

Dr Karen Grylls was one of five inaugural NZCF Board members, serving for seven years in her first Board stint from 2007–2014, followed by a further four years of valued service to date, from her re-election in May 2022.

She was an inaugural member of the Association of Choral Directors Committee, contributing her insight and leadership from the outset, and has served two terms as Chair of the ACD, from 2013–2018 and again from 2024 to the present.

Karen was co-Artistic Director, with Dr Guy Jansen, of the highly successful inaugural Choral Connect conference in 2012, and has since provided inspiring artistic leadership as Artistic Director for a further five conventions from 2017.

She has given generously of her considerable experience and expertise across many of NZCF's activities over the past 40 years — as a respected adjudicator for The Big Sing regionals and Finale, as a clinician and mentor for Giving Direction and Fine Tuning workshops, and as a jury member for the 2024 World Choir Games in Auckland.

From 2002 to 2008 Karen represented our region as the Oceania Board member of the International Federation of Choral Music and she has been an esteemed international juror at competitions around the world since 1992.

In the wider choral community, three major areas of contribution stand out. Firstly, her exceptional work with the national choirs, showcasing the excellence of New Zealand choirs internationally. Karen was Artistic Director of Choirs Aotearoa NZ from 1989–2025, overseeing the artistic direction of our three national choirs, and is particularly noted for her work with two of them. As Musical Director of the NZ Youth Choir from 1989 to 2011, she led the choir to international recognition, including Best Mixed Choir at the Cantonigròs International Music Festival in 2007, Choir of the World at the International Eisteddfod in 1999, and Overall Best Choir at the Cantat Grand Prix in 1999. She was also the founding Music Director of Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir, a role she held for 28 years from 1998 until her farewell concert in March 2026. During that time, she led Voices on numerous successful international tours, and in 2006 the choir won Best Classical Album at the Tūi New Zealand Music Awards for *Spirit of the Land*.

The second major area is her contribution to training the next generation of choral directors. Karen established the University of Auckland's postgraduate choral conducting programmes in 2006 and has trained many of New Zealand's leading choral directors, including around half of the conductors at The Big Sing Finale each year. She continues to contribute generously as a teacher and mentor.

And thirdly, her tireless advocacy for New Zealand music and her leadership in bringing Māori music to the forefront of choral performance in Aotearoa. The relationships she and Elise Bradley fostered with Te Wehi Whānau and Te Waka Huia have been crucial to this work.

Karen is now focusing on the youngest generation of choral singers through her role as co-Artistic Director of the New Zealand Children's Choral Academy, which she co-founded with Elise Bradley in 2022.

Karen continues to serve NZCF as a member of the Governance Board and as Chair of the ACD. In 1999 she was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) and in 2023 was promoted to a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) for her services to choral music. It is timely to award Dr Karen Grylls Life Membership in recognition of her exceptional and sustained contribution to NZCF, the ACD, and the wider choral sector in New Zealand and internationally.