

Waitangi Tribunal

Media Statement



8 September 2009

EMBARGOED UNTIL 6AM 8 SEPTEMBER 2009

Waitangi Tribunal progresses historical claims towards inquiry

The Waitangi Tribunal has made good progress with processing the unprecedented number of Treaty claims submitted ahead of the 1 September 2008 deadline for the lodging of historical claims.

Waitangi Tribunal Director Darrin Sykes says a total of 1,835 new claims were lodged in the final four weeks leading up to 1 September 2008, more than the entire total of 1,497 claims registered over the previous 32 years since the Tribunal's foundation in 1976.

"The Tribunal has given high priority to registering the new claims," Mr Sykes says.

During the year to 31 August 2009, 620 of the pre-deadline claims were registered, accounting for the great majority of those that meet the requirements of section 6 of the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975. Altogether, the Tribunal's registry now holds 2,125 registered claims.

"Most of the 1,341 claims still pending do not meet the statutory requirements for registration," Mr Sykes says. "The Tribunal has taken active steps to communicate with all submitters, including letters and circulars as well as information hui alongside judicial conferences in Tribunal district inquiries."

He says analysis by Tribunal staff confirms that 94 percent of the pre-deadline claims whose issues could be reliably identified stated historical grievances.

"This is close to the 93 percent of all registered claims that did so. An historical claim is defined as any claim relating to an act or omission of the Crown that occurred before 21 September 1992."

Mr Sykes says the Tribunal's inquiry programme has long given priority to the hearing of historical claims, mainly through its district inquiries, which hear all claims in a district together.

"To date, the Tribunal has completed reports on 15 of our 37 districts, and we are well advanced with reports on four more and are completing hearings in the Whanganui Land inquiry. Together, these inquiries cover 81 percent of New Zealand's national territory."

Inquiries are in planning and research preparation for inquiry in 10 further districts in Northland, East Coast, King Country and from Taihape to Kapiti. Altogether, more than 1,000 registered claims and another 700 unregistered pending claims - the majority of the outstanding claims - arise in the 15 districts under Tribunal action.

"The Tribunal is also taking active steps to offer access to claimants who came late to inquiries in session that have completed their hearing of evidence," Mr Sykes says.

"We are aware that many claimants will be seeking to progress the negotiation of their historical claims over the next few years. The Waitangi Tribunal is committed to ensuring that all claimants with unsettled historical claims who wish to have them heard can have timely access to the Tribunal's inquiry process."

Ends

More information on progress in processing claims and in developing the Tribunal's inquiry programme will be provided on the Tribunal's website:

<http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/>

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