

New Zealand pride parade in chaos after ban on police sparks mass withdrawals

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Row engulfs LGBT festival after organisers said some participants felt unsafe marching alongside police in uniform

The New Zealand police, [New Zealand](#) Defence Force and numerous major sponsors have pulled out of the country's largest pride parade after organisers banned police and corrections staff from marching in uniform.

Auckland pride parade organiser Cissy Rock said uniformed officers would not be welcome at the February parade, as the organisation had a long way to go in terms of respecting [LGBT rights](#), and some march participants felt unsafe marching alongside uniformed police and corrections staff.

"If members from our community are highlighting concerns around discrimination by those institutions, we expect them to work to address them, and that may include making compromises regarding their participation at the pride parade," Rock said in a statement.

Police officers have marched in uniform in previous pride parades in the city, and said organisers had taken a significant step backwards by banning them. The move prompted a mass exodus of sponsors and supporters and calls for the Auckland pride parade board to be sacked.

The move also prompted the New Zealand Defence Force, Rainbow New Zealand Charitable Trust and numerous major sponsors - including the Westpac bank and Vodafone - to withdraw from the parade, saying the festival should be about inclusion and acceptance.

In a statement Westpac said it had consulted with its LGBT staff who had advised that the ban on uniformed police "seems contrary to the principles of openness and inclusiveness".

Rainbow New Zealand said it was with "great regret" that it withdrew its support from the parade. Chair Gresham Bradley said the ban on uniformed police was "contrary to the wishes of the vast majority of the Rainbow Community."

Squadron Leader Stu Pearce of The New Zealand Defence Force said the organisation did not feel "comfortable" participating in the march if fellow uniformed officers would be banned.

"Like defence, police are on their own journey and are fully committed to inclusive diversity," Pearce said.

MPs on all sides of the political spectrum voiced their displeasure at the ban, with police minister Stuart Nash saying he was "extremely disappointed", while opposition police spokesman Chris Bishop called it a "regrettable decision".

Groups who had boycotted the Auckland Pride Parade, the largest in the country, said they still intend to attend pride marches in Wellington and Christchurch.

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The Guardian

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