

# How news items represent Maori

## A checklist for news media consumers to assess news stories

Auckland media research group Kupu Taea analysed news items about Maori issues and the Treaty of Waitangi in newspapers and television news in 2004 and 2007, finding systematic negative depictions of Maori. This leaflet summarises these negative frames and suggests possible action to improve media reporting. See [www.trc.org.nz/resources/media.htm](http://www.trc.org.nz/resources/media.htm) for more information.

### USE OF SOURCES

Sources are the people interviewed, quoted or summarised in a news story. Stories about Maori issues or the Treaty of Waitangi that use no Maori sources may be unbalanced. Stories that used sources who do not have the authority or expertise in the Maori world to speak on an issue may be unfair.

Does the story cite any Maori sources?	YES	NO	<b>MAY BE POSITIVE</b> <b>MAY BE NEUTRAL</b> <b>MAY BE NEGATIVE</b> <b>UNFAIR</b> <b>UNBALANCED</b>
Do the Maori sources have the authority or expertise in the Maori world to speak on the issue?	YES	NO	
If Maori are criticised in the story, do the Maori sources who are quoted respond to that criticism?	YES	NO	
Are viewpoints in the item limited to one end of the spectrum of opinion?	YES	NO	
Are Maori sources quoted after Government or non-Maori sources in the item? <i>[If Maori sources are persistently quoted in response, this may indicate a lack of balance.]</i>	YES	NO	
Did Maori decline to comment for the story?	YES	NO	
Are Maori trivialised or insulted by a source or writer?	YES	NO	

### FRAME OR VIEWPOINT

All media stories reflect and depend on social meanings shared with their audiences. Story "frames" restrict how audiences can think about an issue. Researchers have identified several media frames that insult or undermine Maori. Some are listed below.

Does the item depict the interests of Maori as separate from the public/taxpayers/New Zealanders? <i>[This implies that Maori are not tax-payers or members of the public or part of the audience.]</i>	YES	NO	<b>MAY BE POSITIVE</b> <b>MAY BE NEUTRAL</b> <b>MAY BE NEGATIVE</b> <b>OR UNFAIR</b> <b>OR UNBALANCED</b>
Is Maori control of resources (eg. land or fisheries) portrayed as a threat to non-Maori interests?	YES	NO	
Does the story support the idea that Maori are privileged or receive special treatment compared to other New Zealanders?	YES	NO	
Does the story imply that Maori are financially incompetent? <i>[Other implications: Maori have unfair access to funding; Maori initiatives are unworthy of financial support; or Maori are inappropriate proprietors of valuable national assets.]</i>	YES	NO	
Are existing or possible Treaty settlements depicted as unreasonably generous, or unjust to non-Maori?	YES	NO	
Is "race" used in headlines or by the writer to describe a cultural difference or a Treaty commitment to Maori?	YES	NO	
Do the story or images imply that Maori are more aggressive or violent than other New Zealanders?	YES	NO	
Does the story imply that Maori culture is inferior or inadequate compared to Pakeha culture? <i>[For example, more sexist.]</i>	YES	NO	

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## FRAME OR VIEWPOINT *continued*

Does the story imply that some people are not real Maori because they also have non-Maori ancestors? **YES** **NO**

Does the story state disparities between Maori and Pakeha social status without historical context, or without comparison with earlier Maori statistics? **YES** **NO**

Is the background to any conflict, Treaty claim or grievance explained? **YES** **NO**

## USE OF TE REO MAORI

*News items or outlets that use few words in te reo Maori are likely to convey a monocultural viewpoint.*

Does the story or media outlet use any words in te reo Maori? **YES** **NO**

Are the words in te reo Maori all used by or summarising a Maori speaker? **YES** **NO**

Does the item use English words (such as tribe) instead of words or phrases in te reo Maori that are part of New Zealand English (such as iwi)? **YES** **NO**

Does the item use only English words and concepts about resources? **YES** **NO**  
*[For example, ownership has different meanings to Maori concepts such as kaitiakitanga or mana.]*

Does the item use te reo Maori correctly? **YES** **NO**  
*[For example, add s to make a plural; misspell Maori names or words; mispronounce Te Reo Maori.]*

MAY BE POSITIVE

MAY BE NEUTRAL

MAY BE NEGATIVE OR UNFAIR OR UNBALANCED

## IMAGES AND PRESENTATION

Are headlines or teasers backed up by quotes from named sources? **YES** **NO**

How do you rate the images of Maori presented by the item?  
*[Persistent images of Maori as aggressive or extremists, for example, may be unbalanced.]*

## ABSENCES

If the story is about the Treaty, does it summarise the relevant Treaty clause? **YES** **NO**

Does the story make assertions about Maori actions that are unsupported by comment from Maori? **YES** **NO**

Does the story consist of non-Maori debating Treaty policy without any Maori comment? **YES** **NO**

Are Pakeha/European New Zealanders identified by ethnicity in the story?  
*[If Pakeha ethnicity is not mentioned as one among many, it becomes an unquestioned norm and other ethnicities are represented as exotic or "different".]*

Does the story include discussion of a Treaty-based future? **YES** **NO**

Do you know of important Maori stories that have not been reported at all?

MAY BE POSITIVE

MAY BE NEUTRAL

MAY BE NEGATIVE OR UNFAIR OR UNBALANCED

# Possible actions about news items prejudicial to Maori

## COMPLAIN TO THE NEWS SOURCE

- > **Complain in writing to the editor or news producer.** Letters criticising the way a media outlet reported an issue are unlikely to be published.
  - > **Organise a delegation to the editor or news producer to discuss the issue.**
  - > **Organise a complaints campaign.** In late 2007, Allies of Whānau of Aotearoa (AWA) organised an email complaints campaign about TVNZ reporting, which referred to Tuhoe arrested on gun offences as Maori activists, in contrast to the BBC and Al Jazeera, which called them Maori rights or sovereignty campaigners. AWA likened this to reports of the New Orleans floods that described Black people as “looters” and White people as “salvaging food”. It provided TVNZ phone numbers and points to make in complaints.
- In 2007, Wellington writers’ group Writers Block distributed *Burn This CD*, a copyright-free CD of writing and songs criticising the October 15 police raids. Recipients were asked to copy the free CD and pass it on.

## COMPLAIN TO STANDARDS BODIES

The New Zealand Press Council (NZPC) is responsible for formal complaints about breaches of media news standards for newspapers and magazines; the Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) for radio and television. Both can take months to arrive at a decision, require a lot of work from the complainant, and agree with (“uphold”) only a small minority of the complaints made to them. Both agencies have a similar process.

### Complaints processes

**Complainants must write** to the publication or broadcast outlet within a certain time of the publication of the item in question.

If you do not hear back or you are dissatisfied with their reply, you can then complain in writing to the standards authority. You have to include your letters to and from the media outlet, all the details of the media item and any background material.

The standards body sends your complaint to the media outlet for comment, and refers any response to you. You can make a final comment that is sent back to the media outlet for their response. The standards body then makes a decision.

### Penalties

If the NZPC agrees with your complaint, it can require the publication/s concerned to publish a summary of its decision.

The BSA can order broadcasters to publish a correction or a summary of the decision, or pay up to \$5,000 to the government.

In extremely serious cases, the BSA has the power to order a broadcaster to stop advertising for up to 24 hours or stop broadcasting altogether.

A 2007 review of the NZPC recommended that it become an independent legal entity, separate in the public eye from the publications that fund it, and that its standards be urgently reviewed. The review also recommended that e-publications such as newspaper websites be included in its brief.

### Letters to the editor

One of the most common complaints to the NZPC is the lack of publication or cuts to letters to the editor; the NZPC recognises the right of editors to control completely whether and how they publish this correspondence.

### High threshold

The BSA says that the right to free expression means that a high threshold must be crossed before it considers

a standard breached. Breaches have included broadcasts with a high level of abuse; those which portrayed a section of the community as inherently inferior or in a highly offensive way; and those that encouraged negative racial stereotypes or amounted to hate speech.

### Successful iwi complaint

Ngati Pukenga of Tauranga was one iwi to use the process successfully; their complaint to the BSA about a *Holmes* programme in 2002 took more than ten months to be resolved.

Ngati Pukenga had registered a Bay of Plenty mountain as wāhi tapu. *Holmes*’ intro started: “..wait till you hear about this one. Prepare to go ballistic.” Four Pakeha landowners (but no Maori landowners) were interviewed; the Maori interviewee had not been involved in the registration.

The BSA agreed that the item was unfair and unbalanced and required the *Holmes* programme to broadcast a summary of its decision. ([See www.bsa.govt.nz/decisions/2003/2003-109.html](http://www.bsa.govt.nz/decisions/2003/2003-109.html))

### Monocultural standards

Researchers employed by the BSA found in 2005 that its broadcasting standards do not take into account existing unequal power relations in New Zealand or Maori cultural values - that is, they are inherently

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monocultural - and the same could be said of the very similar NZPC standards.

(See [www.bsa.govt.nz/publications/BSA-PortrayalofMaori.pdf](http://www.bsa.govt.nz/publications/BSA-PortrayalofMaori.pdf))

Few of the news items which depict Maori or Treaty issues negatively, for example by framing them as about “race” rather than commitments by the Crown to hapu, would breach media standards. Yet the damage done to Maori/Pakeha relations and a Treaty-based future by this common media framing is insidious and potentially more damaging than the much less frequent use of hate speech, for example.

Few individuals or organisations have the persistence of Ngati Pukenga, in the face of standards that do not mention the Treaty or incorporate Maori cultural values.

## BOYCOTT

Boycotts of media outlets are an effective tactic by organisations such as iwi, especially those responsible for major events or within their own rohe. Boycotts of major advertisers in offending media require more participants. As news exists to sell audiences to advertisers, media outlets are very sensitive to any tactic that affects advertisers.

Boycotts can be more effective if the organisation continues to speak to

the offending media’s opposition. This includes different media types, for example speaking to radio and boycotting television, as well as media under different ownership.

## Boycott examples

In 2003, kaumatua at Te Tii Marae decided to ban mass media reporters from their annual Waitangi hui because of their consistent focus on conflict and inaccurate representation of the event. The media’s response ranged from apoplectic to bemused.

In 2007, the Kingitanga banned the *New Zealand Herald* from covering the anniversary of the coronation of Te Arikiniui Kingi Tuheitia at Turangawaewae. This was in response to the paper’s publication of an inappropriate photograph taken of him and his father at the anniversary of his mother’s death.

A third example is the Whakatohea Maori Trust Board’s boycott of one of the two reporters at the *Opotiki News*.

## PROTEST

Where media coverage results in wide-spread community reaction, a protest can highlight community concern.

## Protest example

In the 1990s, Taranaki Maori organised a march in New Plymouth to celebrate the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. A focal point of the march was the office of the *Daily News*, which had a policy of referring to Mt Taranaki as Mt Egmont, even changing its name in direct quotes. The original name of Taranaki had already been recognised by the New Zealand Geographic Board. Local iwi perceived the newspaper’s policy as a huge slap in the face. One protester rode his horse up the front steps of the newspaper building.

## SUPPORT ALLIED CAMPAIGNS

The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU), which represents journalists, is campaigning against cost-cutting and out-sourcing in news production by big media companies and the “dumbing down” of reporting.

The Human Rights Commission is also campaigning for better reporting and representation of cultural diversity in the country’s newsrooms.

## USE INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Watch, listen and read Maori-controlled

broadcast news and publications; they present Maori perspectives on Aotearoa that are rarely available in mass media. Support other independent media outlets such as Indymedia and blogs, which also provide alternative views.

Send news releases from your organisations to Maori media first, or tell them about issues that the mass media have framed negatively so the record can be set straight.

## RESOURCES

### Complaints

[www.presscouncil.org.nz/](http://www.presscouncil.org.nz/)  
[www.bsa.govt.nz/](http://www.bsa.govt.nz/)

### Maori and independent media

**Maori TV:** [www.maoritelevision.com/](http://www.maoritelevision.com/)

**Iwi radio:** [www.irirangi.net/](http://www.irirangi.net/)

**Magazines:** [www.manaonline.co.nz/](http://www.manaonline.co.nz/)

[www.tumaimagazine.com/](http://www.tumaimagazine.com/)  
[www.ngaitahu.iwi.nz/News%20and%20Publications/Publications/Te%20Karaka](http://www.ngaitahu.iwi.nz/News%20and%20Publications/Publications/Te%20Karaka)

**Indymedia:** [www.indymedia.org.nz/](http://www.indymedia.org.nz/)

### Allied campaigns

**HRC:** [www.hrc.co.nz/home/hrc/introduction/tengirathenzdiversityactionprogramme/ngar-eotangatadiversityandthedia.php](http://www.hrc.co.nz/home/hrc/introduction/tengirathenzdiversityactionprogramme/ngar-eotangatadiversityandthedia.php)

**EPMU:** [www.epmu.org.nz/SITE\\_Default/SITE\\_OurMedia/SITE\\_ormda/](http://www.epmu.org.nz/SITE_Default/SITE_OurMedia/SITE_ormda/)

See [www.trc.org.nz/resources/media.htm](http://www.trc.org.nz/resources/media.htm) for reports and summaries of Kupu Taea research.