

29/11/2023

Good morning – I do not agree with this overarching Equity and Inclusion policy, and how it will serve as a replacement for the other specifically named policies. The scope is far too broad and generalised to effectively and efficiently manage competing interests and needs between the stated groups of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, culture, faiths, geographical location, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

There are no guardrails in this policy to prevent whoever's implementing it from drifting off-track into favouritism towards one group, nor guidance on how to weigh up conflicting interests and needs. Rather, it is an umbrella policy, where disparate groups are all placed into a melting-pot underneath it. This is the kind of situation where the already advantaged will be able to take the most advantage, and the loudest and/or most favoured groups will be able to apply the most pressure to the Council to make the policy work in the way they want it to. It has the potential to be extremely time and resource expensive in its management, due to being so open to interpretation. Whilst those here today may know exactly what they want from this policy, can it be guaranteed that others will know the same things from reading it, both now and in the future?

Although the Council claims adherence to the Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act under the Legislation section of this policy, it's unclear whether those Acts would take precedence over the Equity and Inclusion policy, in any matters of conflicts of interest, or whether the policy would be used instead to override those Acts at a local level.

Omitting the word 'sex' in the policy may have the effect of stymying the Council's ability to protect women's and girls' sex-based rights and protections under these Acts, as is allowed. I would remind you that gender is not a legally protected characteristic, whereas 'sex' is. The word 'gender' may have been acceptable once when most people considered it to be a polite euphemism for sex, but it now has too many meanings to be clearly understood in policies which govern our lives. For example, gender can be interpreted as a social or cultural construct, or a euphemism for sex, or as gender identity. It's possible that even more interpretations may develop as time goes on, due to its fluidity of application. Sex, however, has been definable for all of humankind's existence. At this point, red herring questions often arise about gender non-conformity, but to answer them, accommodations as needed for gender non-conforming people can always be made in some way. But, they do not supercede women's and girls' sex-based rights.

A woman is an adult human female. Although the word 'woman' can be arbitrarily changed in certain circles to mean anyone who 'identifies' as one, we can't change our sex, and there are times we need clear language to differentiate between the sexes. The word 'gender', on the other hand, can be used in a manner which allows any man who identifies as a woman to have free and unfettered entry into women's and girls' spaces, irrespective of how women and girls feel about that. It doesn't matter if they *never* encounter such a man in their spaces - women and girls should always feel assured that, as much as possible, they won't encounter a man of any stripe in spaces that are provided for their safety and dignity, and that they are important and valued enough to have those things protected. If a man who identifies as a woman goes into a women and girls' space, women and girls will see a man, irrespective of his identity. It's extremely rare for him to pass as a woman absolutely. What does that invasion of their space, whether potentially or actually experienced, do for their confidence to use public spaces, or their confidence in those they should be able to trust to protect them?

Therefore, I and Mana Wāhine Kōrero submit that this policy gets revoked due to it being highly unlikely to be able to protect women's and girls' sex-based rights and protections with clarity and confidence, nor any of the other groups mentioned in it.

Katrina Biggs, in whakawhanaungatanga with Mana Wāhine Kōrero.