

Friends of Te Papa
c/- Demi Heath

27 March 2019

Kia ora tatou,

I wanted to write to you regarding recent changes at Te Papa. Before I do though, I need to acknowledge the horrific events in Christchurch. Te Papa has expressed publicly our utter abhorrence of this hate crime. We have been offering support to our team, we have put in place a book of condolence on the floor for visitors and staff to sign, and we have increased our security measures in the building. Our history team are monitoring the community response and collecting items and images that reflect this time in our nation's history.

Beyond these immediate responses, we are considering how Te Papa can take a leadership role in the aftermath of these events, whether through public programmes and events, working with communities, public statements, exhibitions or collecting. You will appreciate that there are a lot of things to think about, and that Te Papa's response needs to be thoughtful and well considered. One thing is certain, in these troubled times Te Papa has an opportunity and a duty to stand up for the values we hold dear and to play our role as a forum for the nation.

To turn to the matter of changes at Te Papa. You may have seen some media coverage of this, particularly in relation to our science area. The changes we've made in science are designed to create a better career path for science researchers working in taxonomy. This is so important in a narrow field where many are nearing retirement.

The need for more entry-level roles and better career paths was identified by the Royal Society of New Zealand in its report on taxonomic research needs. This is a reality that the whole network of taxonomic research institutions worldwide needs to grapple with, not just Te Papa.

We've reshaped the team to give as much priority as we can to roles that carry out research: assistant curators, curators and lead curators. We will be appointing internal candidates to these roles where we have staff who have the right qualifications and experience, and advertising externally where we need to bring in new expertise. We have had huge national and international interest in these new research roles and we are excited about the calibre of researchers we can bring into our team.

The overall size of the team remains the same. Three collection manager roles are removed, with new assistant curator, lead curator and technician roles added. Regrettably, the removal of the collection manager roles means that there are staff who are made redundant. As you know, this is never easy.

We really value the contribution that former staff can make beyond the end of their working careers with Te Papa. We seek to retain strong ties with people when they leave, as demonstrated through research fellowships and similar roles which we have in place with a number of former staff. Dame Claudia Orange is an example of this and there are many more.

During the same change process we also disestablished the role of curator of historical international art. Again, this was not an easy decision and we have been fortunate to be able to ensure ongoing strong ties with Dr Mark Stocker who held this role. We will retain an international historical art collection, and continue to have expertise in this area through curator Dr Rebecca Rice.



We've done our best throughout this process to respond to criticisms and explain the thinking behind our changes. Of course we have to balance this with the need to respect the employment process, and the privacy of our staff. It is frustrating to us that individuals involved in a confidential process have been named by media and their photographs used, but we are committed respecting the privacy of our people and our good faith obligations as their employer.

These are exciting times at Te Papa, particularly for science. The opening of *Te Taiao | Nature* in May is the biggest ever investment we have made in science education. With more than 1,200 natural history specimens on show, it is a showcase for the national collections. And with its vast array of new interactive learning experiences, it aims to be a catalyst for real change on issues like climate change, plastics and fresh water.

One of the things that attracts research scientists to Te Papa is the opportunity to communicate directly with the public through exhibitions, talks and public programmes. We look forward to showcasing our natural history team – both our existing staff and our new recruits – in our programmes once the exhibition is open. I know the Friends will enjoy hearing from our science team as they continue to build on the research legacy of those that have gone before.

I appreciate the chance to talk to you directly and I hope I've assured you that we remain totally committed to doing our taxonomic research, and to having the right mix of skills in our team to do that.

While we grapple with the after effects of the Christchurch attacks, it is more important than ever to stand by the values we hold dear, to come together as a community, and to embrace diverse perspectives. We are honoured to be able to offer a forum where all people can be welcome and see themselves reflected in our collections, research and programmes.

Ngā mihi nui,



Geraint Martin
Chief Executive

