

YEA Submission on Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi Bill

ABOUT YEA

YEA (Youth Employability Aotearoa) is a systems change organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand advocating for our youth to be given the skills and support to become work-ready. We represent over 500 individuals, organisations, businesses, associations, and elected members who are committed to ensuring the future workforce is equipped with the skills needed to create strong communities and a robust economy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A key matapono (principal) of the YEA Trust Deed is respect for an implementation of the dual heritage of the partners of Te Titi o Waitangi. The reason being, this acknowledges the foundational partnership between Māori and the Crown, ensuring that the unique identities, rights, and contributions of both Treaty partners are recognized and upheld. This commitment fosters equity, inclusion, and mutual respect, which are essential for creating meaningful opportunities for all youth, particularly rangatahi Māori, and reflects YEA's dedication to building a future where Aotearoa's dual heritage enriches its social and economic fabric.

We are deeply concerned about the potential consequences of this Bill on rangatahi Māori. This submission outlines YEA's opposition to the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi Bill.

OPPOSITION TO THE PRINCIPLES OF THE TREATY OF WAITANGI BILL

1. Erosion of Partnership and Participation

The Treaty of Waitangi embodies a partnership between Māori and the Crown, guaranteeing Māori tino rangatiratanga over their taonga and ensuring active participation in decision-making. The Bill risks diluting these fundamental rights by narrowing the interpretation or application of the Treaty principles. For rangatahi Māori, this would lead to reduced opportunities for culturally relevant education and workforce training. It also risks the potential for rangatahi Māori to achieve equity in the workforce.

2. Negative Impact on Māori Youth Employability

Māori youth already face barriers in accessing employment and training opportunities. The Treaty principles are instrumental in shaping policies that prioritize equity. While not explicitly stated in the Treaty, equity has become a recognized principle derived from its intent. It ensures Māori have the same access to opportunities, resources, and outcomes as other New Zealanders. In employment, this translates to addressing disparities, such as lower Māori employment rates and income levels, through targeted interventions and affirmative action policies. Limiting or redefining the principles will exacerbate disparities for Māori youth and will not only undermine their future potential, but their potential contributions to Aotearoa's economy. This is not to be overlooked with one in three children in Aotearoa likely to identify as Māori by the early 2040s.

3. Contradiction with Te Tiriti Obligations

The Bill is a step backward in honoring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. By restricting the scope or influence of the Treaty principles, the Crown risks failing its obligations to protect and uphold Māori rights. It stands in stark contrast with the broader movement toward reconciliation and equitable outcomes for all New Zealanders. Removing references to the Treaty principles from legislation would limit Māori access to legal redress through courts or the Waitangi Tribunal. This means breaches of partnership, protection, and equity could go unchallenged, further entrenching systemic inequities.

4. Impact on Social Cohesion

The Bill has already distorted the historical narrative of the Treaty and dismissed Māori tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty), and incited racism and social disharmony. The Bill is attempting to send a message to youth that the Treaty is a relic of the past rather than a living document foundational to Aotearoa's identity. This risks undermining efforts to foster respect for biculturalism and inclusion, which are essential for social cohesion and a prosperous future for all young people in Aotearoa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Withdraw the Bill

YEA urges Parliament to withdraw the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi Bill.

2. Strengthen Treaty Education

We recommend increased investment in Treaty education for youth and employers, emphasising the relevance of the Treaty to contemporary issues like employability, equity, and social justice.

3. Support Māori-Led Initiatives and Initiatives that Address Inequities for Rangatahi Māori

Commit to resourcing and supporting Māori-led initiatives and other initiatives that address employment inequities for rangatahi Māori, ensuring that the principles of partnership, protection, and participation remain at the forefront of policy and practice.

CONCLUSION

YEA opposes the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi Bill because it risks undermining the rights, opportunities, and futures of rangatahi Māori and youth across Aotearoa. We believe that meaningful partnership under Te Tiriti o Waitangi is essential for achieving equitable outcomes in employment and society at large.

We urge Parliament to reconsider this Bill and instead prioritise policies that uphold and strengthen the Treaty partnership.

Ngā mihi nui,
Youth Employability Aotearoa (YEA)