



TEU

TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION
TE HAUTŪ KAHURANGI

Submission of

**Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education
Union**

to the

Environment Committee

on the

***Environment (Disestablishment of Ministry
for the Environment) Amendment Bill***

11 March 2026

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1. TEU Position and Recommendations

- 1.1. TEU **opposes** the Environment (Disestablishment of the Ministry for the Environment) Amendment Bill (the Bill) and calls on the Committee to recommend that it does not proceed in its current form.
- 1.2. The Bill would disestablish a dedicated Ministry for the Environment and hand its functions to a single Secretary who will simultaneously lead three other Ministries with competing mandates. This is not an efficiency; it is a dilution of environmental accountability at the moment Aotearoa New Zealand needs more focus on these issues, not less.
- 1.3. The Bill has been introduced without a Regulatory Impact Analysis, without disclosure of financial implications, and with a consultation window of just 15 working days – shorter than the statutory minimum for an OIA response.
- 1.4. TEU has a direct stake in this legislation. Our members – across universities, ITPs, and wānanga – train the scientists, planners, and kaitiaki who will navigate our environmental and climate future. Weakening the Ministry’s functions has real consequences for the research and education they provide.
- 1.5. Summary of recommendations:

TEU RECOMMENDATIONS
1. We recommend that the Committee examine and document how conflicts of interest between the four merged Ministries will be identified and managed, and provide binding assurances that environmental functions will not be subordinated to the competing priorities of the consolidated Ministry.
2. We recommend that Section 6(c)(i)–(v) of the Environment Act 1986 be explicitly retained in the Amendment Bill, providing governance assurance that the critical interests of ecosystems, Treaty principles, resource sustainability, and the needs of future generations remain legally protected.
3. We recommend that the Committee obtain binding written assurances that each function listed in Section 31 will be fully resourced and performed, and that the Secretary for the Environment will be required to report publicly on performance against each function.
4. We recommend that the Amendment Bill retain the requirement for all staff of the new Ministry – not only the Secretary – to have regard to the matters set out in Section 17(a)–(g) of the Environment Act 1986.
5. We recommend that education – including tertiary education – be explicitly recognised in the Amendment Bill and in all associated environmental and climate policy as a strategic priority, with the Secretary for the Environment required to engage with the tertiary sector in the development and implementation of environmental policy.

6. We recommend that a full Regulatory Impact Statement be completed and publicly released before the Bill proceeds further.
7. We recommend that all financial implications of the proposed merger be publicly disclosed prior to the Bill's further consideration.
8. We recommend that the consultation period be extended to a minimum of 20 working days, and that all currently redacted government documents relevant to this Bill be released in full to enable informed public participation.

2. Competing Functions of New Consolidated Ministry Deprioritise Mana Taiao

2.1. The Bill states that “the Ministry for the Environment’s existing functions are unchanged.” However, consolidating four Ministries with differing and sometimes competing obligations under a single Secretary for the Environment creates a significant risk that environmental functions will be deprioritised.

2.2. The roles and responsibilities currently held by four separate Ministers will be transferred to one chief executive. There is no credible assurance that the Secretary for the Environment will be able to effectively fulfil all of the Ministry for the Environment’s current obligations while simultaneously leading three other Ministries with contrasting mandates.

2.3. This structure poses a direct threat to the autonomy, stability, and public-good purpose of environmental governance in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.4. **Recommendation:** We recommend that the Committee examine and document how conflicts of interest between the four merged Ministries will be identified and managed, and provide binding assurances that environmental functions will not be subordinated to the competing priorities of the consolidated Ministry.

3. Removal of Considerations for the Management of Natural and Physical Resources

3.1. The Environment Act 1986 was established to, among other things:

“ensure that, in the management of natural and physical resources, full and balanced account is taken of —

(i) the intrinsic values of ecosystems; and

(ii) all values which are placed by individuals and groups on the quality of the environment; and

(iii) the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi; and

(iv) the sustainability of natural and physical resources; and

(v) the needs of future generations.”

3.2. The TEU welcomes the Bill's retention of the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. However, the Bill provides no assurance that the above objectives – in particular (c)(i)–(v) – will continue to be upheld under the new structure.

3.3. **Recommendation:** We recommend that Section 6(c)(i)–(v) of the Environment Act 1986 be explicitly retained in the Amendment Bill, providing governance assurance that the critical interests of ecosystems, Treaty principles, resource sustainability, and the needs of future generations remain legally protected.

4. Shifting All Ministry Functions to One Secretary

4.1. The tertiary education sector has a direct and material interest in the functions of the Ministry for the Environment. Universities, ITPs, and wānanga are responsible for teaching and research in, about, and for the natural, physical, and built environment. They contribute knowledge, innovation, and trained professionals to address local, national, and global environmental and climate challenges.

4.2. It is therefore critical that the following functions of the Ministry are maintained under the new structure:

- Research and the collection of environmental information
- Environmental education
- Effective public participation in environmental planning

4.3. The Bill states that “the Ministry for the Environment’s existing functions are unchanged.” However, it transfers all Section 31 “Functions of the Ministry” in the Environment Act 1986 to become “Functions of the Secretary for the Environment” – concentrating them in a single individual who will be leading four Ministries.

4.4. The following functions – as set out in the proposed Section 31 of the Amendment Bill – must not be lost, reduced, or deprioritised:

The Secretary has:

(a) to advise the Minister on all aspects of environmental administration, including —

(i) policies for influencing the management of natural and physical resources;

(ii) significant environmental impacts of public or private sector proposals;

(iii) ways of ensuring effective provision is made for public participation in environmental planning;
(b) to solicit and obtain information and to conduct and supervise research to formulate advice to the Government on environmental policies;
(c) to provide the Government with advice on the application, operation, and effectiveness of relevant Acts; procedures for environmental monitoring; pollution control; natural hazards; and hazardous substances;
(d) to facilitate and encourage the resolution of conflict in relation to policies that may affect the environment;
(e) to provide and disseminate information to promote environmental policies, including environmental education and effective public participation in environmental planning;
(f) generally to provide advice on matters relating to the environment;
(g) to carry out any other functions conferred on the Secretary by an Act listed in Schedule 3.

4.5. **Recommendation:** We recommend that the Committee obtain binding written assurances that each function listed in Section 31 will be fully resourced and performed, and that the Secretary for the Environment will be required to report publicly on performance against each function.

5. The Amendment Bill Changes the Ministry's Intent

5.1. Section 12 of the Amendment Bill amends Section 32 of the Environment Act 1986 by changing the obligation from one that applies to "every officer and employee of the Ministry" to one that applies to the Secretary alone. This is not a technical amendment – it fundamentally narrows the scope of accountability.

5.2. Under the current Act, all Ministry staff are required, as far as practicable, to have regard to the environmental considerations set out in Section 17(a)–(g). These include:

- The maintenance and restoration of ecosystems of importance, especially those supporting rare, threatened, or endangered species
- Areas and structures of aesthetic, archaeological, cultural, historical, recreational, scenic, and scientific value
- Land, water, sites, fishing grounds, or physical and cultural resources that are part of the heritage of tangāta whenua
- The effects on communities of changes to natural and physical resources

- Proposals likely to result in or increase pollution, natural hazards, or the introduction of non-native species
- All reasonably foreseeable environmental effects, whether adverse or beneficial, short-term or long-term, direct, indirect, or cumulative
- Alternative means or methods of implementing any proposal, policy, or matter

5.3. By restricting this obligation to the Secretary alone, the Amendment Bill removes the requirement for all staff of the new Ministry to consider these environmental factors in carrying out their work. This represents a significant weakening of the environmental protections embedded in the Act.

5.4. **Recommendation:** We recommend that the Amendment Bill retain the requirement for all staff of the new Ministry – not only the Secretary – to have regard to the matters set out in Section 17(a)–(g) of the Environment Act 1986.

6. The Bill Fails to Recognise Education as an Enduring Environmental Lever

6.1. We urge the Committee to recognise that education – and tertiary education in particular – is one of the most powerful and enduring levers for enabling, supporting, and sustaining environmental and climate transitions. This Bill makes no mention of education – this is a significant omission.

6.2. The tertiary sector takes a wide systems view, providing research, knowledge, and graduates who contribute directly to addressing local environmental issues and the global challenge of climate change. Tertiary education is not a peripheral concern in environmental policy – it is central to it.

6.3. Specifically, we call on the Committee to ensure that the new Ministry structure:

- 6.3.1. Ensures core environment-related material is embedded in all curricula and programmes, and that programmes are progressively aligned with a climate-resilient, low-emissions Aotearoa New Zealand;
- 6.3.2. Provides adequate funding, time, and focus for environmental research that is culturally appropriate and applicable to Aotearoa New Zealand;
- 6.3.3. Makes education consistently and enduringly visible in all environmental and climate advice and national policy, in perpetuity;
- 6.3.4. Supports the tertiary sector’s role in the Research, Science, Innovation, and Technology system, ensuring continuity of people, infrastructure, technology, and information;

- 6.3.5. Requires the Secretary for the Environment to work actively with the tertiary sector to investigate challenges, develop solutions, and embed new practices across industry education and training;
 - 6.3.6. Ensures that all industry education and training includes a component that considers environmental and climate implications, and that supports students to consider the future viability of their sector;
 - 6.3.7. Includes the voices of tertiary education staff in the co-creation of all strategies and policies that impact on the provision of learning and research.
- 6.4. Tertiary educators play an integral role in environmental and climate transitions: preparing graduates, upskilling workers, and equipping people with the knowledge, critical thinking, scientific literacy, and ethical frameworks they need to contribute meaningfully to mitigation, adaptation, and the reversal of climate change.¹
- 6.5. Long-term vision, strategy, and adequate funding for environmental research and education are necessary safeguards against short-term thinking and reactive political and economic shocks. The tertiary sector provides exactly this kind of long-term investment in our collective economic, social, cultural, and environmental futures.
- 6.6. **Recommendation:** We recommend that education – including tertiary education – be explicitly recognised in the Amendment Bill and in all associated environmental and climate policy as a strategic priority, with the Secretary for the Environment required to engage with the tertiary sector in the development and implementation of environmental policy.

7. No Regulatory Impact Analysis

- 7.1. No exemption from a Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) was sought at the time the policy decisions underpinning this Bill were made. The Ministry for Regulation subsequently determined that the proposal has “no or only minor impacts on businesses, individuals, and not-for-profit entities.”
- 7.2. However, no documentation or evidence has been provided to support this conclusion. Without disclosure of what these impacts are – and who or what will

¹ Reimers, Fernando., ed. 2021. ‘The Role of Universities: Building an Ecosystem of Climate Change Education.’ In *Education and Climate Change: The Role of Universities*, pp.1-43. Cham: Springer.

be affected – organisations including tertiary institutions, union members, and mana whenua cannot assess for themselves whether the impacts are truly minor or potentially significant.

7.3. **Recommendation:** We recommend that a full Regulatory Impact Statement be completed and publicly released before the Bill proceeds further.

8. Unknown Financial Implications

8.1. The Government has not disclosed the financial implications of merging the Ministry for the Environment with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Ministry of Transport, and the local government functions of the Department of Internal Affairs.

8.2. The near-complete redaction of the “Planning and Infrastructure Arrangements” document published by Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission / RMA Reform strongly suggests that financial modelling has been conducted but withheld from public scrutiny. This is unacceptable for legislation of this significance.

8.3. **Recommendation:** We recommend that all financial implications of the proposed merger be publicly disclosed prior to the Bill’s further consideration

9. Unreasonably Short Consultation Period

9.1. The consultation period for this Bill ran from 20 February to 11 March 2026 – a period of approximately 15 working days. This is shorter than the standard 20 working days provided under the Official Information Act 1982 for responding to OIA requests.

9.2. This timeframe is insufficient for submitters to seek further information, request the release of redacted content (such as CAB-25-MIN-0476, the Minute of Decision confirming ECO-25-MIN-0218), or meaningfully engage with the implications of the Bill.

9.3. **Recommendation:** We recommend that the consultation period be extended to a minimum of 20 working days, and that all currently redacted government documents relevant to this Bill be released in full to enable informed public participation.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1. TEU urges the Committee to recommend that this Bill does not proceed. Disestablishing a dedicated Ministry for the Environment – without rigorous analysis, financial transparency, or meaningful public consultation – risks long-term harm to Aotearoa New Zealand’s environmental governance that cannot easily be undone.
- 10.2. Aotearoa New Zealand needs stronger environmental institutions, not weaker ones. We ask the Committee to take seriously the concerns raised in this submission and to ensure that the functions, obligations, and intent of the Environment Act 1986 are fully protected for current and future generations.