

Funding cut silences Ruia Mai

It's the end of an era for an award-winning Maori radio news service. Ruia Mai recently lost its news and current affairs funding contract to Radio Waatea. LUCY CAMPBELL talks to the people at Ruia Mai about what they have achieved.

by Lucy Campbell

Maori radio news service Ruia Mai will stop broadcasting this month after losing a major news and current affairs funding contract.

Ruia Mai, part of Mai Media Limited owned by Auckland's Ngati Whatua iwi, lost the two-year news and current affairs contract to Radio Waatea, a bilingual station owned by Urban Maori Authority Broadcasting.

Radio Waatea is not linked to an iwi.

Maori radio stations compete to win funding for different contracts allocated by the government agency Te Mangai Paho.

Ruia Mai was launched in May 1996 on 1179am and has won a

number of media awards, including best Maori language broadcast at the New Zealand Radio Awards in 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2003.

It was also the first station to have 100% Maori language broadcasting.

Te Mangai Paho chairperson Wira Gardiner said in a media statement that one of the reasons the contract was awarded to the bilingual Waatea was because the station "provided a vision for the language that would attract a Maori audience".

Kingi Taurua, Ruia Mai's morning news and current affairs presenter, says he sees the station's broadcast solely in Maori as important for fostering te reo.

"I think it is important that the lan-

guage be broadcast on air and it doesn't matter whether people understand it or not.

"It is more important that they hear the language and then from there they can see their own inadequacies in terms of the language and then they can then say, 'I must learn the Maori language'."

Pere Maitai, the general manager of Ruia Mai, says there has been competition for the contract every year but says the contract may have been lost for a number of reasons.

"Waatea's budget was well under ours and Te Mangai Paho was probably looking for a new way of doing things," says Mr Maitai.

Mr Maitai says Ruia Mai has always prided itself on providing

fair and balanced news.

"One of the things Ruia Mai has tried to maintain is that sense of journalism balance.

"And I believe no matter what language it is in, you're meant to provide a balanced view, and I think Ruia Mai has."

Waatea's station manager, Bernie O'Donnell, says an important aspect of the station is its recruitment of young people and retention of broadcasters.

At a time when many Maori broadcasters are moving into television, Mr O'Donnell says:

"It is important to make sure those people aren't lost to radio forever."

Although 15 staff will lose their jobs this month, Ruia Mai will contin-

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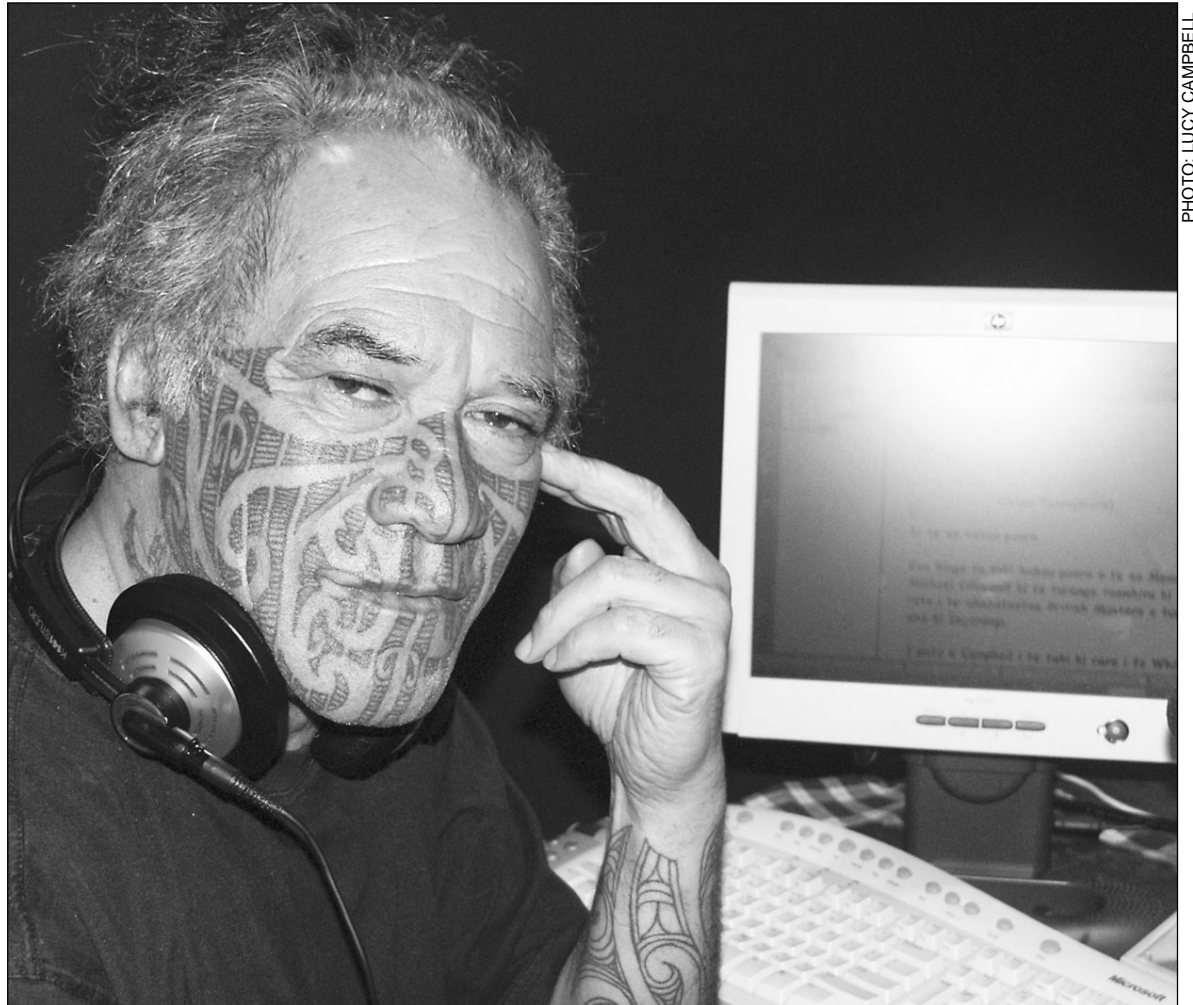


PHOTO: LUCY CAMPBELL

SILENCED: Kingi Taurua says broadcasting in te reo Maori is important.

ue broadcasting, says Mr Maitai.

"Ruia Mai will keep its brand name and some members of staff will stay on doing a documentary series and also perhaps a kaumatua series."

Mr Maitai says Ruia Mai's mother company Mai Media Limited may reapply for the news and current affairs contract in two years time.

Mr Taurua and Mr Maitai say they

both have a number of options for the future.

"I think it's a bit of an end of an era. We all have to go forward now," says Mr Maitai.

Ko te matatau ki te reo he tino take ma te karipoata

by Barnaby Sharp

A lack of fluency and misunderstanding of te reo Maori are the biggest problems facing journalists entering the New Zealand media today, says a journalism teacher.

Annabelle Schuler heads the journalism school at the Waiariki Institute of Technology in Rotorua, which offers a national diploma in journalism specifically designed for working in the Maori media.

Of the 30 students attending the journalism school, Mrs Schuler says only two were fluent in te reo Maori.

"The issue of fluency is subjective. Some students think they are fluent, but when asked, they are unable to hold a conversation on a marae with either a kaumatua or elder."

Mrs Schuler says few Maori are choosing journalism as a career and an even smaller number are fluent Maori reporters.

Prominent Maori broadcaster and former chairman of Maori Television, Derek Fox, believes a lack of Maori representation in mainstream media is to blame for negative perception of Maori.

He says Maori issues, such as the Treaty of Waitangi, and more recently the Hiko against the government's proposed seabed and foreshore legislation, are covered poorly.

At Waiariki, students study te reo and learn how to report on Maori

issues with accuracy and fairness. It is hoped that through education, future journalists covering Maori issues will have a better understanding and will therefore be more balanced in their stories.

This was the purpose of a two-day hui that was held on Waiariki's Tangatarua marae in April.

Final year journalism students from the Auckland University of Technology joined Waiariki students in a series of workshops designed to help them understand the dynamics of reporting Maori issues and the role the media has in creating negative perceptions of Maori.

Mai FM communications director Vanessa Bidois says staff retention is a challenge.

Maori media is also influenced by market forces and often many who are fluent in te reo are lured away to larger, higher profile companies.

Ms Bidois says Mai FM had lost many staff to larger organisations such as Maori Television.

She says it is a worrying trend in Maori media organisations as there are few qualified staff to replace them with.

"I think as Maori media organisations get stronger, the issue of people moving from job to job will slow down."

Mrs Schuler says one way of strengthening the Maori media was to attract students from kura kaupapa (Maori language schools).

Tuhono aims to connect Maori with iwi

by Shannon Elliot and Nic Daley

Around 360,000 Maori voters have the chance to connect with their iwi this month as the new iwi affiliation service Tuhono begins. And it is already generating much discussion and positive feedback from the Maori community.

Tuhono, meaning "to connect" or "to link" and having a deep spiritual meaning with tikanga, is a service set up by the Tautoko Maori Trust which aims to link individual Maori with their iwi.

Sir Paul Reeves, chairman of the Tautoko Maori Trust which oversees Tuhono, says the scheme has been planned for some time and initial signs are encouraging.

"It has taken us six years to bring the concept to fruition and I am struck by the positive response of Maori to Tuhono."

Affiliation forms were sent to everyone on the Maori electoral roll on May 3.

Once returned, the details on these forms will be distributed to the indicated iwi and relevant Maori organisations.

Sir Paul, a Te Atiawa descendant, says it is important for Maori culture that the initiative is successful.

"Maori are a collective. We hang together and we are bound by a common heritage that we share within our whanau, hapu and iwi."

Tuhono will help to get an accurate number on a Maori roll, which will in turn assist in Treaty settlements, says Sir Paul.

"It is absolutely necessary for us to have durable and accurate rolls in order to give a mandate to our representatives to prepare us to receive assets from Treaty settlements."

Louis Tekani, senior policy analyst of the Treaty of Waitangi Fisheries Commission (who fund Tuhono along

"We're all inexplicably linked somehow through all of our mythologies and our stories."

side the Government) says the feedback so far has been extremely positive.

"There has been a tremendous amount of communication from people to call centres as to how they can fill out forms, and asking lots of questions," says Mr Tekani.

Chair of the Maori Spectrum Trust, Mavis Mullins, is also positive about Tuhono.

She says many young Maori have little connection with their iwi and says Tuhono will provide this.

"We have many younger Maori who work with us who are on the electoral roll who have no idea how they can connect back to their iwi organisation. Tuhono will facilitate and streamline this connection."

Kitea Tipuna, Maori student support advisor at AUT, supports the Tuhono service. He says his iwi (Ngati

Kahungunu Ki Wairoa) is very important to him.

"There's a heap of Maori who don't know their iwi, and I'm hoping that Tuhono will put strategies in place to help those Maori who aren't familiar with their Maori identity to get in touch with that."

"We're all inexplicably linked somehow through all of our mythologies and our stories. We're able to become like family members."

Aroha Awarau, an AUT student affiliated with Ngati Mari and Ngati Porou, supports Tuhono but says that his experiences away from home have led him to become more independent.

On a personal level Mr Awarau's iwi is not that important to him. "I think I've been quite urbanised. For someone whose made their home in the city you become more independent and more individual."

"I think it's really important having a database of people who affiliate themselves with Maori or to their tribal roots. So when it comes to allocating resources and funding that database is there, so we will be able to benefit from it. The reason I will be using Tuhono is so I can contribute to that," says Mr Awarau.

Mr Tipuna says that Tuhono is providing a service that Maori may or may not choose to use, and that is fine.

"Tuhono is not going to measure how Maori you are. I think Tuhono's going to try and create a service where by if you want to know your iwi affiliation and if you want to have that as a part of your reality or world view, then that service is available to you."