

10 August 2009

The Chairman
New Zealand Geographic Board
C/- Land Information New Zealand
P O Box 5501
Wellington 6145

Dear Sir

**PROPOSED NAME CHANGE: FROM WANGANUI TO
WHANGANUI**

This submission is made on behalf of not just the Wanganui District Council, but on behalf of the people of Wanganui.

The Council is constitutionally responsible for the representation and wellbeing of our community. But, twice now, it has sought the direct input of the community into this specific issue of the naming of Wanganui. This has been achieved by postal referenda in both 2006 and 2009, and supported by impartial information campaigns.

The New Zealand Geographic Board (NZGB), after its decision that the city and district were not spelt correctly, conducted a number of question and answer sessions with the '*Wanganui Chronicle*'.

In one answer, the NZGB spokesman said that Wanganui people may have come to a different conclusion if they had been provided with more relevant and recent information.

Subsequently, the applicants have had their viewpoint published and the Council has also commissioned an independent report by historian Diana Beaglehole regarding the naming of Wanganui and its usage over the last 170 years.

In a letter to the editor of the '*Wanganui Chronicle*' [3 August 2009] Malcolm McKinnon confirms that Diana Beaglehole is held in very high regard by her historian peers and this view is reinforced by the thoroughness and impartiality of her report on the spelling of Wanganui (*Appendix 1*).

The referendum question in 2009 was thus held against a background of extensive public education and an assertive promotion of the Board's position and proposition.

61% of the registered population voted (over 19,000 voters) and the results were as follows:

- 77% preferred that the city and district be spelt as 'Wanganui'
- 22% preferred the name change to 'Whanganui'
- 1% informal/blank

It is absolutely clear that the people most affected by the proposition of the NZGB are adamantly opposed to any spelling alteration. '*Referendum '09*' essentially mirrors the earlier result of 2006.

At its meeting on 20 July 2009, the Wanganui District Council resolved the following:

THAT the Wanganui District Council submits to the NZ Geographic Board that the spelling of Wanganui city echoing the express desire of the majority of the people of Wanganui as expressed through Referendum '09, remain with the status quo, and also provide as part of that submission an updated history on the naming of Wanganui by historian Diana Beaglehole.

REASONS FOR RETAINING THE STATUS QUO

1. Upholding democracy

'Referendum '09' results support the retention of the status quo spelling of Wanganui.

2. Common usage

Wanganui is not a Maori name. It belongs to the entire Wanganui community and common usage has made it so over the past 170 years. It has been accepted as the correct spelling by both Maori and Pakeha until comparatively recently. It is still the overwhelming preference.

Whatever the original spelling – and we know now that that was without the 'h' – the name has acquired a mana, heritage and identity of its own throughout New Zealand and the international community.

There are many place names that have evolved from their original spelling and meaning. Wanganui is one of them.

3. The community's choice

Our community should not be forced to change and accept a spelling by an organisation and group of people who have no affiliation with Wanganui at all. In other words, the NZGB position seeks to impose an alien solution.

Up until now, the wider Wanganui community has been prepared to accept that there is a specifically Maori name for Wanganui and that is with the 'h', even though there was no written Maori language when those given the responsibility were transcribing the name Wanganui. This has led to a tolerance of different viewpoints, which has been both healthy and complementary. To choose one spelling over the other in 2009 would be to select a "winner" and the others' feelings, sensibilities and heritage rendered void.

Dual usage is perhaps best demonstrated by Aoraki/Mount Cook or Mount Taranaki/Mount Egmont which effectively have two place names which are legitimate and in common usage. If there is to be one place

name for Wanganui, usage and evolution should determine that evolves within the community, rather than being imposed from outside.

4. Pronunciation

Wanganui is the only Maori dialect that does not sound its 'h' - which is the reason for the original written spelling of Wanganui.

One might argue that the Wanganui settlers may have recognised that difference and that it more adequately represents the cultural place of local Maori within the wider district. Already Whanganui with an 'h' is being pronounced as '*Fonganui*' by those outside our district.

The difference between the status quo and the proposed spelling means no pronunciation difference for locals but a vast difference for others outside the district who would pronounce it '*Fonganui*' and already do so in all media and public forums.

It is time that the Maori of Wanganui had their unique dialect recognised in the spelling. Tupoho's original submission seems to fly in the face of recognising that difference. The pronunciation of Whanganui as '*Fonganui*' would cause a wider cultural offence and eventually subsume the unique pronunciation of our city.

Attachments:

Appendix 1:

Letter to the editor of the '*Wanganui Chronicle*', 3 August 2009, from Malcolm McKinnon.

Appendix 2:

'The Naming of Wanganui' – a paper prepared for the Wanganui District Council, Diana Beaglehole, May 2009.

Yours sincerely

Michael Laws
Mayor
Wanganui District