

# PHANZA

Professional Historians' Association  
of New Zealand/Aotearoa



NZHTA

NEW ZEALAND HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION



**Statement from Professional Historians' Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (PHANZA), New Zealand Historical Association (NZHA), and New Zealand History Teachers' Association (NZHTA) regarding proposed staffing cuts at Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH)**

16 June 2025

PHANZA, NZHA, and NZHTA express profound alarm and deep opposition to the proposed restructuring of MCH. The changes threaten to dismantle decades of world-class historical scholarship, shutter vital resources for history research, and harm public education.

The proposed elimination of historian positions catastrophically reduces the ability of New Zealanders to preserve, discover, and share their stories. MCH staff are custodians of resources that showcase our collective memory and are architects of free, accessible, and high-quality educational resources serving hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders.

The digital platforms created and maintained by Te Hua's operational team are irreplaceable national assets. Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand, the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, NZHistory.net.nz, and Te Akomanga digital history curriculum support are crucial resources for educators, students, researchers, and the broader public. These platforms receive extraordinary usage rates, particularly in schools, and have earned international recognition for their scholarly rigour and accessibility.

The proposed cuts also threaten the effectiveness of two flagship research programmes. The Ngā Kōrero Tuku Iho Oral History Grants are funded for another decade and administered by historians who understand the complexity and potential of applications. Historians are involved in ensuring Whiria Te Mahara New Zealand History Grants meet high standards of scholarly rigour and support projects that significantly enhance our understanding of the past.

PHANZA, NZHA, and NZHTA are also concerned about the loss of educational outreach programmes including the exemplary work conducted at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park and the community engagement initiatives that connect iwi, Pacific communities, and diverse New Zealand populations with their histories. The elimination of digital editors, designers, and web technicians will effectively end the Ministry's capacity to maintain and develop key public history platforms that are freely accessible to anybody in New Zealand.

This restructuring fundamentally misunderstands the MCH's core mission. Far from being peripheral activities, the creation and maintenance of historical content is essential cultural infrastructure that allows New

Zealanders to better understand who we are as a people. In an age of misinformation, these resources serve as the foundation for informed citizenship, educational excellence, and cultural identity in New Zealand. The characterisation of this work as somehow separate from the MCH's legislative mandate demonstrates a troubling narrowing of vision about what constitutes essential cultural heritage work.

The timing of these cuts is particularly concerning, coinciding with Sport NZ's integration into the Ministry and a shift towards what appears to be a more limited 'policy shop' model. This represents a drastic departure from the Ministry's foundational historical commitment to public engagement and community service.

We call upon the Government to:

1. **Reverse these proposed cuts** and instead provide additional funding to strengthen New Zealand's historical research and public education capacity
2. **Ensure continuity** of the oral history and research funding programmes that have supported New Zealand scholarship for over thirty years
3. **Maintain the digital infrastructure** that has made New Zealand a world leader in accessible public history
4. **Preserve the educational outreach programmes** that connect schools and communities with quality historical resources and expertise

The proposed restructuring represents false economy at its worst. The relatively modest savings achieved through these cuts will result in the loss of irreplaceable expertise, the degradation of world-class educational resources, and the abandonment of New Zealand's international leadership in public history.

Our historians at the Ministry are not merely employees – they are members of our professional community who have dedicated their careers to serving the public interest through rigorous scholarship and accessible education. The knowledge, relationships, and institutional memory they possess cannot be easily replaced by contractors 'as and when required'.

PHANZA, NZHA, and NZHTA urge all stakeholders – educators, students, researchers, and concerned citizens – to voice their opposition to these short-sighted cuts during the consultation period. The future of New Zealand's historical consciousness hangs in the balance.

New Zealand deserves better. Our history deserves better. Our students and educators deserve better.

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