

Waitangi Limited Strategic Statement

Far North District Council's Proposed District Plan Hearing's Panel regarding Waitangi National Trust's proposal for a Special Purpose Zone over the Waitangi National Estate

3 May 2025

1. Introduction

This statement is made by Ben Dalton, Chief Executive of Waitangi Limited, regarding Waitangi Limited's proposal to establish a Special Purpose Zone for the Waitangi National Estate as part of the FNDC Proposed District Plan.

This statement outlines the role and significance of the Waitangi National Trust, its strategic priorities, its governance model, plans for the bicentenary, and its position and value to the Bay of Islands and Taitokerau. It provides background about the organisation that should be read alongside evidence filed in support of the Special Purpose Zone.

2. The Waitangi National Trust

The Waitangi National Trust is a body corporate established by the Waitangi National Trust Act 1932. It is responsible for the care, management, and administration of the Waitangi National Trust Estate, which includes the Waitangi Treaty Grounds.

3. Historical Significance

The Waitangi Treaty Grounds is the site of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in 1840. This Treaty is considered the founding document of New Zealand, and the grounds hold immense historical, cultural, and spiritual significance for all New Zealanders.

The Waitangi Treaty Grounds are regarded as the most important heritage place in New Zealand. It was the first place to be inscribed as National Historical Landmark by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, their highest level of recognition of heritage significance. The Department of Conservation is proposing it as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

4. Significance of the Waitangi Treaty Grounds to the Nation

The Waitangi Treaty Grounds is the primary site where Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed. This treaty is a foundational document in New Zealand's history, establishing the relationship between the British Crown and Māori.

It is a place of national commemoration, particularly on Waitangi Week (1-6 February), where New Zealanders reflect on the Treaty's historical context, its ongoing implications, and its relevance to contemporary society.

The grounds are a symbol of New Zealand's bicultural heritage and the ongoing dialogue between Māori and Pākehā. They are increasingly a place of interest for international visitors and new New Zealanders.

Waitangi Treaty Grounds is a place where key events in New Zealand's history unfolded, shaping the nation's identity and its development, and is a place where all New Zealanders can connect with their past and reflect on their national identity, including in times of conflict. Annual Anzac Day commemorations are held at the Treaty Grounds for the 28 Māori Battalion, which brings significant numbers of the 28 Māori Battalion to Northland each year.

5. Purpose and Objectives of the Waitangi National Trust

The Waitangi National Trust's core objectives include:

- Maintaining and enhancing the Waitangi National Trust estate and its taonga (treasures).
- Preserving, protecting, and presenting taonga in its care through operating two state of the art museums (the two best on Northland)
- Promoting understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, its significance, and its ongoing relevance.
- Running high quality visitor experience (including conference facilities).
- Offering education experiences for tamariki in Taitokerau and around the country.

6. Operation of the Waitangi National Trust

The Waitangi National Trust operates under the framework established by the Waitangi National Trust Act 1932 and a Deed of Trust which is attached to the governing legislation.

The Waitangi National Trust Act 1932 established the Trust as a body corporate and defines its legal powers and responsibilities. It provides the legislative basis for the Trust to administer the Waitangi National Trust Estate.

The **Waitangi National Trust Deed of Trust** document, attached as an appendix to the legislation, outlines the specific terms by which the Waitangi National Trust must manage the Estate, including the objectives for the use and preservation of the land. Together, the Act and the Deed of Trust empower the Waitangi National Trust to:

- Hold and manage the Waitangi National Trust Estate.
- Preserve the historical and cultural heritage of the site.
- Promote public access and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi.
- Develop and maintain facilities and infrastructure appropriate to the site's significance.

The Trust Board, which governs the Waitangi National Trust, operates in accordance with these documents, ensuring that its activities align with the long-term preservation and promotion of Waitangi's significance.

7. Waitangi National Trust 20-Year Statement of Strategic Intent:

The Waitangi National Trust has a long-term vision for the future of the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, articulated in its 20-year statement of strategic intent. This strategic intent provides a roadmap for the Waitangi National Trust's activities and decision-making, ensuring that the Trust's work remains focused on its core objectives over the long term. The core mission of the Trust is He Whenua Rangatira – to create an enduring symbol of nationhood. Its mission statement is Titiro ki ngā taumata o te Moana. We seek to illustrate the ongoing promise of Waitangi to the world. The 20-year strategic plan has the following key goals:

- (i) Ensuring the ongoing preservation and enhancement of the Waitangi Treaty Grounds as a place of national significance.
- (ii) Developing and delivering engaging and educational experiences for visitors.
- (iii) Strengthening the Trust's relationships with Māori and other stakeholders.
- (iv) Promoting the Treaty of Waitangi as a living document with ongoing relevance to contemporary New Zealand.
- (v) Ensuring the financial sustainability of the Trust to support its long-term goals.

The 20-year strategic intent reflects the Trust's commitment to its role as a guardian of this important site and its dedication to promoting a deeper understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi for generations to come.

8. The Upcoming Bicentenary of the Treaty of Waitangi in 2040:

The year 2040 will mark the bicentenary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, a hugely significant milestone in the history of New Zealand. The Waitangi Treaty Grounds will be at the centre of these commemorations, given its status as the site of the original signing. It is anticipated that the grounds will host major national events, drawing together people from across New Zealand and around the world to mark this important occasion. It is possible that the visitor numbers could reach as high as 4-500,000 over the bicentenary period. As a

result, we need to start getting planning frameworks in place now that allow for the essential infrastructure works to occur within the next 15 years.

9. Other priorities – meeting current financial sustainability challenges

Within the current annual plan, the Trust's primary focus is on achieving a level of financial sustainability. The Waitangi National Trust operates without operational funding from the government or local bodies and is funded entirely through visitor admission charges and revenue generated via the wider Estate, which presents ongoing financial challenges as discussed in my earlier presentation to the committee.

The Trust relies on self-generated revenue to cover the costs of:

- Maintaining and preserving the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, including its historic buildings, landscapes, and taonga.
- Providing educational programs and visitor services.
- Developing new exhibitions and facilities to enhance the visitor experience.

This financial model requires the Trust to be financially prudent and entrepreneurial, balancing its cultural and historical responsibilities with the need to generate income.

In recent years, since the Covid 19 pandemic, the Trust's financial sustainability has been impacted by the reduction in international and domestic visitor numbers, rapidly increasing fixed costs, repairs and maintenance, particularly of high specification buildings and technology, as well as overall economic conditions. The need to generate its own funding places significant pressure on the Trust to maximize revenue-generating opportunities off the wider Estate while upholding the integrity and significance of the Waitangi Treaty Grounds and operating within the scope of the Trust Deed and governing legislation.

10. The importance of Waitangi to the visitor offerings and economic benefit of Waitangi to the Bay of Islands and the wider Northland

The Waitangi Treaty Grounds is a premier tourist destination, attracting visitors from both New Zealand and overseas. It is the number one visitor destination in Northland and a major factor in people deciding to travel to the Bay of Islands and Northland.

Waitangi is of direct importance to the regional economy. Waitangi generates direct and indirect employment in the tourism sector, it supports local businesses, including accommodation providers, tour operators, and retail establishments. It also enhances the overall appeal of the Bay of Islands as a visitor destination. The economic benefits of tourism associated with Waitangi extend beyond the immediate vicinity, positively impacting the wider Northland region.

11. Waitangi Governance

The Waitangi National Trust Board comprises representatives from across New Zealand, including descendants of those involved in the original signing of the Treaty. This ensures that the Trust's work reflects the partnership between Māori and Pākehā and upholds the principles of the Treaty. The Governor-General is the current Patron of the Trust.

In 2016, the Trust Board established a wholly-owned subsidiary, Waitangi Limited, to manage the day-to-day operations of the Treaty Grounds and the wider estate. Waitangi Limited is governed by a Chairman and directors and managed by the Chief Executive, on behalf of the Trust Board. The Trust Board maintains overall responsibility for the Waitangi National Trust Estate, while Waitangi Limited handles the operational and commercial aspects of managing the site.

The Trust is responsible for a 506-hectare estate, including: The Treaty House (Busby's Residence where the Treaty was written, Te Whare Rūnanga (the meeting house), Te Kōngahu Museum of Waitangi, Te Rau Aroha Museum / Museum of 28 Māori Battalion and Ngātokimatawhaorua (the world's largest ceremonial waka).