



For the first time in Aotearoa New Zealand's history, ten former MPs from across the political spectrum were driven to establish their own select committee in response to a government that stripped pay equity overnight for working people in female-dominated professions. The Committee set out to do what the government did not do, ensure that the people's voices could be heard on the Equal Pay Amendment Act 2025.

THE VOICES OF NEW ZEALANDERS WERE VERY CLEAR

- Over 1,500 submissions overwhelmingly opposed the Bill, clearly rejecting changes rushed through without proper consultation and retrospectively cancelling 33 active pay equity claims.
- The committee heard directly from workers impacted by the loss of pay equity, employers who invested time and money into processes that were cancelled overnight, and communities concerned about the impact this would have on vital services.
- Far from "streamlining" the system, the reforms suppress claims, narrow eligibility, and block meaningful recourse for workers seeking pay equity.
- These impacts fall hardest on wāhine Māori, Pacific women, migrant workers, and others in undervalued care, support and education roles, deepening existing structural discrimination.
- Submissions were clear that pay equity is not abstract or optional: it directly effects the wellbeing, survival, and sustainability of workers, their whānau, and the essential services their communities rely on.
- The People's Select Committee evidence presents an urgent choice—the Government must act now to value women's work, because the long-term social and economic gains for Aotearoa far outweigh short-term fiscal concerns.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Equal Pay Amendment Act 2025 changes made by this government should be repealed.
- The cancelled claims should be reinstated without a requirement to restart a pay equity process.
- Community and iwi organisations delivering public services should be fully funded to implement any pay equity settlement to which they are party.
- Government agencies should improve funding and contracting processes and procurement rules for health, social and education services to support future pay equity settlements.



THE REPORT AND FULL RECOMMENDATIONS

As well as analysing submissions on changes to New Zealand's pay equity regime the committee considered the wider impacts on human rights, the rule of law, and Aotearoa New Zealand's international obligations.

The recommendations set out a clear pathway for government action to restore our international credibility and deliver immediate pay equity to more than 180,000 workers whose jobs remain systematically undervalued, while also outlining medium- and long-term reforms to future-proof the system.

The report is structured around the key themes raised in submissions, with each section summarising the evidence received and setting out the Committee's corresponding recommendations.



Dame Silvia Cartwright,
Former Governor-
General of New Zealand

SECTION 1: THE RULE OF LAW AND GOOD LAWMAKING

This section focuses on the submissions received relating to the bad faith policy and legislative process of the passing of the Bill, the impact on constitutional norms of good law-making and the integrity of the rule of law.

"The rights that these women ... relied on, have been removed or changed to their detriment without giving them a chance to comment. This appears to be an historically unfair provision, that breaches fundamental legislative principles of fairness, legal certainty and the rule of law."
PCPE 1597, Dame Silvia Cartwright

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Legislation affecting fundamental rights should be explicitly excluded from urgency provisions except in genuine cases of emergency (natural disaster, war, pandemic).
- Any future employment law changes should require minimum 90-day consultation periods, including targeted engagement with affected communities, unions, employers and Treaty partners.
- Pay equity should be recognised as a constitutional principle, protected from political interference. This could be achieved through entrenched legislation requiring supermajority support for amendment, or through judicial development of pay equity as a recognised right under New Zealand Bills of Rights Act 1990.



Mel Burgess,
Early Childhood Teacher

SECTION 2: PAY EQUITY IS A HUMAN RIGHT

This section considers if the National-NZ First-Act Government knowingly acted in breach of its international legal commitments to human rights on multiple levels. It outlines who knew what and when. You can find the full timeline at payequity.org.nz.

"New Zealand's international reputation as a leader in gender equality is at stake. Rolling back protections enshrined in the Pay Equity Act sends a troubling message, both domestically and to the global community, about the value placed on women's work." PCPE 1545, Soroptimist International of Aotearoa New Zealand

RECOMMENDATION

- That the tripartite representatives of New Zealand on the ILO Committee of Experts co-operate to seek a determination from the ILO on Convention 100 and the Equal Pay Amendment Act 2025.

SECTION 3: LABOUR MARKET EXPERIENCE AND ECONOMICS

This section draws on submitters' lived experiences to show how the structure of New Zealand's labour market systematically undervalues and underpays work in publicly funded, female-dominated sectors such as care, health, disability support, and education. It also considers the positive impacts of pay equity settlements on worker retention, quality of life and the wider economy.

"Libraries fill so many gaps in our society - in education, in social assistance, in childcare, in technology, in elder care, in public services and many more. When governments remove services from the public domain, librarians almost always are the ones to step up and fill the gaps. Librarians have a high burnout rate, which leads to high turnover."
PCPE 1173, Kath Read

SECTION 4: PAY EQUITY, KAUPAPA MĀORI AND TE TIRITI

This section focuses on Kaupapa Māori submitters who clearly argued the changes breach Te Tiriti o Waitangi and undermine intergenerational equity for wahine Māori. It reframes pay equity as Te Tiriti-anchored social contract in which work that sustains life, culture and community is recognised as a taonga rather than fiscal cost.

"Pay equity is more than just wages - it's about mana, whakapapa, and resisting systems that have historically devalued our labour." PCPE 094, Te Whāriki Manawahine o Hauraki - Denise Messiter

RECOMMENDATION

- To make this report, all its submission information, and data on the impact of the 2025 Equal Pay Amendment Act on wahine Māori, available to the Waitangi Tribunal as evidence in support of claims made by unions and others with standing in the WAI 2700 hearing.



SECTION 5: PASIFIKA VOICES

This section considers the disproportionate impact cancelled claims on Pacific workers and their families. The committee looks at the importance of recording ethnicity in workforce data, the impact of a lifetime of underpayment and how pay inequity, when systemically allowed to continue, can lead to generational transfers of economic insecurity and societal perceptions of inequality as inevitable and self-inflicted.

“The Pacific pay gap is not caused by a lack of work ethic.... We are disproportionately represented in the very sectors targeted by this law: support roles in education, health, care, and cleaning. These are the same roles that were celebrated as “essential” during COVID-19. And now they are being erased from the conversation on equity.” PCPE 1395, PSA Pasefika

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Embed race and gender in the Equal Pay Act’s principles and processes. Any system redesign must address the intersectional nature of Pacific women’s pay inequity.
- Mandate disaggregated pay gap reporting – requiring data by gender and ethnicity, with specific reporting on Pacific women.

SECTION 6: THE EMPLOYERS’ PREDICAMENT

This section looks at the intersection of pay equity, funding models for the health, community, education and social services and employer perspectives on engaging in pay equity claims in good faith, with unions, only to have that work cancelled overnight. The section also speaks to the underfunding of these vital sectors from successive governments and the impact that has on our communities.



Traci Houpapa,
Crown Facilitator, Joint Working
Group on Pay Equity Principles

“Pay equity is not a zero-sum contest between employers and workers. It is a problem that benefits from cooperative design and shared implementation, open engagement, thorough consultation and agreed practical approaches, to build partnerships and trust necessary for enduring and systemic change.” PCPE 1453, Traci Houpapa

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the Government issue guidance that section 2AACb of the Act is a proactive obligation on employers.
- That the 2025 Act be repealed.
- That, after repeal, simple changes in processes and milestones to cut time frames and capacity for delays be put in place.
- That the government establishes and resources an independent pay equity unit.



SECTION 7: FISHING AND FINDING: COMPARING JOBS

This section focuses on the process of comparing jobs, with a particular focus on Fisheries Officers and Librarians, as much was made of this comparison at the time of the legislation change. It speaks to the detailed nature of a pay equity process that is undertaken with both union and employer representatives, and the lack of evidence to support the Government's suggestion that "claims have been able to progress without strong evidence of undervaluation".



Stephanie O'Brian,
Secondary School Teacher

"It was our experience that the process of assessing the work of both claimants and comparators was robust. The data was analysed by independent assessors, as was the remuneration. Comparability was established through robust, consistent process and quality assurance by other independent assessors was carried out." PCPE 1471, NZNO

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the government establish and resource an independent pay equity unit.
- That previously established oversight processes in pay equity claims be reduced and reframed.
- That the services of the pay equity unit be provided free of charge to SMEs.
- That unions bringing pay equity claims should receive financial support to do so.
- That the ability to extend a pay equity settlement across a workforce be reinstated.
- That community and iwi organisations delivering public services are fully funded to implement any pay equity settlement to which they are party.
- That government agencies improve funding and contracting processes and procurement rules for health, social and education services to support future pay equity settlements.





SECTION 8: AGAINST THE EVIDENCE: EXAMINING CHANGES TO THE EQUAL PAY AMENDMENT ACT 2025

This section the committee examines each legislative change in detail, as a clause-by-clause analysis of the Equal Pay Amendment Bill. The Committee has examined each of these alongside the issues identified with the 2020 version of the Equal Pay Act.

“Raising the percentage of women that have been in an occupation for at least 10 years indicates a lack of understanding of how deeply embedded gender discrimination is in our systems. Systemic discrimination is produced not only by the policies and regulations imposed on our labour market, workers and employers, but also in the social attitudes towards workers and work, and the day-to-day practices of employers.” PCPE 1343, Katherine Ravenswood

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the changes to the threshold are reversed, restoring the light touch assessment process and concept of arguability as agreed by the Joint Working Group and reflected in the 2020 Act.
 - That the percentage threshold for a female-dominated workforce is returned to approximately 60%, as outlined in the 2020 Act; and that the requirement for the stated level of a female-dominated workforce to have been at that percentage for 10-years is removed.
 - That the 2025 amendments regarding reviews and the 10-year ban on raising claims are reversed in full.
 - That work is done on developing agreed best practice for review processes, facilitated by an independent unit and involving government, business, union, community and iwi representatives.
 - That the 2025 amendments to scope are reversed and the 2020 Act provisions are reinstated.
- That guidance and support for parties in navigating any issues around scope, such as was provided by the Taskforce, is refreshed by an independent unit with input from experts.
 - That the changes allowing employers to opt out of multi-employer claims without a reason is reversed.
 - That the ability to take any issues arising in a pay equity claim to mediation and to the Authority, if required, is restored.
 - That the ability to extend a pay equity settlement which covers multiple employers, as outlined in the Funded Framework, should be:
 - strengthened with input from experts and consideration of lessons learnt
 - catered for in legislation (consideration of the fair pay framework which allowed for a sector-based agreement on wages may be relevant here).

