

Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage



Ministry  
for Culture  
& Heritage

**BRIEFING**

**Creating National Memorials to the 1979 Erebus Crash and Other Disasters**

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|------------|------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Date:      | 24 November 2017 | Deadline: | 24 November 2017 |
| Reference: | BR2017/470       | Priority: | High             |

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| <b>Recommendations for Action</b>  |
| <p><b>Consider</b> the symbolic value of a new national memorial in the context of other priorities</p> <p><b>Decide</b> whether a new Erebus memorial should be progressed</p> <p><b>Direct</b> the preparation a Cabinet paper or further policy advice, as appropriate</p> <p><b>Sign</b> the attached responses to correspondents on this matter</p> |

|                 |                                  |            |                         |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Contacts</b> |                                  |            |                         |
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|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Minister's office to complete | <input type="checkbox"/> Approved             | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined            |
|                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Noted                | <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change        |
|                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Seen                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by events |
|                               | <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn           |
| Comments:                     |   |  |

## Purpose

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- 1 This briefing provides advice on the possible creation of a national memorial to the Erebus crash of 1979, potentially as part of a suite of national memorials to disasters.

## Key Messages

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- 2 The Erebus crash is a worthy subject of national memorialisation.
- 3 Any decision to create a new national memorial should be taken in the context of existing memorials, and calls for memorialisation of other disasters.
- 4 Cabinet's approval will be required to advance an Erebus memorial.

## Recommendations

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- 5 The Ministry for Culture and Heritage recommends that you:
  - a **Consider** the symbolic value of a new national memorial for the Erebus crash in the context of other priorities for national memorials
  - b **EITHER**
    - i. **Decline** to create a new national Erebus memorial at this time  
**Agree / Disagree**
    - OR**
    - ii. **Agree** to the creation of a new national Erebus memorial; and
    - iii. **Direct** the Ministry to prepare a Cabinet paper seeking 'in principle approval' as a basis for communicate to families, engagement with stakeholders and further work on scoping and location options  
**Agree / Disagree**
    - OR**
    - iv. **Agree** that the creation of a new national memorial to the Erebus crash will be considered in the context of the range of possible subjects of new national memorials and direct the Ministry to undertake policy advice accordingly; and  
**Agree / Disagree**

c **Sign** the attached responses to correspondents on this matter

**Agree / Disagree**

9(2)(a)

Heather Baggott  
**Group Manager, Delivery**

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern  
**Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage**

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PROACTIVELY RELEASED

## Background

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- 6 You and your associate Ministers have received correspondence from Reverend Dr Richard Waugh, who convenes a group calling for a memorial to the Erebus crash of 1979. The group largely comprises relatives of those killed in the crash.
- 7 Over the last two years Reverend Dr Waugh has corresponded regularly with the previous Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, and with officials. The Ministry has worked closely with his group, including travelling to Auckland to meet with members. Relations between the group and the Ministry are very cordial, but we are aware of members' mounting frustration in the absence of a decision on the whether or not government will fund a national memorial to this disaster.

## Comment

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### ***No formal government policy on the creation of national memorials***

- 8 Government has a two-tier commemorations policy, which emphasises the marking of significant anniversaries – generally multiples of 25. (You will be briefed separately on the commemorations policy shortly.) But government does not have a formal policy on the construction of memorials. It has at times created national memorials when it has seemed appropriate to recognise an event, relationship or individual that has had a very significant impact on the nation. In some cases, these memorials are focussed on military events or relationships. Other memorials honour former Prime Ministers. National memorials are managed by this Ministry.
- 9 In two cases only, the government has created a formal national memorial to the victims of a non-military disaster:
  - the memorial to the 1953 Tangiwai railway disaster at Karori Cemetery in Wellington
  - the recently unveiled Canterbury Earthquake National Memorial in Christchurch
- 10 The absence of a formal national memorial does not mean a disaster is not memorialised. There are many other memorial 'providers', including local authorities, community and professional groups, and sympathetic individuals. It is through their efforts that (for example) memorials to the Hawke's Bay earthquake of 1931, the loss of the Wahine ferry in 1968, the 1979 Erebus crash, and the Pike River mine accident in 2010 have been created. (Wahine, Erebus and Pike River have all been marked by several memorials, none of them 'national'.)

- 11 Government can endorse a memorial through such means as high level attendance at unveiling and commemorative events without it having a 'national memorial' designation. Conversely, government can choose to recognise a disaster without creating a formal memorial – the walking track established in acknowledgement of the Pike River Mine victims is a case in point.
- 12 The memorials landscape is a complex one, therefore, and government's involvement in it is appropriately determined on a case by case basis. Memorials are created where it is agreed that there is the need, firstly, to acknowledge a national loss, on behalf of all New Zealanders and, secondly, to respond to the calls for a memorial from the bereaved. In the Ministry's view, there is no advantage to government creating a more detailed policy on national memorials, and specifically national memorials to disasters. Its implementation would always be impacted significantly by the charged and unforeseen nature of these events, the other roles that government likely has in relation to a significant disaster (eg recovery, investigative, judicial); and the provision of memorials by others.
- 13 But the positive reception given the Canterbury Earthquake National Memorial demonstrates that the sensitive development of a memorial by government (in consultation with important stakeholders) can both appropriately recognise the national impact of an event, and play a part in healing those most directly affected.

***Is there a case for national memorials to other disasters?***

- 14 It is only those disasters that have had an extraordinary impact on the fabric and psyche of the nation that warrant consideration of formal memorialisation by government. The Ministry's Chief Historian suggests that with respect to non-military events over the last hundred years, the following would certainly meet that very high bar:
  - influenza pandemic of 1918 (more than 8600 dead)
  - Hawke's Bay earthquake of 1931 (officially 256 dead)
  - Tangiwai railway disaster of 1953 (151 dead)
  - Wahine sinking of 1968 (53 dead)
  - Erebus crash of 1979 (257 dead)
  - Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 (185 dead)
- 15 As noted, two of these disasters (the Tangiwai railway accident and the Canterbury earthquakes) already have national memorials, which list the names of all those lost. Government could contemplate completing a suite of national memorials marking the six events. Other disasters also, depending on particular circumstances, might also warrant national memorialisation as part of this suite.
- 16 For example, the Pike River disaster is (regrettably) one of a number of industrial accidents that have occurred in New Zealand during its long mining history, another being the 1967 Strongman mine accident, near Greymouth, which killed

19 miners. But the fact that Pike River happened at a time when most New Zealanders assumed that coalmining deaths were a thing of the past – that modern mining techniques and safety measures would ensure that such tragedies would no longer occur – meant that it had an extraordinary impact not only on the families, but on the nation as a whole. (It should be noted that in this instance it does not seem that families are looking for a formal ‘national memorial’ – in fact, there have been media reports that they have ‘enough memorials’ – their focus has been on recovery and accountability.)

- 17 At this point, we have considered the four disasters in the list above that are as yet un-memorialised.

### ***Influenza pandemic of 1918***

- 18 The non-military disaster that has caused by far the greatest number of deaths in New Zealand is the influenza pandemic of 1918 (8600). You have recently received correspondence from 9 (2) (a) 9 (2) (a) suggesting that a national memorial be considered. (A draft response to this letter will be separately supplied.) Other commentators have over recent months made the same suggestion.
- 19 The Ministry’s prima facie view is that a national memorial to the pandemic would certainly be appropriate. We see clear potential for a commemoration of the pandemic centenary that both links with the centenary of the end of World War One, and promotes public health messages, (and have early discussions with the Ministry of Health to this end). No significant funding has been earmarked for this centenary however, and no there has been no policy or budgeting work done around an influenza pandemic national memorial.

### ***Hawke’s Bay earthquake of 1931***

- 20 The Ministry does not consider creating a national memorial for this disaster is a priority: there is a substantial civic memorial in Napier, and we have not noted any public suggestion that another memorial is desirable. If this matter is to be reconsidered we suggest that it be so nearer the centenary of the event. On the other hand, if government wishes to develop a series of further memorials to disasters, this could be signalled several years earlier, as part of a planned programme. In any event, 2031 would seem the obvious date to which any new memorial is attached.

### ***Wahine sinking of 1968***

- 21 The 50th anniversary of the sinking of the Wahine will occur in April next year. It is a ‘tier two’ anniversary under the government’s commemorations policy, meaning that it is a significant anniversary of a highly important event (though not one of the same magnitude as those such as the First World War, the first meetings of Cook with Maori, and the signing of Treaty of Waitangi, which generate ‘tier one’ anniversaries).
- 22 Planning is underway at a local level to mark the anniversary. A charitable trust headed by former head of the NZDF, Rhys Jones is working with local councils

and other groups to organise a series of commemorative events. Given our coordinating role in commemorations, the Ministry is liaising with this group and other stakeholders and providing limited assistance – we are not resourced to play a significant part in delivering tier two commemorations ourselves, though our commemorative and historical expertise, and our publications, are often useful to those who do.

- 23 To date, a national memorial marking the sinking of the Wahine has not been called for or considered. In large part this is because the sinking is already well memorialised – we understand that there are local memorials at Pencarrow, Eastbourne and Seatoun. None of these list the names of those lost, but those names do appear in a panel at the Museum of Wellington, which has put considerable effort into marking the anniversary each year.
- 24 The upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary does present an opportunity for the government to consider whether an addition to the memorial landscape is desirable. There is not time now to build a memorial before next April, but the intent to create a new memorial could be announced on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and its construction could be included in a broader programme of work.
- 25 A national memorial to the loss of the Wahine would be a natural part of such a broader programme of work, but we do not consider that the creation of a Wahine memorial is in itself a priority.

### ***Erebus crash of 1979***

- 26 There have been numerous calls for the creation of a national memorial to the plane crash on Erebus in 1979 (notwithstanding the fact that there are other memorials in New Zealand and Antarctica that recognise the tragedy). Families of the victims have been vocal about wanting a single memorial where the names of the dead are recorded, but there are good reasons beyond the needs of the bereaved why government would prioritise the creation of such a memorial:
  - it remains New Zealand’s worst civil disaster in terms of loss of life with 257 killed, and the scale of loss shocked all New Zealanders
  - the plane was lost from the fleet of the distinctive and trusted national carrier; Air New Zealand was in full state ownership at that time
  - the crash was significant in international terms; at the time it was the world’s fourth worst aviation accident and there were 57 overseas nationals (mostly from Japan and the United States) on the flight
  - the plane was lost in Antarctica, a continent with which New Zealanders sense a special relationship but which very few will visit – therefore there is no obvious central memorial, unless government creates one
  - the subsequent enquiry raised questions of blame and integrity that have never been resolved, but that may be somewhat laid to rest by a sensitive process of memorial creation.

- 27 It is in relation to that last point that the national perspective comes into closest alignment with the views of the families. They have a keen sense that the Erebus disaster is still not quite 'out in the open' and that compromises their ability to grieve and remember as they would wish to. The Ministry is sympathetic to this view, and to their desire to have a place where all victims' names are listed. We stress, though, that the key driver of national memorial creation is the need to acknowledge a national loss, on behalf of all New Zealanders. It is only when this test is passed that government is in a position to respond to the more specific (though heartfelt) needs of the families.
- 28 We suggest, therefore, that there are other stakeholders (such as Air New Zealand) who will need to be spoken to as part of the process of developing a national memorial to the crash.
- 29 The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash will occur in November 2019, and would give government a good platform to either announce or unveil a national memorial – the feasibility of the latter would be dependent on its scale. Government would have to determine as part of any process what would be an appropriate scale and therefore cost – at the upper end, the Canterbury Earthquake Memorial cost in the region of \$8 million. The location of any memorial would also need to be agreed – there are a number of options, and the families cite Auckland as a natural possibility, but do not have a firm view.
- 30 We understand that you may visit Antarctica in 2018. That too would provide a natural opportunity to announce a new national memorial.

## Next steps

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- 31 The construction of a new national memorial is both highly political and highly symbolic. National memorials (like all commemorative activity) provide rallying points for the nation to remember and to honour, and natural opportunities for leaders to speak to citizens about identity and history.
- 32 This paper suggests that there are clear reasons why a memorial to Erebus would be appropriate. We do note, though, both the complexity of the memorials-landscape, and the competing demands on the memorial dollar. Any announcement that the government has decided to create a memorial to Erebus would certainly generate commentary that there are other deserving disasters (most notably the 1918 influenza pandemic).
- 33 Three broad-brush options are now available to you:
- a You determine that no new national memorial should be created at this time
  - b You determine that a national memorial to Erebus is appropriate, and therefore:
    - Direct the Ministry to prepare a Cabinet paper for your colleagues' 'in principle' agreement to this course of action



- c You determine that it is appropriate to consider an Erebus memorial as part of a suite of memorial issues, that you will set the timeframe for doing so and direct the preparation of Cabinet papers accordingly.
- 34 Should you wish to have further information around options and costings for any new national memorial before you make a decision, the Ministry will undertake further investigations. It should be noted that though memorials are highly scalable, the \$8 million Canterbury Earthquake Memorial has created a benchmark in the public mind. Though an Erebus Memorial could certainly be smaller and less expensive, it could not be seen to be done cheaply, and would require Cabinet agreement and a new appropriation.
- 35 If the decision to create a memorial is taken, the Ministry's extensive experience in constructing and managing memorials, and the constructive relationship it has with the group representing Erebus families, will mean that it is well placed to advance the issue on your behalf.
- 36 We have in the meantime prepared a 'holding' response to correspondents.