



Submission of Taituarā – Local Government Professionals Aotearoa regarding the Electoral (Māori Electoral Option) Legislation Bill

What is Taituarā?

Taituarā — Local Government Professionals Aotearoa thanks the Justice Committee for the opportunity to respond to the Electoral (Māori Electoral Option) Legislation Bill.

Taituarā — Local Government Professionals Aotearoa (formerly the NZ Society of Local Government Managers) is an incorporated society of almost 1000 members drawn from local government Chief Executives, senior managers, and council staff with significant policy or operational responsibilities. We are an apolitical organisation. Our contribution lies in our wealth of knowledge of the local government sector and of the technical, practical, and managerial implications of legislation.

We make this submission on behalf of those who are charged with the administration of local elections, and with supporting all candidates be they sitting members or challengers during the election period.

Changes to the frequency of the electoral option may improve the salience of elections, especially to younger Maori.

The regulatory impact statement that accompanies this Bill notes that turnout on the Māori roll is lower than that on the general roll. Analysis of results from elections between 2014-2020 show that the difference in turnout is greater in the younger age groups.¹

¹ The difference in turnout is as much as 12 percent amongst voters aged 18-24 (source: Electoral Commission).

While there are many factors that influence an individual electors' decision to vote – but these can be simplified to:

- the salience (perceived relevance) of voting
- electoral processes and the degree to which these support voting and
- the availability of information on candidates and issues.

We submit that increasing the frequency of the Māori electoral option goes to the first two of these factors: salience and electoral processes.

We recommend that the electoral option be more frequent because it enables a Māori elector to make a judgement as to which roll is most relevant to their needs, values and identity at each electoral cycle. This is the key to making elections more salient to the Māori elector.

As to process, the current frequency and timing of the electoral option may provide an unnecessary discouragement to people exercising a vote. As the Commission's report on the 2020 election noted

*"... we continue to see large numbers of electors of Māori descent trying to change roll types outside the Option and finding it frustrating that the law does not allow this. The current timing of the Option does not align with the electoral cycle and is not intuitive for voters."*²

We concur with this comment and add that younger voters have been raised in a time when greater flexibility and greater choice have been embedded into the design of public services.

The Local Electoral Act amendments appear well considered.

Changes to the Māori electoral option also impact the establishment and review of Māori wards and constituencies at local level. We have reviewed the proposed amendments to the Local Electoral Act and have no issues to raise with the Select Committee.

² Electoral Commission (2021), Report of the Electoral Commission on the 2020 General Election and Referendums, page 58.