

27 March 2026

Justice Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

Teena koutou katoa,

## **Submission from Waikato District Council on the English Language Bill.**

### **Introduction**

Waikato District Council (Council) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed English Language Bill. Council acknowledges the legislative intent of the Bill and notes that English already plays a central and well-established role across New Zealand's public, legal, and local government systems.

Council notes that while the Government is progressing this Bill, it is simultaneously repealing the Plain Language Act 2022. The stated justification for the repeal, as outlined in the explanatory note of the repeal Bill, is that the Act does not directly contribute to the improved use of plain language and that compliance with its requirements does not represent an efficient use of Government resources. Considered together, these actions appear inconsistent and warrant further clarification as to how they align with the Government's broader objectives.

While the Bill states that it does not diminish the status of te reo Maaori, Council notes that symbolic legislative measures can, over time, influence interpretation, implementation, and public expectations. Council considers that, this creates a risk of unintended consequences for te reo Maaori growth and normalisation efforts and for existing local government practices that support bilingual and tikanga based approaches.

In the absence of safeguards, there is a risk that the Bill could be interpreted in ways that place pressure on bilingual or tikanga based practices that are currently well established, supported, and aligned with best practice that have arisen, in part, out of Council treaty settlement obligations regarding our Joint Management Agreements with Waikato-Tainui and Te Nehenehenui.

If progressed without amendment, the Bill may introduce uncertainty for councils in meeting Maaori participation and partnership responsibilities, reduce the visibility and normalisation of te reo Maaori, and weaken alignment with the Māori Language Act 1987, the Local Government Act 2002, and existing Crown commitments to Maaori language revitalisation.

Council considers that if the English Language Bill is to proceed, it presents an important opportunity to consider how education in Aotearoa New Zealand supports and delivers more equitable weighting across our official languages. This includes ensuring that English, te reo Maaori, and New Zealand Sign Language are each appropriately resourced, visible, and embedded within teaching and learning. A more balanced approach would support genuine participation for all learners, reduce language-based barriers, and reflect New Zealand's commitment to inclusion, accessibility, and cultural recognition across its education system. In support of these principles, this submission is also presented in te reo Maaori.

## Positioning

Should the Bill proceed, Council recommends that the following amendments be made:

1. Confirm that legislative recognition of English does not affect the status of te reo Maaori or the Crown's obligations of active protection.
2. Clarify that the Bill does not alter, or intend to alter, existing statutory duties on local authorities in relation to Maaori participation, partnership, and engagement.
3. Ensure the Bill cannot be relied upon to justify the removal or reduction of bilingual or tikanga based practices, including the use of te reo Maaori, karakia, poowhiri, signage, and the naming of places and sites.
4. Provide guidance on how the Bill should be interpreted where multiple official languages intersect in future legislation, policy development, or service delivery, reinforcing the safeguards outlined above.
5. Ensure implementation guidance for the Bill supports equitable recognition and use of Aotearoa New Zealand's official languages within the education system, reinforcing accessibility, inclusion, and the safeguards outlined above.

## Conclusion

Council recognises the central role that English plays in Aotearoa New Zealand's public life. However, if legislative recognition of English is to proceed, Council considers it important that the Bill is carefully framed and supported by clear safeguards to avoid unintended impacts on the ongoing growth and normalisation of te reo Maaori and tikanga-based practices. Whether grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi or the Treaty of Waitangi, enduring obligations of partnership, good faith, and active protection apply across both central and local government.

These obligations are exercised on behalf of, and have direct implications for, Maaori and the wider communities that councils represent. Clear safeguards and guidance would support councils to continue meeting these responsibilities with confidence, while maintaining trust, consistency, and effective partnership-based governance.

The issues raised in this submission highlight the importance of coherence across the Government's legislative programme. In particular, the progression of the English Language Bill alongside the repeal of the Plain Language Act raises questions about consistency of intent and outcomes, especially in relation to accessibility, inclusion, and effective communication with communities.

Should the Committee require clarification on this submission or any additional information, please contact Maggie Ford, Strategy Manager [Maggie.ford@waidc.govt.nz](mailto:Maggie.ford@waidc.govt.nz) at Council.

Ngaa mihi,



**Aksel Bech**  
**Mayor**

**Council Approval** This submission was approved by the Mayor and Chairs on 27 March 2026.