

1 November 2024

**Open Letter to the President of the Royal Society Te Apārangi, Distinguished Professor  
Dame Jane Harding DNZM FRSNZ FRACP**

E te Kahurangi, e Jane, tēnā koe,

The Māori signatories to this letter have strong associations to a broad range of tertiary institutions and professional bodies. Our academic and research expertise likewise extend across multiple areas of interest, endeavour and activity. Despite this diversity, we have always been unified in our efforts to support the growth and development of our people, to ensure that our collective aspirations are advanced and that any barriers are removed.

In this regard, we would like to express, in the strongest possible way, the concerns we have with the proposed changes to governance of the Royal Society Te Apārangi (RSTA). As an organisation built on democratic and representative governance processes, the proposed shift towards a top-down, Fellow-driven board model under the auspices of ‘best practice’ is troubling. This proposal not only threatens to dismantle the progress made to support and enhance Māori participation and rangatiratanga over the past decade, but also undermines the principle of partnership and rite-tahi as enshrined in the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Over the last ten years, RSTA has made significant and commendable changes including the creation of the Pou Tiaki Director Māori role to support the use of te ao Māori and tikanga Māori concepts within its structure and processes. These institutional advancements required sustained advocacy from the Māori Academy, and marked a pivotal shift from the monocultural foundations of the Society towards an institution that better reflects the uniqueness and vibrancy of our nation. Enhanced recognition of Māori science aspirations has facilitated a significant increase in Māori Fellows from just nine in 2015 to 40 by 2023, a Tiriti o Waitangi provision in the General Rules, establishment of the Māori Electoral College and two permanent Māori positions on the Council, as well as the introduction of new research medals that recognise Māori achievements in science in collaboration with Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Centre of Research Excellence. These advancements have been widely acknowledged internationally, further emphasising the organisation’s unique commitment to Indigenous science approaches amongst our international peers.

The current proposal therefore raises significant concerns and places at considerable risk the progress made over the past decade. It signals a retreat from the inclusive governance model we have been working towards and lacks any meaningful consideration of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The proposal lacks a well-founded rationale for such a substantial change, raising questions about the sincerity of this process. The consultation process has been rushed and top-down in nature. Moreover, the suggested governance restructure is out of step with the Society’s

recently released strategic plan, which provides assurances to honour the spirit and intent of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and ensure Māori voices are central in decision-making, whilst affirming RTSA's values of collaboration, diversity, integrity and transparency. The inconsistency between the proposed restructure and the strategic vision raises serious questions about the Society's commitment to its own values and aspirations. These are not minor inconsistencies and further call into question the legitimacy and integrity of the consultation process.

To this end, and while the proposal may appear to allow for Māori participation, it fails to recognise the fundamental right of tangata whenua to tino rangatiratanga - the right to make decisions for ourselves, and to exercise authority over our own people, lands and knowledges. Under Te Tiriti, the governance structure of RSTA must reflect a true partnership between Māori and the Crown. This means explicit inclusion of Māori representatives mandated by the Māori membership at the governance level, where decisions that impact Māori are made *by Māori*, not *for Māori*. The current proposal falls well short of this.

The proposed restructure also comes at a time when RSTA has entered a tripartite academy partnership with the Australian Academy of Science and The Royal Society of Canada, with an emphasis on the rights of Indigenous peoples and how the academies may give effect to their responsibilities toward Indigenous engagement and inclusion. In this context, where RSTA is engaging with international Indigenous communities, the proposed governance changes appear disingenuous. It is contradictory for RSTA to promote Indigenous leadership and partnership abroad while simultaneously removing dedicated Māori representation from its own governance body.

We hope to work collaboratively to uphold the principles of partnership and inclusion and continue the progress that has been made towards a truly bicultural and future focused academy. If there is no visible space for Māori decision-making in this reimagined structure, the creation of an independent Māori Academy may be the path forward.

Dame Jane, we urge you to reconsider the current governance proposal, which we view as a significant step backwards, and call for a pause in the current consultation process. There must be genuine engagement with Māori from the outset, in line with Te Tiriti, to ensure that RSTA remains a place where Māori voices are heard and our aspirations are enabled.

We appreciate your careful consideration of the concerns we have raised and look forward to receiving your reply.

Ngā manaakitanga,

Professor Melinda Webber (Waipapa Taumata Rau), former RSTA Councillor

Professor Tahu Kukutai FRSNZ (Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga), former RSTA Councillor

Professor Linda Waimarie Nikora FRSNZ (Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga), former RSTA Councillor

Professor Te Kani Kingi (Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiārangi), former RSTA Councillor

Professor Reremoana Theodore (Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka), former RSTA Councillor

Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith CNZM FRSNZ (Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi), former RSTA Councillor

Emeritus Professor Ngahuia Te Awekōtuku MNZM CRSNZ (Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga)

Distinguished Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith CNZM FAERA FRSNZ (Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa)

Distinguished Professor Sir Hirini Moko Mead KNZM FRSNZ (Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi)

Distinguished Professor Jacinta Ruru MNZM FRSNZ (Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka)

Professor Tracey McIntosh MNZM (Waipapa Taumata Rau)

Professor Rangi Matamua ONZM FRSNZ (Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa)

Professor Poia Rewi FRSNZ (Te Mātāwai)

Dr Leonie Pihama FRSNZ (Tū Tama Wāhine o Taranaki)

Professor Joanna Kidman FRSNZ (Te Herenga Waka)

Professor Helen Moewaka Barnes FRSNZ (Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa)

Dr Carwyn Jones FRSNZ (Te Wānanga o Raukawa)

Professor Rawinia Higgins FRSNZ (Te Herenga Waka)

Professor Margaret Mutu FRSNZ (Waipapa Taumata Rau)

Professor Michelle Thompson-Fawcett FRSNZ (Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka)

Professor Denise Wilson FRSNZ (Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau)

Dr Sonja Macfarlane FRSNZ (Ngāti Waewae)

Professor Brendan Hokowhitu FRSNZ (University of Queensland)

Dr Mahonri Owen (Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato), Early Career Researcher Forum Co-Chair & Māori Electoral College

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Professor Matthew Roskrige (Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa), Māori Electoral College

Associate Professor Moana Waitoki (He Paiaka Totara, Māori Psychologists Network), Māori Electoral College

Professor Bridgette Masters-Awatere MRSNZ FNZPsS (Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato), Māori Electoral College

Dr Amohia Boulton (Whakauae Research Services Ltd), Māori Electoral College

Professor Jason Mika (Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato), Māori Electoral College

Dr Nimbus Staniland (Waipapa Taumata Rau), Māori Electoral College