

lish. There is only one hour a week of Hawaiian language used on the programme — and the programmers find it hard to fill it, so few are the Hawaiian speakers available. Mr Karetu himself was interviewed two or three times.

The Hawaiian language enthusiasts, too, marvel at New Zealand's kohanga reo, and are keen to set up something similar there.

But Mr Karetu said they would have a problem finding suitably qualified people to staff them, which sets in motion a vicious cycle towards extinction.

Mr Karetu says New Zealand is only a matter of years away from the Hawaiian situation in that, there, the universities have become the arbiters of what is good Hawaiian and what is bad, rather than the old native speakers — there are hardly any of them left. And it won't be long before there are very few of the older generation of native Maori speakers left either.

Another disturbing aspect Mr Karetu found has a parallel in New Zealand — although interest in Hawaiian song and dance is alive and well, it is not helping to save the language. Hawaiians, like the Maori, have many cultural groups which sing in Hawaiian, but few of the performers understand what they're singing.

Even among their instructors, Mr Karetu found a lack of knowledge and understanding of the language they were using.

The message was clear to him — the Maori cannot afford to believe that cultural activities will keep the language alive.

"The most overt manifestations of the culture are song, dance, carving etc., but already many haka and songs are being mutilated because people do not really know what the words say.

"As a consequence of that you can sing in any language and people will applaud because you make a nice sound.

"If we accept that the language is the essence of the culture, it follows that we should be making an effort to use it and retain it," he said.

"It's up to us Maoris to do something about it."

The message was clear to him — the Maori cannot afford to believe that cultural activities will keep the language alive.

Mr Karetu, however, points to one or two advantages which Maori still has over Hawaiian. The Hawaiians now have no equivalent of the marae where frequent gatherings of the people help to keep the language alive and meaningful.

And the Maori language still enjoys a relatively large reserve of old people from whom younger people can learn, and who can pass on the knowledge of what is good and what is bad Maori. Hawaiian has almost none of these people left.

And "I think on a comparative basis New Zealand is making more effort than at least the Hawaiians. We are getting more support from the Government and the public than they are. They are getting very little," he said.

"But I admire them for their resilience. They have not said dead yet, whereas we can afford to fight much more strongly, but we are not."

Mr Karetu also visited a Navajo-language school in Arizona, where, because of the size of the tribe and its isolation in the desert, the Navajo Indians have been able to keep their language alive.

The Navajo children board at the school and are taught in the Navajo language until they are 12 or 13 years old. Because there are no Navajo-speaking secondary teachers available, the school switches to English at that level.

Mr Karetu's visit there came about as a result of a six-month visit by one of the Navajo school teachers and his wife to Ruatoki, near Whakatane. Sam's school was the first bi-lingual one in New Zealand.

The experience inspired them to redouble their efforts to inculcate the Navajo language into the children before they had a chance to drop it in favour of English.

Mr Karetu also attended classes at the Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona. This college used to be a completely Navajo language college, but Indians from other tribes wanted to attend it too, and as they spoke neither their own languages nor Navajo, most of the college's classes switched to the English medium.

Another of his duties while away was to represent the Maori and South Pacific Arts Council at an Indigenous People's Theatre Association conference in Toronto, Canada. It was the first time there had been a Maori representative at the conference.

"It was interesting to see that not only the Maori is suffering a language and cultural loss, but in fact, many people from many countries around the world. While the problems are similar, the solutions that each country is trying to find, vary greatly."

He described his "complete involvement in the Hawaiian situation" as the highlight of his year's leave.

"To me their plight could well be ours if definite measures are not taken to avert this possibility.

"Admittedly there are more overt signs here in New Zealand that things are happening, which certainly cannot be said for the Hawaiian situation."

Maori Writers Read

The "Maori Writers Read" series to be held over Labour Weekend Oct 21-23 aims to present strong Maori literature.

It'll back up the considerable body of publication that has "assisted in halting New Zealand's monocultural perception of itself and... helped force a reconsideration of the national identity as being... beneficiary of both Maori and Pakeha cultural heritages." ("Into the World of Light" Ihimaera, Long).

As well as promotion in a visible and performance sense the series will financially support publications by Maori writers, the first two publications being "The Bone People" a novel by the Kati Tahu writer Keri Hulme, and "The House of the Talking Cat" short stories by J.C. Sturm of Taranaki, both books soon to be released by "Spiral".

Main organiser, Janet Potiki, is interested in providing a "quality performing space" for the writers, and at the same time help maintain the high profile that Maori visual artists already have in New Zealand and overseas.

Two works will be exhibited at The Depot (the venue for Writers Read). The installation by Matt Pine is from his 'Pataka' series. This work, being a floor installation, will define the space in which performances take place. Darcy

Nicholas's environmental installation 'Ancestral Images' will provide a backdrop to the performance space.

Janet wants to give the public "a chance to share a unique and enriching encounter with a **living** culture".

She has tried to ensure that both younger and older women and men are involved, and the new writers are given a voice alongside established writers. It is her aim that a variety of works — poetry, waiata, story, music and theatre are included, "though the backbone of **this** series is poetry and stories." But whatever the media, the overall criteria is that it will all be "original material."

"Writers Read" will enable the oral nature of much of the literature to become obvious, so it can be seen as an oral tradition that is able, in a contemporary mode, to be performed by young and old, women and men equally.

This, along with the written voice, adds up to a statement that we are Maori, we are various (the contributors are from a wide range of Maori backgrounds), we live and belong in a present setting, **this is our turangawaewae**, we have worked together and with others to define a culture and build a nation. Here we are. **Tihe Mauriora.**