Statement on Final Decisions Regarding Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage Restructure

28 July 2025

The Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture & Heritage Change Decision Document released on 24 July 2025 ignores overwhelming public feedback and proceeds with cuts that will irreparably damage New Zealand's cultural infrastructure, simultaneously demonstrating that this restructure was never about operational necessity – it is about a government that refuses to adequately fund one of New Zealand's most vital cultural institutions.

The Ministry's acknowledgement that they received strong feedback about the importance of their heritage content and production team and the taonga they have created over the past three decades only makes these cuts more unconscionable. When your own consultation process tells you that what you're doing is wrong, the appropriate response is to secure proper funding, not to forge ahead with a "reduced scale" operation.

False Choices and Manufactured Constraints

The decision document presents a series of false choices: maintain world-class historical resources OR operate within fiscal constraints. This is a manufactured dilemma. Historical and cultural infrastructure requires sustained investment to remain effective and accessible.

The Ministry's stated vision to continue providing access to heritage content at a reduced scale is bureaucratic doublespeak for managed decline. Te Ara, NZ History, DNZB, Te Akomanga and related educational programmes don't need to be maintained "at reduced scale" – they need to be properly funded to serve New Zealand's growing population and educational needs.

The Devastating Details

Even with some modifications following consultation, these decisions remain catastrophic:

Loss of Expertise: The elimination of multiple Senior Historian positions and the Historian role removes decades of accumulated knowledge and relationships that cannot be replaced by contractors brought in as needed.

Digital Infrastructure Under Threat: The proposed elimination of both Digital Production Editor roles, despite clear feedback about the risks this poses to web accessibility and maintaining heritage assets, shows a complete disregard for the technical expertise required to maintain world-class digital platforms.

Educational Programme Gutted: Deferring cuts to December 2025 for the education programme is merely delaying the inevitable while creating uncertainty for schools and teachers who rely on these resources.

Pukeahu Diminished: The decision to end activation and non-commemoration related engagement activity at Pukeahu represents a fundamental misunderstanding of how memorial spaces serve living communities.

These Are Public Resources, Not Just Educational Tools

The decision document references exploring alternatives for the education programme, noting that "the education curriculum is the mandate of the Ministry of Education." This may be so, but championing culture and heritage is the mandate of the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. While we acknowledge the vital importance of these resources for education, any suggestion that MCH resources that are useful for education should be transferred to the Ministry of Education fundamentally misunderstands their wider scope and value. The online resources created and maintained by MCH serve researchers, genealogists, journalists, iwi, community groups, and countless members of the public seeking to understand their heritage and identity.

Reducing these world-class public history platforms to purely educational resources would represent a massive diminishment of their purpose and reach. They were designed as comprehensive national resources, accessible to all New Zealanders, and that breadth of service must be preserved.

While not mentioned in the decision document explicitly, we are also deeply concerned about any potential for these resources to be transferred to for-profit organisations. New Zealand's historical record is not a commodity to be monetised. These platforms must remain free and publicly accessible, as they have been for decades. Any privatisation would inevitably lead to paywalls, reduced accessibility, and the commercialisation of our collective memory.

The Real Solution: Proper Funding

The Minister needs to stop hiding behind fiscal constraints and core purpose rhetoric. The real solution is simple: provide MCH with adequate funding to maintain its world-leading heritage and historical services.

The cost of maintaining these essential roles represents a tiny fraction of the government's overall budget. These are not significant fiscal pressures – they are choices about priorities.

International Embarrassment

These cuts will damage New Zealand's international reputation in the historical and cultural heritage sectors. We are voluntarily surrendering leadership in accessible public history that took decades to build.

Call to Action

We call on the Government to:

- Immediately reverse course and provide MCH with sufficient funding to maintain all Heritage Content & Production roles and programmes
- Recognise that heritage work IS core business for a Ministry of Culture and Heritage, not an optional extra
- Commit to long-term investment in New Zealand's cultural infrastructure rather than perpetual cost-cutting
- Acknowledge the false economy of these cuts, which will cost more in lost expertise and reduced services than they save

The Broader Pattern

This restructure is part of a concerning pattern of disinvestment in New Zealand's cultural sector. When combined with cuts across libraries, museums, and educational institutions, it represents a systematic dismantling of the infrastructure that supports informed citizenship and cultural identity.

The decision document reveals a Ministry forced to choose between essential functions because of inadequate government funding. This is not good governance – it is managed decline disguised as efficiency.

Our Commitment

We will continue to advocate for proper funding of New Zealand's historical and cultural infrastructure. We will monitor the implementation of these decisions and continue to call for their reversal.

New Zealand's history is not a luxury item to be trimmed when budgets tighten – it is the foundation of our national understanding and identity. This government's approach to MCH funding represents a profound failure of cultural stewardship.

New Zealand deserves a government that invests in its cultural future, not one that manages its cultural decline.

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