



11 February 2021

Māori Affairs Committee

By email: ma@parliament.govt.nz

Dear Members,

SUBMISSION ON THE LOCAL ELECTORAL (MĀORI WARDS AND MĀORI CONSTITUENCIES) AMENDMENT BILL

1. Founded by David Farrar and Jordan Williams in 2013, the *New Zealand Taxpayers' Union* mission is *Lower Taxes, Less Waste, More Transparency*.
2. The *Taxpayers' Union* opposes the Local Electoral (Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Bill, in both its content and process.
3. **The Bill is not necessary.** Māori have already achieved proportional representation at local councils. The 2018 census found 13.7% of adult New Zealanders were Māori and, according to Local Government New Zealand, the proportion elected to local councils in 2018 was 13.5%. This defeats the stated purpose of the Bill.
4. **The Bill is undemocratic.** It is tradition and convention that electors can vote on, and veto, fundamental changes to local voting systems. For example, voters can approve or veto any change from an FPP voting system to an STV one. The Government's decision to selectively overturn this convention in the specific case of Māori seats cannot be justified on principle. If the Government is concerned about consistency in the way local electoral systems are altered, it should introduce allow for more democratic participation, rather than disabling referenda for one specific issue.
5. **The timing and retrospective nature of the Bill is a calculated move to disenfranchise voters.** The Bill will cancel nine referenda that residents have petitioned for, or are in the process of doing so, at territorial authorities across the country. Hundreds of thousands of ratepayers would have voted in these referenda but will instead be disenfranchised if this bill passes. The timing of the Bill's introduction suggests the Government's real motivation is fear that residents will vote in the "wrong way". Rather than disenfranchising voters, the Prime Minister could simply make the case for voters in these referenda to support Māori wards.
6. **The Bill entrenches an electoral advantage for the political Left.** There is a good reason why convention is to entrust voters, rather than politicians, with changes to electoral systems. Politicians are hopelessly conflicted: once in a position of power, their incentive is to gerrymander voting wards and electoral systems to maximise future electoral success. That is what we are seeing with this bill. Despite the

LOWER TAXES, LESS WASTE, MORE TRANSPARENCY

WWW.TAXPAYERS.ORG.NZ

Government's rhetoric, the Bill has nothing to do with equity or justice. The Bill will have the practical effect of increasing the proportion of local councils with Māori wards, which will disproportionately elect left-leaning councillors who are more likely to vote in line with the Labour Party's ideological preferences. If this sounds cynical, consider the counterfactual: would the Government support reform that would swing council majorities to the political Right? The suggestion is laughable.

7. **Passing the Bill under urgency is cynical.** The *Taxpayers' Union* has 60,000 subscribed members and supporters, and we are confident that, given a longer submission period, thousands of our supporters would have produced personalised submissions for the Committee. Limiting the submission period to just two days has the practical effect of silencing these voices, allowing the Government to deny the existence of widespread opposition to this bill. This is wilful neglect of the promise of open and transparent government. It also has the unintended consequence of giving a future National-led Government cover to exploit Parliamentary urgency in the same way. When this happens, it will be with no pleasure that the Taxpayers' Union says, "we told you so".
8. **The Government has silenced New Zealanders with abusive rhetoric.** The Government's political allies – including many funded by taxpayers – have sought to silence opponents of this bill by playing up the racial justice dimension of the debate, even accusing those opposed to the legislation (i.e. most New Zealanders) of being racist. Some Government MPs have even participated in this abuse and the Government's leadership has failed to condemn these disgraceful attacks. We are left to assume that the Government supports this kind of rhetoric from its cronies because it provides distraction and cover for its own self-interested motivation in passing the Bill.
9. To summarise, this bill and its process is unnecessary, undemocratic, politically self-interested, convention-destroying, institution-eroding, and abusive. The *Taxpayers' Union* urges all MPs to put aside their Party's politics and withdraw support for this disgraceful bill.
10. The *Union* would like to speak on this bill in front of the Committee.

Yours faithfully,
New Zealand Taxpayers' Union Inc.



Jordan Williams
Executive Director
Jordan@taxpayers.org.nz

LOWER TAXES, LESS WASTE, MORE TRANSPARENCY

WWW.TAXPAYERS.ORG.NZ