

Te Reo o Poneke breaks sound barrier



It took many hours of preparation and around thirteen hundred dollars for Te Reo o Poneke to be the first private Maori language radio station.

It broadcast for five days during Maori language week on an FM frequency to the Wellington area with an average of ten hours per day solid Maori language.

And now Nga Kaiwhakapumau, the Maori Language Board, which was backing the radio venture wants to go for another licence, this time to a much bigger area says board spokesman, Huirangi Waikerepuru.

He says the board's aim is to promote Maori language to as wide a community as possible and the radio station did just that. He says in a 'naturally foreign' way, many Maori listeners picked up their language by just turning on their radios.

"For most of them it was a great experience to tune into their language

any time of the day."

Huirangi says the station opened up a whole new field for learners of the language and showed that not only is Maori language workable but it should also be the right of every New Zealander to hear it spoken.

One sticking point in the licence application was the need for slander insurance. It was felt that people could be abused in the Maori tongue and others would not know it had happened.

However Huirangi pointed out that Maoris would say it face to face with a person rather than resorting to settling disputes over the airwaves.

He says Nga Kaiwhakapumau is out to provoke the Broadcasting Corporation to set up a station broadcasting in the Maori language. But he says the station would need to have the right environment to attract Maori participation.

"The lack of Maoris in the media is because the Maori spirit hasn't been reflecting back to the people. For the

Maori spirit to be awakened, it must be in the medium."

Huirangi believes Te Reo o Poneke awakened that spirit in Wellington listeners, and the success is encouraging other groups throughout the country to try similar ventures.

For Huirangi the most memorable moment was waiting for the opening which was done with karanga, waiata and karakia. The most forgettable moment was when a switch in the Victoria University studio was accidentally turned off shutting off sound to the broadcasters. Fortunately the sound going out over the airwaves was unaffected.

Huirangi pays tribute to all the many workers who got the station underway especially Maaka Jones and Piripi Walker. He says Piripi's employers, Radio New Zealand were also to be complimented on their support to the venture, both in allowing Mr Walker time to work on the venture and also equipment and expertise provided.