

MEDIA RELEASE – IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Māori Law Society supports all lawyers using te reo Māori in Court

Ko tōku reo tōku ohooho, ko tōku reo tōku mapihi maurea
My language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul

“Te Hunga Rōia Māori o Aotearoa, the Māori Law Society, supports all lawyers using te reo Māori in the Courts and in practice,” says Glenn Tootill, Tumuaki Tāne (Co-President) of Te Hunga Rōia Māori o Aotearoa.

This statement comes in response to an incident at the High Court in Auckland on Wednesday where a Crown Law Office lawyer was queried by the presiding Judge after giving an appearance in te reo Māori.

The law in Aotearoa guarantees the right to speak te reo Māori in legal proceedings.¹ It has been over 30 years since that law was introduced, following the Waitangi Tribunal’s recommendation in its 1986, Wai 11 – Te Reo Māori Report “that legislation be introduced enabling any person who wishes to do so to use the Maori language in all Courts of law and in any dealings with Government Departments, local authorities and other public bodies.”

“While Te Hunga Rōia Māori is happy to see all lawyers use te reo Māori in all courts, the Crown, in particular, has an obligation under Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016 (Māori Language Act 2016) to actively protect and promote this taonga, the Māori language, for future generations,” says Marcia Murray, Tumuaki Wahine (Co-President). “For Crown lawyers, an introduction in te reo Māori is a small step towards achieving that duty. But more importantly, all lawyers should be supported by the judiciary to speak te reo Māori.”

One of the key objectives of Te Hunga Rōia Māori is promoting and encouraging the use of te reo Māori and tikanga in professional fora. Earlier this year Te Hunga Rōia Māori hosted its first Kura Reo, a full immersion te reo Māori course held on a Marae for three days, with participants learning and speaking te reo Māori both day and night. “This year’s kura reo was very popular due to the growing demand for a better understanding of the Māori language in the legal profession and we intend on holding another one next year,” says Mr Tootill. “The Kura Reo was open to our Hunga Rōia members and to all lawyers and judges to attend.”

Te Hunga Rōia Māori notes that the Government is going through the process of selecting the next Chief Justice. “We would expect that the minimum criteria for appointment of New Zealand’s most senior judge would include a demonstrated commitment to understanding tikanga Māori and te reo on its own terms” says Ms Murray.

Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori
The language is the life force of the mana Māori

About us

¹ See in particular, section 4 of the Māori Language Act 1987 and now s 7 Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016 (Māori Language Act 2016).

Te Hunga Rōia Māori o Aotearoa, the Māori Law Society, was formally established in 1988. Since then, the Society has grown to include a significant membership of legal practitioners, judges, parliamentarians, legal academics, policy analysts, researchers and Māori law students. The vision for Te Hunga Rōia Māori is *Mā te Ture, Mō te Iwi – By the Law, For the People*.

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