

## **Hon Parekura Horomia**

23/07/2007

### **We can all speak Māori**

Waiwhetu Marae, Lower Hutt.

New Zealand was once a country in which everyone spoke Māori and we can be again. I say this not as a fanciful whim but as an imperative.

When we celebrate our national identity, we acknowledge and celebrate that Māori people provide the “X”-factor that makes us unique in the world.

And the reo makes us who we are as Māori. It exists no-where else on this earth.

Therefore, it is incumbent on us all – especially those of us who can speak the reo – to use it in order to ensure its continued revitalisation. And this is an area each of us can make improvements, I’m sure.

This week, the 32nd Māori Language Week, we have much to celebrate in terms of improving health of te reo.

Of course, we have some way to go before we can say the reo is a healthy, living language, but let’s not forget how far we have come to save it from a state once described as “perilous”. In the mid-to-late 1970s the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) conducted a wide-ranging survey on the state of the Māori language with some 6,500 Māori whānau and their 33,000 whānau members.

Those whānau members gave detailed information about their experiences relating to the use of the reo in many different contexts.

When the NZCER reported on results of that survey, their conclusions included that the “communities in which the Māori language had remained strongest were mainly small traditionally Māori settlements in Northland, the Eastern Bay of Plenty, and the East Coast”. “Conversely, large towns and cities did not seem to have encouraged people to continue speaking Māori.”

They also concluded that while there were few completely Māori-speaking or bilingual communities, it was obvious that the reo was “far from dead”!

In its closing, the report also asserted that many Māori who had moved to cities and large towns had taken with them a linguistic resource which could only be developed further, if Māori and non-Māori alike valued it.

Those words were written in the early 1980s from information collected a decade before that. In 1991, the author of those words noted that a language may be revitalised “when a community decides to make it once more the main language for the next generation.”

Tonight I am especially pleased to be here with you to launch the results of the Survey on the Health of the Māori Language in 2006.

The results hold significant promise for us all as we strive to realise our potential through our combined efforts for a healthy, living reo Māori.

I am not a socio-linguist, nor am I a researcher but when I read the main findings of the survey, they give me great hope because they show there has been significant progress made in revitalising the Māori language.

Shortly, Tipene Chrisp from Te Puni Kōkiri will tell us much more about the survey and its results but I want to highlight several findings for you:

- First, the survey shows there are significant increases in the number of Māori who can speak, read, write and understand Māori.
- Second, the results of the survey show that the greatest increases in proficiency levels are seen in the higher levels of proficiency.
- Third, the results also show there have been significant shifts in the number of younger adults who can speak Māori.
- And finally, we see from the results that more Māori is being spoken and heard in the home and community, especially with children.

As the Minister of Māori Affairs, I am especially delighted with these findings because they

indicate significant progress is being made towards the achievement of the goals of the Māori Language Strategy which are:

- Strengthening language skills;
- Strengthening language use;
- Strengthening language education opportunities;
- Strengthening community leadership; and
- Strengthening recognition of the Māori language.

These gains are being made as a result of investment in language revitalisation activities such as in broadcasting and education.

Furthermore, the focus of Government's activities on re-establishing intergenerational transmission is having the desired effect as language usage in normal everyday interactions between whānau members is increasing.

Māori and Government share a long-term commitment to the revitalisation of te reo Māori as a living language.

Still, we have some way to go before we can declare te reo Māori is 100% fighting fit.

I say this, not to discourage, but to encourage you to continue the good work.

Māori people dedicate thousands of hours of voluntary labour and financial contributions to help keep the language alive. The Government invests significantly each year in Māori language development.

Since 2001, Mā Te Reo, has distributed about \$1.8 million each year, for Māori communities to continue strengthening their reo and has supported about 600 completed projects with many more still underway.

In education, we cannot bypass the impact on language revitalisation through Te Ātaarangi, Te Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori.

And in broadcasting too, Māori Television and iwi radio stations have made an enormously positive impact on te reo revitalisation.

As we found last year through Te Puni Kōkiri's research on Attitudes to the Māori Language, there is real positive outlook towards te reo amongst both non-Māori as well as Māori. And New Zealanders are more supportive of Māori being used in public settings.

We are in the most te reo-friendly environment that we have experienced since the 1800s when everyone spoke te reo.

This means te reo can only continue to prosper.

Through the Budget earlier this year, the Government continued to nurture that reo-friendly environment by supporting Māori language, culture and institutions with:

- \$23.1 million over four years for Māori Television to transition into digital technology and programming;
- \$4 million to strengthen the iwi radio network over four years;
- \$102 million for property development for kura and wharekura over four years, with \$38 million to be spent next year;
- \$13.9 million additional funding for kōhanga reo over four years; and
- \$660,000 capital funding for Te Taura Whiri I Te Reo Māori and Te Māngai Paho.

And in other initiatives this year:

- Te Reo Matatini Māori Medium Literacy Strategy was launched in May 2007. Te Reo Matatini is a planning document for education providers delivering bi-lingual and immersion programmes. Te Reo Matatini is focused on widening the concept of te reo literacy beyond words, reading and writing.
- And in March, we launched the draft guidelines, Te Reo Māori in the New Zealand curriculum. They will guide the teaching and learning of te reo Māori in English-medium schools that is primary and secondary schools, where English is the main language of instruction.

In New Zealand we have a total of 2,600 schools, catering for 760,000 students. Most of those schools, that is, more than 90% are English-medium schools. So potentially they could all use these curriculum guidelines to help their students learn te reo Māori.

There is no doubt in my mind that the tide has turned for our reo.

We see many wonderfully inspiring and creative examples to foster the reo-friendly environment all around us such as hakarongomai at Te Matatini earlier this year.

Before I finish, I want to thank Te Taura Whiri I te Reo Māori, the Human Rights Commission, and Te Puni Kōkiri, for making Māori Language Week happen.

This tripartite relationship goes from strength to strength each year and they have never failed to come up with inspiring activities and themes. This year, it's a Tourism theme which is

particularly apt for Māori given the many successful tourism stories we read and hear about are Māori ones.

I warmly thank Tourism New Zealand who provided generous sponsorship to get us ON THE ROAD WITH TE REO.

I want to leave you with the vision of the Māori Language Strategy because the survey results suggest we are “on the road” to achieving it:

By 2028, the Māori language will be widely spoken by Māori. In particular, the Māori language will be in common use within Māori whānau, homes and communities. All New Zealanders will appreciate the value of the Māori language to New Zealand society.

Kia ora.