

BEFORE THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL

WAI 2700
WAI 381

IN THE MATTER OF

the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975

AND

IN THE MATTER OF

the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry (WAI 2700)

AND

IN THE MATTER OF

a claim filed by **DAME ARETA KOOPU** on behalf of herself and on behalf of the Māori Women's Welfare League Incorporated and by **DAME WHINA COOPER, DAME MIRA SZASZY, DR ERIHAPETI MURCHIE, DAME GEORGINA KIRBY, VIOLET POU, DAME JUNE MARIU, HINE POTAKA, DAME AROHA RERITI-CROFTS** (being past Presidents of the Maori Women's Welfare League) and by **DR HOPE TUPARA** (being the current President of the Maori Women's Welfare League) and on behalf of themselves and **RĪPEKA EVANS** of Ngāpuhi, Te Aupouri, Ngāti Kahu and Ngāti Porou for herself and on behalf of Māori women and by **MARY-JANE PAPAARANGI REID** of Te Rarawa and Te Aupouri for herself and on behalf of Māori women and by **DONNA AWATERE-HUATA** of Ngāti Whakaue and Ngāti Porou for herself and on behalf of Māori women and by **LADY ROSE HENARE** for herself and on behalf of Ngāti Hine and by **KATERINA HOTERENE** for herself and on behalf of Ngāti Hine and by **TEPARA MABEL WAITITI** for herself and on behalf of Ngāti Hine and by **KARE COOPER-TATE** for herself and on behalf of Ngāti Hine (WAI 381)

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF TORY WHANAU

Dated on this 28th day of November 2025

RECEIVED Waitangi Tribunal
28 Nov 25
Ministry of Justice WELLINGTON



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TĒNĀ E TE TARAIPUNARA:

Introduction

1. Ko Tory Whanau tōku ingoa.
2. He uri ahau nō Pakakohi me Ngā Ruahine, ā, he mokopuna hoki ahau o te rangatira o Taranaki, a Ngāwaka Taurua.
3. I served as the Mayor of Wellington City for three years and was the first indigenous person to hold that office.
4. I was the key relationship manager for Wellington City Council’s Takai Here Agreement with mana whenua, including Te Āti Awa Taranaki Whānui and Ngāti Toa Rangatira.
5. Prior to the mayoralty, I was Chief of Staff to the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand and an advisor to former Ministers Hon James Shaw and Hon Marama Davidson. I was also a senior staff member within the Labour-led Coalition Governments between 2017 and 2021.
6. This brief has been created to illustrate the systemic failures that disproportionately expose wāhine Māori leaders to political violence and harm.
7. I provide this evidence as a wāhine Māori leader in local government and as a public figure who has been subjected to unprecedented scrutiny and negativity as a direct consequence of the Crown’s failure to meet its obligations. This evidence is in my personal capacity and not on behalf of any organisations I currently work with or am affiliated to.

The Māori Ward Legislative Backdown

8. Wellington City Council has one Māori Ward, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Māori Ward which was established following a representation review in 2021, ahead of the 2022 local elections.
9. Following the Government’s announcement that Māori Wards would be subject to a referendum, I publicly stated that this was “...an example of central government overruling a democratically made local government decision... over and above a reversion to the law of 2021, which only required a poll if demanded by a certain number of citizens.”¹
10. In May 2024, Wellington City Council (WCC) submitted a report opposing both

¹ The Post. *Wellington Mayor backs Māori ward retention*. Available at: <https://www.thepost.co.nz/news/350235530/wellington-mayor-backs-maori-ward-retention>

the timing and the implications of the *Local Government (Electoral Legislation and Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Bill*.² On 29 May 2024, Council voted not to support the restoration of Māori Ward poll provisions, and highlighted in its submission the negative implications the Bill posed for mana whenua:

Māori Impact Statement

22. The reinstatement of polls on Māori wards and Māori constituencies has implications on representation of mana whenua and Māori in decision making within Wellington City Council. The proposed Bill deviates from the established process used to ensure fair and effective representation for communities of interest, including our Tākai Here partners and their respective Māori communities.
23. The reintroduction of binding polls weakens the ability for Wellington City Council to make informed decisions about hapori Māori and local iwi, that is based on local iwi context and community needs, and reinstates historical under-representation of iwi interests, and in decision making processes, and in this case Taranaki Whānui ki te

Upoko o te Ika, Te Rūnanga o Te Ātiawa and Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Toa Rangatira, and Tūpiki Ora, the Council's Māori Wellbeing Strategy.

24. The proposed Bill over-rights the necessity for engagement and consultation, and harms Māori representation, input and informed decision-making which remain critical to achieving equitable outcomes for Aotearoa New Zealanders.
25. If passed, the proposed Bill imposes a poll upon communities where local iwi and hapori Māori communities within and outside of the Wellington region will be affected as it reduces the likelihood of Māori voices at the Council table.
26. A six-day period for submissions is insufficient for communities to consider, deliberate and provide comprehensive submissions for this Bill.

11. WCC subsequently **voted to retain** the Maori Ward on 5th September 2024 13-3.
12. During this period, *The Post* used the opportunity to intensify negative commentary about me, implying that I intended to “break the law” by not proceeding with the referendum, despite this decision sitting outside my remit as Mayor.³

Online Abuse, Harassment & Targeted Campaigns Against Wahine Maori

13. Visible wāhine Māori leaders are frequently subjected to racist and misogynistic tropes that seek to dehumanise and undermine their leadership. As Tina Ngata observes:⁴
 - 13.1 “...wāhine Maori who do step into public-facing leadership roles are often subjected to violent and targeted abuse. Misogynist narratives that portray women as wanton, deceptive, and hysterical continue to shape public and political discourse towards wāhine in these public leadership roles. Māori women councillors, politicians, and campaigners in local and national politics face disproportionate levels

² Wellington City Council. *Social, Cultural and Economic Committee: Supplementary Agenda, 29 May 2024*. Available at: <https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/Your-council/meetings/Committees/Social-Cultural-and-Economic-Committee/2024/2024-05-29-Sup-Agenda-Krau-Mtinitini-SCEC>

³ The Post. *Wellington Mayor clarifies council not looking to break law over Māori referendum*. Available at: <https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/350427569/wellington-mayor-clarifies-council-not-looking-break-law-over-maori-referendum>

⁴ Ngata, T. *Brief of Evidence of Tina Ngata for Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry (Wai 2700)*.

of vitriolic abuse.”

14. I experienced significant violent, abusive, and dehumanising treatment as a direct result of occupying public leadership roles. This included the development and circulation of highly sexualised misinformation campaigns from 2023 until the conclusion of my term. These rumours generated intense media attention, including the publication of unverified claims by Radio New Zealand.
15. Dr Sanjana Hattotuwa has stated:⁵
 - 15.1 *“...creates conditions for opportunistic amplification by those with "shared misogyny," resulting in the sustained harassment campaigns documented throughout 2022-2025. The persistence of specific false narratives despite repeated debunking, combined with the organised nature of groups like Better Wellington and their stated electoral objectives, indicates this is not merely organic social media hostility but includes elements of deliberate political strategy.”*
16. Research analysis of social media responses demonstrates the scale and coordination of harassment. A single RNZ Facebook post about my departure generated over 700 hundred hostile comments, whilst broader analysis across platforms examined over 650 comments exhibiting coordinated messaging patterns. Comments repeatedly deployed identical phrases including references to former Prime Minister Muldoon's quote about emigration and intelligence quotients, suggesting either organic convergence around shared misogynistic narratives or deliberate amplification through coordinated networks.
17. The harassment exhibited clear intersectional patterns combining racist and misogynistic elements. Terms including "brown women", "Māori supremacist", and "DEI hire" appeared repeatedly, framing my election as an outcome of diversity policies rather than democratic choice. This aligns with documented patterns where women of colour face accusations that their achievements result from preferential treatment rather than merit.
18. The release of a defamatory email authored by Councillor Ray Chung⁶ further generated national media attention and significant online harm directed at me for

⁵ Hattotuwa, S. *Targeting pathologies against Mayor Whanau: Research and analysis.*

⁶ New Zealand Herald. *Exclusive: Wellington mayoral candidate Ray Chung's sex and drugs gossip about Tory Whanau.* Available at: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/exclusive-wellington-mayoral-candidate-ray-chungs-sex-and-drugs-gossip-about-tory-whanau/YIEIRU6J3FF7POYARBERTAW6FA/>

several weeks.⁷ The combined impact of these campaigns contributed to my decision to step aside from the Mayoral election to allow another candidate to run, and I believe it also adversely affected my prospects of election to the Te Whanganui-a-Tara Ward of Wellington City Council in October 2025.

19. Dr Cassandra Mudgway recently submitted to Wellington City Council in response to the appointment of Councillor Chung to a Chair position and stated that this type of harm:

19.1 *“...is designed to exhaust women, to destabilise public confidence in them, and to create an environment in which their leadership becomes untenable. And for women of colour, these attacks are compounded by racism, drawing on colonial stereotypes that hypersexualise them.*

19.2 She goes on to say that: *“the campaign of rumours and fabrications targeting the former Mayor is an example of this. False, sexualised claims were circulated about her in a way that fused misogyny and racism. This pattern reflects what researchers describe as the “pipeline of online harm,” where disinformation rapidly escalates into online harassment and abuse.”*⁸

20. Below is a list of harmful slurs that have been made against me on a regular basis over the last three years. These have been collected and analysed by Dr Hattotuwa and attached to this report.

Scarily demented men, family planning, needs God, Whanau is dumber than a sack of hammers, fuck face, ignorant uncivilised communist, travelling round the world on ratepayers money, needs to can Te Mana O Te Whai, communism sucks, face fken horrendous, cheap shots, gives free blow jobs, lesson for the entire country, hitting up rate payers, doesn't have money to replace our water pipes, paid what she's worth, getting bigger, paid in donuts, overpriced swings and slides, fiiiike as piiigshiiite, more functions for her to attend, free booze, money laundering, out of all councils elected members from Wellington city council should be the ones staying quiet, it's NOT their money, should have resigned, party girl not happy, disestablish rates, fund councils from central govt, f/ faces on councils across NZ, drive all the poverty out of the city, \$84k bike rack that nobody uses, easy come easy go, women shouldn't be allowed to hold elected office, 350 million on the town hall, booze, hit a nerve, who the fuck voted in semen sponge, shouldn't she be on her knees in a bar, twat, there is an enormous disconnect, only ratepayers should get the vote, money launderers, the fat face of greed and hypocrisy, time to appoint commissioners, most inept council ever, disaster, stop nibbling on sausages, globalist agenda, shut up Turdy, drunk cuck, bulldog licking piss off a nettle, commissioners should sack them all, dumb Maori, pig, raise rates and blame colonialism, cheap shots, rates are stolen money, spending money on woke rubbish, senseless overseas trips, face to sink a thousand ships, more times than she would like to remember, part of the Maori elite, never contributed a day's work in her life, pet horse, a face to sink a thousand ships, and troughing ethnicity.

21. The sentiment of online abuse has become more volatile since leaving office and

⁷ The Spinoff. *Chung's non-apology deepens storm over sexist smear campaign*. Available at: <https://thespinoff.co.nz/the-bulletin/14-07-2025/chungs-non-apology-deepens-storm-over-sexist-smear-campaign>

⁸ Mudgway, C. Submission to Wellington City Council, 20 November 2025.

making a decision to leave the country. Dr Hattotuwa reported that “...*The sentiments targeting Tory Whanau demonstrate textbook patterns of gendered political harassment that research consistently identifies as disproportionately affecting women politicians in New Zealand, with intensified severity for wāhine Māori,*” while analysing the sentiment on a Facebook post announcing the news.⁹ This shows a common sentiment against women leaders who have made a decision to leave their sector or country, including Dame Jacinda Ardern, Kiritapu Allan and Golriz Ghahraman.

22. The intense, hostile online reaction to my decision to leave the mayoral role and Aotearoa is not a reflection of personal failure, but a predictable response to a wāhine Māori exercising agency and leadership. This backlash is a hallmark of misogynistic and racist online environments, highlighting that women leaders who challenge norms often face disproportionate abuse, even as they step into larger opportunities for power, visibility, and systemic change.

23. The impact of not challenging this harmful behaviour has a flow on effect to other wāhine Maori or women of colour seeking leadership roles. In the same response Dr Mudgway states:

23.1 “*Rewarding someone who has participated in gendered disinformation sends a clear message to women in Wellington and elsewhere, particularly wāhine Māori, about whose safety and dignity are prioritised in our democratic institutions, both big and small. It communicates that those who weaponise gendered and racist tropes against their colleagues can still expect advancement and influence. And it signals to emerging women leaders that if they become targets of disinformation, they may have to endure it alone.*”

24. Based on my experience, the current support structures for elected members experiencing online abuse are inadequate. While I had access to EAP counselling and could submit incidents via Wellington City Council’s MySafety system, these resources are not sufficiently resourced to address sustained or targeted harassment. Local Government New Zealand’s recently released *Safety Toolkit* provides guidance, but it does not provide the practical legal, emotional, or cultural support necessary to protect victims.

25. I believe the Government has a clear obligation to strengthen legislation, including the Harmful Digital Communications Act, and to create safe and supportive environments that allow wāhine Māori to lead without fear of

⁹ Hattotuwa, S. *Research and analysis – capture of harms*, 21 November 2025.

harassment or intimidation. This should include access to legal resources, emotional and cultural support, protective networks, and the ability to meaningfully influence legislation to safeguard public participation.

Broadcaster Amplification of Harassment

26. Analysis reveals that commentary by broadcasters Mike Hosking and Sean Plunket functioned as authoritative framing that legitimised and directed subsequent public attacks. Hosking's characterisation of me as "poster child for ineptitude" and Plunket's description of my valedictory speech as "delusional self-justification" appeared verbatim throughout subsequent commentary, demonstrating clear patterns of influence.
27. Both broadcasters explicitly referenced my acknowledged alcohol problems, with Plunket crudely stating "that's a nice way of saying I'm a piss head". This language saturated subsequent commentary with numerous references to "drunk", "pisshead", and "alcoholic", signalling to audiences that such personal attacks constituted acceptable political discourse rather than inappropriate harassment.
28. Hosking questioned my employability outside politics, suggesting I "might have trouble finding work", a narrative that proliferated through comments asserting I was "unemployable" and lacked transferable skills. This demonstrates how media authority figures establish frameworks that audiences then replicate and intensify.

Treatment by Media

29. I have received extensive coverage of my personal life, sexualised rumours and so-called scandals my entire term. I would categorise the coverage as bias and beyond healthy democratic reporting.
30. Author Emily Writes has written extensively about the treatment I've received by the media, and has called it 'relentless', 'racist' and 'misogynistic'.¹⁰
31. Radio New Zealand published a story about an unverified rumour after my office confirmed it was false. This led to MediaWatch questioning their reporting and weeks of continued political commentary and online abuse as a result.¹¹
32. Disgraced broadcaster Sean Plunket has made regular segments about me and referred to me as 'useless', 'fat' and went into detail about me 'performing fellatio' in a bar. That segment has since been removed from their online

¹⁰ Emily Writes. *The campaign to destroy Tory Whanau*. Available at: <https://www.emilywrites.co.nz/the-campaign-to-destroy-tory-whanau/>

¹¹ Radio New Zealand. *Midweek Mediawatch: The case of the missing mayoral footage*. Available at: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/2018919440/midweek-mediawatch-the-case-of-the-missing-mayoral-footage>

programme.

33. Newstalk ZB have created numerous negative articles and opinion pieces¹² which often misrepresent facts and are intended to create ‘rage bait’ for their listeners. For example, Ryan Bridges has coined the term ‘Done a Tory Whanau’¹³ which means utilising funding meant for water infrastructure to create more cycleways. In reality, I reduced cycleway funding by almost \$40M in the Long-Term Plan, and increased water funding to \$1.8B which is three times the amount of any council funding provided for water.
34. There are clear examples of a double standard in media treatment, particularly when comparing coverage of myself with that of Mayor Wayne Brown. I received at least ten negative headlines for selling my car, whereas Mayor Brown received only two headlines after breaking the law by taking a video call while driving.
35. The harassment extended to deportation rhetoric, with multiple commenters predicting I would become a "501 deportee" despite holding no criminal convictions. This framing as criminal-adjacent represents a particularly insidious form of character assassination that extends beyond political criticism into dehumanisation.
36. This pattern of negative coverage has continued beyond my term in public office, including the repeated and prominent use of my image on front pages. The continued use of my image, long after the events in question, suggests an intention to use me as ‘rage bait’ to drive reader engagement and newspaper sales.



37. Such use solidified my decision to leave Aotearoa and move to Melbourne to create space from this environment to reset, rebuild, and protect my wellbeing.

¹² Newstalk ZB. Search results for “Tory Whanau”. Available at: <https://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/search/?term=tory+whanau>

¹³ Newstalk ZB. Perspective with Ryan Bridge: Chris Bishop has done a Tory Whanau. Available at: <https://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/on-air/heather-du-plessis-allan-drive/opinion/perspective-with-ryan-bridge-chris-bishop-has-done-a-tory-whanau/>

Thus making a proactive choice to create a healthier foundation for the next chapter of my career.

38. The decision to move to Melbourne was also told privately to friends in a non-public social media post. However, The Post/Stuff proceeded to publish a story based on that private post and generate more coverage. This forced me to release a public statement¹⁴ to provide context and the online backlash has been intense.
39. Such treatment by the media has caused anxiety, depression, physical back pain, weight gain and a likelihood of post-traumatic stress (letters by health professionals attached) resulting in therapy, medication and other medical treatment. It has contributed to me needing to leave the country, causing undue stress to my whānau.
40. Complaints have been raised directly with the media institutions where necessary or referred to the Media Council. However, this has had little impact on the behavior of some media who have continued their incessant reporting.
41. It would be beneficial for Media Council processes to be reviewed and media ethics to be considered in educational environments. This is another example of Government failure to regulate or review the Media Council process.

Behaviour of Senior Ministers

42. In June 2025, Deputy Prime Minister David Seymour published a social media campaign¹⁵ targeting a group of academics who had expressed opposition to his Regulatory Standards Legislation. I regarded this conduct as an example of bullying that breached sections 2.53 and 2.56 of the Cabinet Manual,¹⁶ which require Ministers to uphold the highest standards of integrity, respect, and public responsibility.
43. In response, I wrote a letter and launched a petition¹⁷ calling on the Prime Minister to hold the Deputy Prime Minister accountable, as I believe Ministers must model exemplary behaviour and ensure that all members of the public can participate in democratic debate without fear of harassment, intimidation, or retaliation.

¹⁴ Facebook. *Tory Whanau posts*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/torywhanau/posts/pfbid0yxQCHFw9tqmGRrkDKQB06jS2nayXuCXEUrhN1FqwDuycuFCMVb853x3VEgmupYxJl>

¹⁵ Facebook. *David Seymour ACT posts*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/davidseymourACT/posts/pfbid0fGJAQgyWTiGrEWwjAaZXEPawqW1Jq61GV7hCEuPPaN6sgqmkPp1GApjRQy6GT3el>

¹⁶ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. *Cabinet Manual*, 2023. Available at: <https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2023-06/cabinet-manual-2023-v2.pdf>

¹⁷ ActionStation. *Petition: Luxon – uphold codes of conduct, hold your government to account*. Available at: <https://our.actionstation.org.nz/petitions/luxon-uphold-codes-of-conduct-hold-your-government-to-account>


44. This incident illustrates how a powerful Minister can use their public platform in a way that legitimises and amplifies similar harmful behaviour within the wider community. Such actions embolden others to engage in harassment and bullying. The impact of that disproportionately falls on marginalised groups, particularly wāhine Māori.
45. I believe the Government has not only a moral responsibility but an explicit obligation to uphold the highest standards of conduct and to actively prevent environments that enable harm, especially for wāhine Māori who step into public leadership.

Conclusion

46. Based on my experience, support for elected members facing media narratives and social media abuse is inadequate. While resources such as EAP counselling and Wellington City Council's MySafety system exist, they are not sufficiently resourced to address sustained or targeted harm. Political parties similarly lack capacity to respond to intense smear campaigns or provide meaningful support to affected members.
47. Practical measures are needed, including access to legal, emotional, and cultural support, robust protective networks, and pathways to influence legislation safeguarding public participation. Initiatives such as the Minister for Women's *Free to Lead* toolkit are valuable but insufficient; victims should not bear the burden of navigating these resources to secure their safety and leadership capacity.
48. The Government has both a moral and statutory obligation to uphold high standards of conduct and actively prevent environments that enable harm, particularly for wāhine Māori in public leadership. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure equitable participation and to protect the safety, dignity, and agency of women leaders.
49. Research documenting technology-facilitated gender-based violence establishes that women in politics face harassment at rates 50 to 90 times higher than male counterparts, with 93 per cent of negative, hateful, sexually explicit or toxic content targeting female rather than male leaders. The commentary directed at me exemplifies these documented patterns, including explicit misogynistic slurs, crude sexual references, and dehumanising language including "mutt", "ogre", and "trollop" that creates hostile environments designed to drive women from public life.

50. The economic dimension of harassment manifested through sustained attacks on my professional competence and employability that continued after leaving office. Comments suggesting I possessed no marketable skills and predictions of unemployment weaponised economic insecurity as a tool of political suppression, a pattern that particularly affects women who lack independent wealth.
51. It is my belief that failing to address these systemic gaps risks a significant decline in wāhine Māori participation within our democratic processes, as well as in their representation at decision-making levels. Such a decline will inevitably have a cascading impact on tangata whenua more broadly, undermining their voice, influence, and ability to shape policies and decisions that affect their communities.

DATED at Wellington this 28th day of November 2025



Tory Whanau