

'Kia ita!'

Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori

MĀORI LANGUAGE COMMISSION



Briefing for the Minister of Māori Affairs

November 2008

Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori Strategic Overview

Introduction

It has been 20 years since Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori was established as an Autonomous Crown Entity under the Māori Language Act 1987. During this time the organisation has been highly visible and played a critical role in ensuring that the Māori language regains its rightful status in the New Zealand consciousness as the indigenous language of this country.

We believe we have reached a turning point in this journey, and the corner is one of anticipation as the 150,000 Māori and over 30,000 non-Māori¹ who now use the Māori language in some way, continue moving forward. The Government's Māori Language Strategy is critical in maintaining this momentum, and Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori looks forward to becoming the leader of the Strategy through its current review.

The Status of the Māori Language

The current signposts show us that the impetus for the Māori language is high. We can now celebrate the fact that it is being heard in increasing frequency through both the Māori language and mainstream broadcasting sectors. Our own publicly-funded radio station, National Radio, provides excellent examples of how the Māori language can be incorporated in daily broadcasts in encouraging and appropriate ways.

Despite the increased status and usage of the Māori language, however, it is still in a fragile state, with proficiency levels actually having dropped from 70,000 native and fluent speakers recorded in 1975², to approximately 10,000 proficient speakers recorded through the 2006 Survey of the Health of the Māori Language. Added to the fact that only a third of Māori households have access to a person who speaks some Māori in the home³, the fragility of the language is a critical reality.

Recent Highlights

Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori has achieved some significant milestones during the last 12 months. They include:

- *He Pātaka Kupu – te kai a te rangatira* - a Māori monolingual dictionary for proficient speakers of the Māori language. He Pātaka Kupu was initiated in response to concerns about the decline in Māori language speakers and dissipation of Māori language corpus. There are some 12,000 head words in the completed dictionary, and a total of just under 24,000 entries, including definitions, examples of usage, and other linguistic information.
- The *i-papakupu* an on-line, free, electronic tool which enables Māori language users to access entries from a monolingual Māori dictionary database.
- Māori Language Week and Māori Language Week Awards enables Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori to promote the social and commercial benefits of the Māori language. Māori Language Week has proven its role in promoting the status of the Māori

¹ TPK: Health of the Māori Language 2006

² Richard Benton: Survey of the Māori Language

³ TPK: Health of the Māori Language 2006

language and raising critical awareness amongst New Zealanders; and the national participation in the events of the Week has increased steadily since it began in 2000 to the point that the 2009 Awards event is currently being planned to span an extended timeframe.

- Recent developments in Māori language broadcasting include New Zealand's first ever 100% Māori language television channel *Te Reo* and in May 2008, iwi radio and television broadcasting sectors celebrated over 500,000 hours of programming in the Māori language. *Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori* ensures quality standards are met in this sector.

Māori Language and the New Zealand Identity

The distinctiveness and uniqueness of Māori language is one of the defining characteristics of Māori people and of New Zealanders. Māori language is a thread that binds us together as a nation and sets us apart from any other people or place in the world.

While the foundation has been set, the next phase is critical in continuing to build the structure around sustaining the language. Within this context, we look forward to projecting the Māori language and culture to strengthen the unique New Zealand identity.

Opportunities to maintain the momentum include:

- A national roll-out of Māori language promotion through a Social Marketing Framework – we are currently working with *te Puni Kōkiri* to research what is working well in communities, and why;
- Extending the Māori Language Week Awards to include the recognition of significant and more long-term contributions to the Māori Language - Māori Language Week subscription has exceeded our ability to recognise the high-fliers through a one-day event, and we plan to extend to two days to incorporate significant contributions to the Māori language in general;
- Realising the full benefits of Matariki as a unique cultural event for NZ, and raising its national profile – We intend work with some of our key strategic partners including Air NZ and NZ Post, to propel Matariki to the forefront of NZ appreciation, with a view to realising its latent promises. We recognise what such an annual event might offer for raising the profile of our Māori language and cultural practices, and we believe the best of its potential still sits largely untapped;
- Adopting 2010 as *Te Tau o Te Reo Māori* – 1995 was the first and last time NZ celebrated Māori Language Year. We believe it timely to recognise the strengths that have been built up for the language since 1995, and plan to use an inaugural International Conference for the Regeneration of Indigenous Languages, as the key focus for the Year;
- Continuing to work with *Te Puni Kōkiri* on the Māori Language Strategy Review including progressing the key recommendation from *Hui Taumata mo te Reo Māori 2007* to review the Māori Language Act with a view to strengthening the legislative basis for Māori as an official language; and sustaining the ongoing success of the *Mā Te Reo* fund beyond 2011 – including the amalgamation of funding for community based Māori language initiatives

Conclusion

As we look to the future, strategic leadership and alliances will be critical in ensuring momentum is not only maintained, but more importantly results in developmental gains for the Māori language. Leadership of the highest form, including ministerial guidance and sponsorship will be a way in which Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori assures Māori language outcomes via the public and private sector are met.

Kua tō te rā ki te parekura, ka ara ake anō te kura hou

Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori looks forward to working with the incoming Minister of Māori Affairs and a renewed commitment to Māori language revitalisation.