuhu's Nixon memorial.

"I was unprepared to find that Colonel Nixon, celebrated by the obelisk in the main street, was famous for razing unfortified Rangiaowhia while men, women and children burnt in their church."

[REDACTED] complained to Stuff that there was no such incident involving a church. The settlement had two churches standing before that day and two churches standing after, she said. This was backed up by many articles and accounts from that time. While the article was labelled as an opinion piece, the publisher still had a duty to ensure the facts on which the opinion was based were correct.

Stuff replied that there was no definitive version of what happened at Rangiaowhia and they stood by the story.

The Media Council notes that the facts surrounding the church burning at Rangiaowhia have been considered a number of times by both the Council and the Broadcasting Standards Authority.

It notes that the facts around the events are contested and that Michael King's *The Penguin History of New Zealand* includes mention of "the firing of a whare karakia or house of prayer in which a group of supposed non-combatants were killed" and historian Jock Phillips has described Colonel Nixon's involvement in the events at Rangiaowhia as "a terrible atrocity".

The material complained about is clearly opinion and given that the facts are contested, no factual inaccuracy is found.

Finding: Insufficient Grounds to Proceed.