

10 February 2026

Hon Judith Collins KC
Minister of Defence
Public Services Minister
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

By email

Dear Minister

**RE: NGATI TUMATAUENGA, BICULTURAL POLICY
NEW ZEALAND ARMY CULTURAL SKILLS FRAMEWORK**

I am writing regarding the New Zealand Army's new internally circulated Ngāti Tūmatauenga bicultural policy and its associated Cultural Skills Framework.

This policy appears to embed ideological and cultural requirements that go well beyond the Government's expectations for a professional, politically neutral public service. Rather than focusing on operational effectiveness and merit, the framework imposes a set of cultural competencies that would not normally be expected of public servants.

For example, under "General Guidance" for Foundation Leaders, the framework lists the following expectations:

- Using tikanga Māori in day-to-day office practice.
- Explaining a range of meeting tikanga and knowing when to seek advice on appropriate approaches.
- Singing at least two common waiata and performing a simple karakia from memory.
- Reciting pepeha.

These expectations escalate further for Operational and Strategic Leaders, including explaining key te ao Māori concepts and memorising six waiata and karakia. The document also includes additional Army-specific examples that reinforce this direction.

In addition, the policy advances a particular interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi that is far from settled and should not be treated as authoritative within a state institution such as the Defence Force.

Taken together, this framework risks prioritising cultural conformity over competence, neutrality, and operational focus. That is not what New Zealanders expect from their Armed Forces, nor is it consistent with the Government's direction for the public service.

I ask that this policy and framework be reviewed as a matter of priority to ensure they align with the Government's expectations and the principle of equal treatment regardless of background or belief.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Todd Stephenson'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Todd Stephenson MP