



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Government uses Northland iwi as political football in democratic rollback

Te Kahu o Taonui condemns the use of our communities to justify legislation that strips Māori of hard-won representation in local government decision-making.

Te Kahu o Taonui, the collective of Te Tai Tokerau iwi Chairs, today responded to the announcement by Local Government Minister Simon Watts that the government will amend the Local Government Act 2002 to remove voting rights from non-elected council committee members - changes explicitly justified by referencing our people's participation in Far North District Council committees.

We reject, unreservedly, the framing that our representation in local government processes is "anti-democratic." It is the opposite. Our participation reflects decades of Treaty partnership-building, legal recognition of our mana whenua status, and the practical reality that decisions about land, water, and environment in Northland cannot be made well without the knowledge we bring.

"Minister Watts has used our communities as a convenient prop to advance a pre-written ideological position. This is not about democracy - this is about silencing Māori voices in the rooms where decisions about our rohe are made". Te Kahu o Taonui Spokesperson, Co-Chair Aperahama Edwards.

The Minister claims that "councils and the public nation-wide" raised concerns. We note that the loudest voice in that chorus was the ACT Party, which has declared this a "massive win" - a party whose policy platform has consistently sought to minimise Treaty obligations and Māori representation at every level of government. *This is not a democratic correction. It is a political reward to a coalition partner.*

The Far North District Council's Te Kuaka Māori Strategic Relationships Committee was not an accident of process - it was a deliberate, considered decision by elected councillors to better reflect the communities they serve. Northland has one of the highest proportions of Māori of any region in Aotearoa. To suggest that including our representatives in governance discussions undermines democracy is to say Māori participation itself is the problem.

The Te Kuaka Committees purpose is:

- *To provide strategic leadership and guidance that strengthens Te Ao Māori perspectives within Council decision-making, ensuring genuine Te Tiriti-based partnership and leadership between FNDC and iwi/hapū, and*
- *To provide recommendations to full Council. This includes strengthening Council's relationship with Iwi and Hapū by promoting effective partnership models, improving engagement practices, championing shared decision-making, and adding value to relationships with Māori.*

It is not a decision making forum. It can only provide recommendations to the full Council and thus cannot override the FNDC elected representatives' responsibilities.

We acknowledge the government's position that Treaty settlement committees and statutory appointments will be excluded from this legislation. However, the message this sends to our rangatahi, to our hapū, and to future generations is clear: your presence in civic life is conditional, revocable, and subject to the political mood of the day.



TE KAHU O TAONUUI

Me mahi tahi tōtou mā te iwi te take

"If accountability to voters is the standard, we ask the Minister — who are the councillors in Northland accountable to, if not the tens of thousands of Māori who live here? Democratic legitimacy does not stop at the ballot box."

Te Kahū o Taonui calls on the Minister to meet with us directly before any amendment proceeds. We call on all members of Parliament to consider the signal this legislation sends about the Crown's commitment to genuine partnership. And we call on local government bodies across Aotearoa to speak clearly about the value Māori representation brings to their communities.

We are not a political football. We are the tangata whenua of Te Tai Tokerau, and we will continue to exercise our responsibilities to our rohe - regardless of what Parliament legislates.

Te Kahū o Taonui is a collective of iwi chairs from Northland, representing the mana whenua of Te Tai Tokerau. Member iwi hold ahi kā across Northland and participate in resource management, environmental stewardship, and local governance processes as Treaty partners to the Crown.

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