Report Title:	**Instruction to change the branded name of the Commission**		
Report No:	**MoSR 2026-0091**		
Date:	1 April 2026		
To:	**Hon Judith Collins KC, Minister for the Public Service**		
Action Sought:	**Note** the contents of this briefing **Confirm** your instruction to commence a process to change the branded name of the Commission	**Due Date:**	As needed
Contact Person:	Hugo Vitalis, Deputy Chief Executive, Strategy, Policy and Integrity		
Encl:	No	**Priority**	High
Security Level:	**IN CONFIDENCE**		

Purpose of Report

1. This report responds to your instruction at the agency meeting on Wednesday 25 March that the Commissioner reverse the ordering of the Te Reo and English terms in the Public Service Commission's **branded** name. (Note that the legal name under Schedule 2 of the Public Service Act remains the 'Public Service Commission'.)

Background

2. Coalition agreements at the start of this term of government included a commitment to "ensure all public service departments have their primary name in English, except for those specifically related to Māori."

3. On 5 December 2023, the Commission provided the then Minister for the Public Service, Hon Nicola Willis, with advice on the current settings for the use of Te Reo Māori in the public sector (including legal names, branding, and agency naming conventions). It included options to address the coalition commitments (MoSR 2023-0302). No Cabinet paper or policy statement was subsequently progressed on the issue of agency names.

4. In May 2024, we provided advice to the Minister in response to media questions as to whether the public service was implementing a Government policy to primarily use English names for agencies [2024-0143 refers]. We advised that, while there had been no general policy decision, public service chief executives must follow lawful instructions from their Ministers on this matter. In the case of directions relating to the use of agency names, we noted relevant considerations may include checking consistency with the Māori Language Act 2016 and the Treaty of Waitangi.

5. We subsequently provided the Minister with an Aide-Memoire for what we understand was an oral discussion at Cabinet [2024-0155 refers], which outlined a "case-by-case" approach where Ministers:

   - will need to articulate their request in writing or have it confirmed in writing by their chief executive; and

- should ensure advice is sought from the Attorney-General in relation to the Crown's obligations to promote Te Reo Māori and matters relevant to consistency with the Māori Language Act 2016 and the Treaty of Waitangi.

6. While the matter was discussed, there was no specific minute for the conversation. However, Minister Willis subsequently wrote to the Acting Commissioner advising that no further general policy on the use of Te Reo in agency names had been progressed, and that, pursuant to a request under the Official Information Act, she had explained the above (case by case) position to Hon Duncan Webb.

The Commission's current Branding

7. The name "Te Kawa Mataaho", was the result of work commissioned from Sir Pou Temara, a prominent Māori language expert and member of Tēkau-mā-rua, the official Council of the Kingitanga. The rebrand followed the change of the Commission's legal name through the Public Service Act 2020 (from State Services Commission to the Public Service Commission).

8. The branding approach was considered consistent with the purpose of The Māori Language Act 2016, which seeks to the affirm the status of the Māori language as a "language valued by the nation" (section 3(2)(iii)). Placing the Te Reo Māori term first was also viewed as consistent with Te Puni Kokiri guidance, which drew on internationally recognised standards in bilingual signage that place a language needing revival first.

9. A summary of relevant statutory provisions and previous dialogue between the Crown and Māori relevant to these issues is provided at **Appendix One**.

Waitangi Tribunal Inquiry (Wai 3327)

10. For completeness, the Waitangi Tribunal Inquiry on the use of Te Reo in the public sector (Wai 3327) considered (among other things) Crown actions following Coalition agreement commitments to ensure all public service departments have their primary name in English. In relation to actions on various agency names, the Tribunal found that:

    - the Crown's actions breached the Treaty principles and were inconsistent with its obligations to Māori under the Māori Language Act;
    - in failing to reference obligations to Te Reo under the Treaty, statute, and international law when advising the Minister of the Public Service on this matter in December 2023 (MoSR 2023-0302 refers) the Commission failed to comply with Treaty obligations and the obligations in section 14 of the Public Service Act.

11. A summary of the tribunal's findings is provided at **Appendix Two**. We note that while influential, the Government is not bound by the findings of the Tribunal.

Comment

12. As there is no blanket Cabinet decision on the implementation of the coalition commitment, changes to the Commission's branded name are a matter for you as portfolio Minister. Consistent with the advice provided to Minister Willis in 2024 and her subsequent letter to the Acting Commissioner, to implement your direction:

    - We seek confirmation of your instruction to commence the process via this report.

- If your instruction is confirmed, 9(2)(h) legal privilege
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- If your instruction is confirmed, we will also engage with Sir Pou Temara and undertake any other necessary steps, 9(2)(h) legal privilege
- you may also wish to seek the views of the Acting Attorney-General.

Risks

13. As indicated by the Tribunal, a reversal in name order is likely to be seen as inherently detrimental and a de-prioritisation of the promotion of Te Reo Māori (as the language is in need of revitalisation in order to survive), and as diminishing Crown efforts to meet its acknowledged duties of active protection and partnership, thus doing material harm to the Crown-Māori relationship. This is likely to be the case given this is a matter the Tribunal has considered and reported on, and in view of the Commission's role at the centre of government.
14. There are also considerations relating to the fact the name is associated with a person of Sir Pou's standing. At the Tribunal, Sir Pou spoke about the process he undertook and the meaning and significance of the name. 9(2)(g)(i) free and frank
15. In this context, the change is unlikely to assist in addressing the significant gap between Māori and non-Maori scores in measures of trust in the public service, satisfaction with services, and trust in the public service brand, all of which are likely to contribute to better outcomes for Māori in the long term.

Recommended Action

We recommend that you:

a **note** the contents of this report.

b **confirm** your instruction to the Commission commence a process to reverse the ordering of Te Reo and English terms in its branded name.

Confirmed / Not confirmed

c **note** that if you instruct us to proceed, 9(2)(h) legal privilege

Hon Judith Collins KC
Minister for the Public Service

Appendix One: Crown-Māori dialogue on Te Reo and statutory provisions

16. There is a substantial history of dialogue between the Crown and Māori in relation to the preservation, revival and protection of Te Reo Māori (including multiple Tribunal inquiries considering the matter). There have been significant Crown interventions in line with this dialogue, including the establishment of Māori language and broadcasting organisations, Crown agreed Māori Language strategies and the production of guidance on bilingual signage, and Crown funding support.

17. In this dialogue, the Crown has repeatedly acknowledged (including in the Waitangi Tribunal) that it has Treaty of Waitangi based obligations of:

    - Active protection – to preserve and protect the taonga of Te Reo Māori, and Māori rangatiratanga over Te Reo; and
    - Partnership – to assist with the protection of Te Reo in partnership with Māori.

18. In addition, the purposes of Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016 – The Māori Language Act – explicitly include affirming the status of the Māori language as a language valued by the nation and providing means to support and revitalise it. Section six of this Act expresses the Crown's commitment to work in partnership with iwi and Māori to continue actively to protect and promote this taonga for future generations, while section 9(1)(a) and (b) provide that, as far as is reasonably practicable, a department of state should be guided by the principles that:

    - Iwi and Māori should be consulted on matters relating to the Māori language (including for example, the promotion of the use of the language); and
    - the Māori language should be used in the promotion to the public of government services and in the provision of information to the public.

19. Section 14 of the Public Service Act affirms the role of the public service to support the Crown in its relationships with Māori under the Treaty, stating that it does so by the Commissioner and public service chief executives developing and maintaining the capability of the public service to engage with Māori and to understand Māori perspectives.

Appendix Two: Findings of the Wai 3327 Inquiry

20. The Waitangi Tribunal Inquiry on the use of Te Reo in the public sector (Wai 3327) considered (among other things) Crown actions following Coalition agreement commitments to ensure all public service departments have their primary name in English.

21. In relation to actions on various agency names, the Tribunal found that:

    - the Crown's actions breached the Treaty principles and were inconsistent with its obligations to Māori under the Māori Language Act;
    - in failing to reference obligations to Te Reo under the Treaty, statute, and international law when advising the Minister of the Public Service on this matter in December 2023 (MoSR 2023-0302 refers) the Commission failed to comply with Treaty obligations and the obligations in section 14 of the Public Service Act.

22. In coming to its findings and in considering actions in relation to specific agencies (e.g. the reversal of the name Waka Kotahi – New Zealand Transport Agency), the Tribunal emphasised that

    - placing the Te Reo term first was consistent with existing guidance by Te Puni Kokiri, which draws on internationally recognised standards in bilingual signage that place the language needing revival first;
    - in this context, the symbolism inherent in reversal of the terms is detrimental to Te Reo, and will be seen by Māori as a de-prioritisation;
    - the Crown failure to consult Māori on any proposed changes was a significant factor in the inconsistency of such actions with statutory and Treaty obligations; and
    - consultation obligations should extend particularly to people who gifted the Te Reo name for the agency.