

After six innovative years as Secretary of Maori Affairs Kara Puketapu felt he was getting rather "ponderous" and "complacent" in his departmental role.

So when Maori leaders asked him to head the recently unveiled Maori International company he decided to accept the new challenge.

He has been granted three years special leave from the public service to lead the new company which aims to promote Maori business ventures particularly in export and tourism.

Mr Puketapu believes the company has a vital role to play in boosting Maori economic development.

"Maoridom has considerable social and cultural muscle but no economic clout."

He says he is leaving behind him a dynamic department working with a Maori community which is stronger than ever, and entering a marvellous new era of progress.

But he says the department was not always geared towards change and flexibility.

He was appointed Secretary in 1977 — the youngest ever permanent head of a governmental department, after working in a variety of government departments as a social science trainee, field officer and administrator.

A Te Atiawa who grew up a speaking Maori in a traditional extended family, he was a graduate of both Victoria University in Wellington and Chicago University, a consultant to the Ford Foundation in New York on American Indian and Maori exchange programmes, and a former Maori All Black.

At Maori Affairs he found a "very well-disciplined, bureaucratic, stable department." "That worried and encouraged me. I thought if ideas were too deeply entrenched how could I get things moving. I had to make changes quickly — but aimed at long term objectives."

He also had to gain the confidence of the Maori community. "For the first couple of years there was hesitancy about me. They were saying "who is this man?"

His answer was the Tu Tangata programme emphasising growth, self-help, and concepts like whanau and kokiri. Under his leadership the department spearheaded other programmes — kohanga reo, rapu mahi, kokiri centres, and most recently the matua whangai programme.

His personal favourite is the kohanga reo programme "kohanga reo is the most beautiful effective programme that any social-minded department runs in this country."

Mr Puketapu will leave the department to take up his new post in November.



The time for feedback has come

Maori communities have had enough of being squeezed dry of information by researchers and then discarded says Maori Affairs Department's Dr Tamati Reedy.

Too many people have been going into Maori communities for many years to do research, ostensibly for the good of the community, and then not going back to the community with the results says Dr Reedy.

"It's obvious people have gained academic status without acknowledging the community that uplifted them".

Dr Reedy says it's time that the information was feed back to the Maori communities throughout the country, so that the information base was strengthened.

He says that was the idea behind him returning from a Fullbright Scholarship in the United States to feed the knowledge he'd gained back to his people of Ngati Porou through the Ngata Lectures.

He says the lectures spread over a week in August drew many people from

all around the country who were hungry for the information contained in the lectures of Sir Apirana Ngata.

"You could see the people feeding themselves on whakatauki, whakapapa...."

Dr Reedy believes that the negative thinking of the 60's and 70's has been proved wrong by the response to hui such as the Ngata Lectures.

Then, he says, with the urban drift of the Maori, it was felt that there wasn't a need to retain kinship ties in a city setting, and instead new city identities would be formed. But he says that was a negative view, because now Maoris are seeing kinship ties are the main strength of the Maori people.

"Tu Tangata, Kohanga Reo, Maatua Whangai — all these rely on using kinship ties as real strengths."

Dr Reedy sees the Ngata Lectures as becoming an annual event drawing the people together.

"The taahuu has been laid.

"We know where the backbone is, now we will build the heke of specific ancestors."