

## **COUNCIL POSITION ON MĀORI LANGUAGE RETENTION**

### **A Response to the Māori Language (Te Reo Māori) Bill December 2014**

In 2014 Government introduced a Māori Language Bill to transfer the leadership on Māori Language retention and development to an entity (Te Matawai) dominated by tribal representatives from seven dialectal regions. Te Matawai would promote the Māori Language Strategy and have the oversight of various other institutions promoting Te Reo. There is no Māori approved Language Strategy but a government Strategy. The government Strategy describes the goals to be achieved but not the action plan by which they will be achieved.

#### **Council Position**

- Te Reo is our most important taonga.
- Form follows function. Before there is a structure for the promotion of Te Reo, there should be a Strategy for its promotion. There is not an adequate Strategy at present.
- The Strategy should have a plan of action – not just outcomes. There is not an adequate plan of action at present.
- The Strategy should be approved by Māori. There is no Māori approved plan at present. A national hui is suggested.
- The Strategy should provide for a coherent and coordinated policy for the development of Te Reo. The Te Matawai structure would help to achieve that.
- The Strategy should recognise that language develops from the ground up. Inculcation occurs at the level of whānau, hapū and community.
- The Strategy should therefore support individual initiatives and practitioners at a whānau or hapū level.
- The national oversight should be entrusted to those selected by practitioner organisations and recognised expert advisors.
- The appointment of regional tribal representatives indicates a top down approach where a bottom up approach is preferred, and appointments on the basis of district representation when a national approach is needed on the basis of practitioner experience.
- No rationale has been given as to how the appointment of tribal representatives will improve language retention or development.
- Dialectal variation is not the basis for a language strategy but a good language strategy will provide the basis for protecting dialectal variation.
- The Strategy should consider that language inculcation occurs through regular exposure to reo in a controlled environment.
- The action plan might therefore foster the dedicated use of Te Reo in Māori speaking zones (like papakāinga) or within Māori speaking groups (like Te Reo speaking sports teams).

- Another Strategy in language retention is the provision of cluster housing where Maori is the preferred language for regular communication.