



## Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage

### BRIEFING

#### CREATING NATIONAL MEMORIALS TO DISASTERS: NEXT STEPS, FOR DISCUSSION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER

<b>Date:</b>	27 April 2017	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Briefing Number:</b>	2017/135	<b>TRIM Ref:</b>	D-0711522
		<b>TRIM Folder:</b>	2010-09500

Action sought	Deadline
<p><b>Agree</b> to discuss with the Prime Minister the possibility of creating a national memorial to the Erebus crash as part of a suite of new memorials marking major civic disasters</p> <p><b>Sign</b> the attached draft letter to the Prime Minister</p>	

Contacts				
Name	Positions	Cell phone	DDI	1 <sup>st</sup> contact
Heather Baggott	Manager, Delivery Team	9(2)(a)		
Sarah Ingram	Principal Adviser			✓

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 Withdrawn           |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

---

This briefing is in response to your request for further advice on the possibility of creating new national memorials to significant disasters.

## Recommended action

---

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage recommends that you:

- a **Agree** to discuss with the Prime Minister the possibility of creating a national memorial to the Erebus crash, as part of a potential suite of new memorials marking major civic disasters of the last 100 years

- b **Sign** the attached letter to the Prime Minister

~~Agree / Disagree~~  
Further info  
requested .

- c **Note** that once the Prime Minister has signalled his willingness to meet, we will provide speaking points, and if appropriate references to potential 'digital' memorials online

Seen by Hon. Maggie Barry ONZM  
Minister for Arts, Culture & Heritage

9(2)(a)

Heather Baggott  
For Chief Executive

Hon Maggie Barry ONZM  
Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage

16 / 5 / 2017

## Background

---

- 1 On 23 March we reported to you on our initial investigations into the case for a national memorial to the Erebus disaster (2017/084 refers). At our meeting of 26 March you asked that we provide you with a further briefing discussing the civil disasters considered sufficiently significant to the nation to potentially warrant a government supported national memorial.

## Comment

---

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

- 2 Government has a two-tier commemorations policy, which emphasises the marking of significant anniversaries – generally multiples of 25. 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.
- 3 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
- 4 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.
- 5 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.
- 6 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.

- 7 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?***

- 8 It is only those disasters that have had an extraordinary impact on the fabric and operation 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, only the following would meet that very high bar:

- influenza epidemic 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)

- 9 As noted, two of those events (the Tangiwai railway accident and the Canterbury earthquakes) already have national memorials, which list the names of all those lost. We have discussed with you the potential for and relative priority of national memorials for the other disasters. We have agreed that the influenza epidemic is not a priority at this time, in part because of its more diffuse nature, and its likely featuring in commemorations across the country marking the centenary of the end of the First World War.

- 10 The remaining three disasters are the Hawke's Bay earthquake of 1931, the Wahine sinking of 1968, and the Erebus crash of 1979.

**The Hawke's Bay earthquake of 1931**

- 11 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.

**The Wahine Sinking of 1968**

- 12 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).

- 13 Planning is underway at a local level to mark the anniversary. A charitable trust headed by former head of the NZDF, Rhys Jones will work with local councils and other groups to organise a series of commemorative events. Given our coordinating role in commemorations, the Ministry will liaise with this group and other stakeholders and provide 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.
- 14 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 puts considerable effort into marking the anniversary each year.
- 15 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. The scale of any memorial created to mark the anniversary would of necessity be modest, given that there is less than a year remaining to create it, and funding has not yet been secured. On the other hand, 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.
- 16 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.

### **The Erebus Crash of 1979**

- 17 As outlined in our earlier briefing, 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 that recognise some of those who died). 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.
- 18 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.
- 19 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.

## Next Steps

---

- 20 The creation of a national memorial is both highly symbolic and highly political. You have advised that you would in the first instance like to discuss with the Prime Minister the possibility of creating a national memorial to the Erebus crash, potentially as part of a suite of new national memorials marking major civic disasters of the last 100 years.
- 21 A draft letter to the Prime Minister, to which you would attach a copy of this briefing for his information, is provided for your signature, if approved.
- 22 Once the Prime Minister has signalled his willingness to meet, we will prepare some detailed speaking points for you. If you consider it appropriate we could include references to the possibility of expanding our 'digital' memorials online as an alternative to a physical memorial, but that has not been the focus of our work to date.

### **File note from Minister's Office**

The Minister would like the letter to the PM re Erebus redrafted to include reference to establishing the memorial area at Tangiwai as the primary national memorial for that disaster, rather than the current National Memorial located at Karori, Wellington

KMB 16/5/2017

Rt Hon Bill English  
Prime Minister  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

Dear Prime Minister

On 22 February this year you spoke to the nation at the unveiling of the Canterbury Earthquake National Memorial. I share your views about the importance of the memorial, and the role it will play in marking the terrible impact of the earthquakes, and the comfort it will provide.

As the Minister who has overall responsibility for government's ongoing interest in the memorial, I have now been thinking about those other disasters that might merit a national memorial (albeit not necessarily on the same scale). In part this is because I have had overtures from a number of individuals keen to see a memorial to the plane crash on Erebus in 1979.

I believe that there may well be a case for such a memorial, perhaps as part of a broader programme of marking civic disasters. I have asked officials at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage for advice, and am attaching for your information a copy of the most recent briefing I have received from them.

The creation of a national memorial is highly symbolic. I recognise that any decision to proceed with such a memorial should take place only after careful consultation – but that that consultation should itself be preceded by Ministers' in-principle consideration of the concept.

In the first instance, I would be very pleased to receive your own views on the matters raised in the attached briefing, and look forward to a discussion with you.

Yours sincerely

Hon Maggie Barry ONZM  
**Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage**