

**Submission on the proposed Māori Language Strategy, February 2014**

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā māngai o te reo Māori, tēnā koutou katoa, i raro i tēnei rautaki mō te reo Māori.

It is timely and pleasing to read the new strategy document in light of recent reports from the Waitangi Tribunal and Te Paepae Motuhake, all of which espouse the need and desire for a fresh approach to consolidate and galvanise support for the revitalisation of Te Reo Māori.

The Waitangi Report for the WAI262 claim, states that the two most important pillars to an effective Māori language strategy are to (a) urgently address the state of Te Reo, (b) in an efficient way (2011: 450). My recommendations are made according to these two principles.

1. Leadership and ownership

The original leadership of most sectors of the language revitalisation movement which developed in the 1980s (kōhanga reo, kura and broadcasting) came from individuals and groups that were urban based and pan-iwi. The current proposal to form a Māori electoral college for Te Mātāwai based on iwi groupings seems more a response to the current political situation, than to an understanding of the language revitalisation movement. Indeed, although the original recommendation from Te Paepae Motuhake was for an electoral college which included two representatives from the Auckland and Wellington urban regions (2011: 6 & 7), the current proposal instead recommends two representatives from the education and broadcasting sectors (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2014: 10). Thus the continuing important role of pan-Māori and urban based groups in the revitalisation of the Māori language is not acknowledged or given expression.

Furthermore, the proposed Te Mātāwai board structure, which is comprised mainly of representatives from seven tribal areas, seems certain to give emphasis to larger tribal groupings at the expense of smaller tribes. This is likely to lead to a feeling of marginalisation amongst smaller iwi and hapū groups, as well as urban based pan-Māori groups. This will be particularly felt with the current upsurge in the importance of tribal dialects which are a particular focus of many larger tribes, in contrast to some smaller tribal groups which would prefer the Crown to concentrate on supporting Te Reo Māori generally (Waitangi Tribunal, 2011: 443). In fact, the

Tribunal notes the inherent tensions as to whether the Crown should focus more on tribal dialects compared to the Māori language in general (2011: 442-3). From a linguistic perspective, the differences between Māori dialects are relatively minimal, but equally these differences are becoming increasingly important politically. Harlow notes that “dialect loyalty has the potential to impede the normalisation of Māori in modern New Zealand” (2007a: 52). In other words, there is a real danger that the proposed iwi dominant structure of Te Mātāwai will not lead to optimal outcomes for Te Reo.

In addition, it is hard to see how the proposed Te Mātāwai electoral college will not become bureaucratic and consume expenditure which could otherwise be directed towards supporting revitalisation activities. What is also not mentioned is how iwi representatives will report back to their constituencies. There should therefore be serious concerns about how, once elected, Te Mātāwai members could become disconnected from their representative base.

In conclusion, while the desire for the undoubted benefits of Māori ownership and leadership of the Te Reo Māori strategy is well-founded, there is little research or detail in the proposal to indicate that the proposed structure is indeed the best manifestation of this desire.

## 2. Role of Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori

I endorse the finding of the Waitangi Tribunal that Te Taura Whiri should “serve as leader” (2011: 472) in the revitalisation of the Māori language. At present a number of responsibilities for Te Reo which were statutorily given to Te Taura Whiri are presently conveyed by Te Puni Kōkiri. This division of responsibilities for Te Reo dissipates focus, energy and expertise. The responsibilities of both groups should be assumed by Te Taura Whiri. This includes all the Te Puni Kōkiri roles listed on pages 12 to 14 of the strategy consultation document.

## 3. Passion for te reo - the role of community

The Waitangi Tribunal Report (2011: 163) notes that an effective Māori language strategy needs to “capture the imagination of grassroots Māori communities”.

In the 1980s there was much passion for Te Reo Māori. Those involved in kōhanga reo, for example, knew what kōhanga was about. The message was simple, and it galvanised many Māori whānau into becoming speakers of Te Reo Māori. Since then, in an inevitable process, this passion has become institutionalised and we now need a new vision for the new century. Thirty years on we realise that current generations don't know what the world would look like without the Māori language schooling and broadcasting options we have available today. Indeed, Hana O'Regan notes the difficulties of keeping inspirational language revitalisation strategies, such as the

Ngāi Tahu Kotahi Mano Kāika initiative, alive and flourishing in the face of widespread apathy amongst tribal members (2013: 88).

For the reality is that despite the statement that the Māori language is an intrinsic aspect of Māori identity it remains that there are many ways of being Māori that do not rely on an ability to speak Māori. The truth of this is revealed in responses to the statement 'you have to be able to speak Māori to be a real Māori' which was included in the first Māori language survey in 1995. The majority of respondents, 82%, disagreed with this statement (Te Puni Kōkiri, 1996: 57). My own informal research while interviewing Māori speakers around the turn of the century was that that it was difficult to get anyone apart from older native speakers of Māori to agree with the idea that Māori language is an integral part of Māori identity. This finding aligns with the responses by those over 60 in the 1995 survey where 38% (the largest proportion of any age group) agreed with this statement. As Ray Harlow has remarked, this admits the possibility of being able to be "ethnically and culturally Māori ... through the medium of English" (2007b: 136).

As a consequence, while it is important to raise the status of Māori through wider efforts aimed at the New Zealand population as a whole, the real future of Te Reo will be amongst those prepared to put a considerable effort into becoming speakers. This is implicit in Hana's critique above. Since the late 1990s in New Zealand there has been a well-founded and concerted emphasis on the role of the home in the revitalisation of the Māori language, in light of Joshua Fishman's analysis about the key role of homes in revitalisation strategies (1991: 95). My own research confirms that adult speakers of Māori report far higher usage of Māori in homes where there are children (King et al., 2012). With the numbers of older native speakers of Māori in serious decline, it is a reality that, for the most part, most Māori speaking homes are headed by adult second language speakers of Māori (those who have learnt Te Reo as adults) and/or English dominant bilingual speakers of Māori (those who have been raised to some extent in Te Reo). However, Fishman didn't just argue for the importance of the home, he argued for an intergenerational and demographically concentrated family-home-neighbourhood-community nexus as being central to revitalisation efforts (1991: 395). While Te Reo Māori is becoming much more normalised in community events such as kapa haka and manu kōrero competitions, Fishman is referring here to the concept of normalising children's exposure to the minority language in a range of day to day interactions in a wider context than just in the home and school contexts as it largely is now.

In summation, what is needed is a simple but inspiring project to engage and support those already those people who are already engaged, or likely to become engaged, as speakers of Māori. I propose that the main focus of our new Māori language strategy should be on building a number of Māori speaking communities in rural and urban areas throughout the country.

This would give whānau who have already made a commitment to Te Reo the opportunity of being around other Māori speaking whānau for mutual support and child-care and to make the challenges of speaking Māori throughout the day much

more achievable. For it has been noted that, as in other jurisdictions, indigenous languages are maintained longest in communities where 70% or more of the population are speakers of the language. In fact, 70% appears to be a tipping point, below which is an inevitable decline towards language loss (Bauer, 2008: 63-66). The creation and support of Māori speaking communities would be true 'Kāinga Kōrerorero' highlighting the meaning of 'kāinga' as village or settlement, rather than the narrow focus on the home as with the current Kāinga Kōrerorero initiative. Having other Māori speaking households in very close proximity, in the same way that the Gaeltachts do in Ireland will be a strong encouragement and support those speaking Māori in the home. These Māori speaking communities need not be large, perhaps a few houses in close proximity to each other, or a street in an urban area perhaps. This is both an ambitious, but easily grasped strategy, which would have grassroots support from the very group the Māori language strategy should have particular focus on.

I believe that Ngāi Tahu looked into the idea of a Māori language street or suburb, but shelved the idea due to organisational and financial difficulties. However, this would be a wonderful focus for Te Mātāwai. I know myself, as someone who raised their children in the Māori language, that, as a second language speaker, it's very difficult. The inspiration and whakawhanaungatanga of other like minded individuals living in close proximity would be a real boost to one's own efforts and would support the quality of the reo (one of the pillars in the current proposed strategy document) in fact all four pillars (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2013: 5). In short, we must concentrate the language, otherwise it will dissipate.

In conclusion, the main points of my submission are:

1. That the focus of a new Te Reo Māori strategy, while supporting initiatives focussed on tribal dialects, must be first towards the language as a whole.
2. That Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori be restored to its original and legislated role as the sole government body charged with researching and implementing Māori language revitalisation initiatives.
3. That what is needed from a strategy at present is a key initiative which will inspire and galvanise those who have already given commitment to being speakers of Māori. Such a project could be the formation and support of a large number of small communities of Māori language speakers. This would be a wonderful flagship project to excite, engage and refresh the commitment of Māori speaking whānau, particularly in urban areas.

Heoi anō, ka rere tonu ngā mihi ki a koutou e titiro whānui ana ki te oranga o tō tātou reo rangatira.