

Discrimination

NZ: A bicultural nation?

There was a time when New Zealand was predominantly made of just two cultures – Maori and European. We were **bicultural** and we took faltering first steps to make it work.

But **bicultural** is not who we are any more. Who we **are** is a nation of peoples from all over the globe. Maori. Europe. Asia. Africa. The Pacific Islands. Australia. The Americas.

We all call New Zealand **home** – the place where we raise our families, where we watch our kids play sport, where we work and vote and try our best to do right by each other.

New Zealand is **our country**. We are a multicultural **nation of equals**.

Stuck in the past?

How do we honour New Zealand's historical past without being continually defined by it?

How do we shape a better future?

There are no easy answers. But fundamentally, we **must** live by the principle of equality that underpins all human rights and underlies the **Treaty of Waitangi**: "**he iwi tahi tatou – we are now one people**."

The Maori seats

New Zealand's Parliament contains a number of seats reserved especially for people of Maori descent. **These seats guaranteed Maori a direct voice in Parliament.**

The Maori seats were first introduced in 1867 and for good reasons. Despite the **Treaty** promising **full equality** in terms of the rights, privileges and duties of citizenship, the **land ownership requirements** of the day denied many men – both Maori and European – the right to vote.

To address this, **protected Maori seats** were created as a **temporary measure** to give parliamentary representation to Maori men until they were able to vote on the **common roll**.

Although full voting rights for men were

granted in 1879 and for women in 1893 – giving all New Zealanders of age equal rights to vote – **the reserved Maori seats were retained.**

This continues even though Maori representation in Parliament now disproportionately exceeds their relative national population.

Unintended discrimination

As a result, the seats that once preserved equality are now a form of **discrimination based on race**. By reserving this privilege for Maori alone, it suggests that **one race is worthy** of more consideration than all the others.

As **New Zealanders**, do we truly believe this is right?

The Royal Commission

To ensure that our Parliamentary system provides fair and effective representation for all New Zealanders, the 1986 **Royal Commission** on the Electoral System made a series of recommendations.

In their report "**Towards a Better Democracy**" the Commission recommended our First Past the Post voting system be replaced with Mixed-Member Proportional representation, or MMP.

They also proposed that the **Maori seats** and the **Maori electoral roll be abolished** on the basis that **separatism** is not the answer to Maori advancement. **Equality** is.

Their recommendation was ignored.

One people

The time has come to reshape things to reflect the **many races-one people-all equal** nature of our nation. If we want that change, **one common electoral roll for all** is an essential starting point.

Where to from here?

To move forward, we must convince our politicians that during the next term of Parliament, **a law change is needed** to abolish

the Maori seats and establish a common electoral roll.

The process **must** involve **every** voter – not just those who enjoy the present constitutional privilege.

Will the new government do it?

Only if enough New Zealanders convince the politicians that doing so is in the best interests of the country, and that our future must be **'One people. One nation. Together.'**

What you can do today!

Contact MPs and candidates and ask if they will support the change to a common roll. Ask them for their party's commitment to abolishing the Maori seats, with all New Zealanders involved in the process.

Share this call to action with your friends and ask them for their support for our campaign for change.

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Equality