

# Beverley Wakem

## Trying to find the formula

**R**NZ's director-general Beverley Wakem says she's been on the trail of Maori broadcasting for over ten years as a public broadcaster.

She's sought the advice of the Maori Advisory Board to RNZ, along with her Maori station manager of Te Reo o Aotearoa, Haare Williams, and received delegations of Maori wanting to push their take.

One of these consultations was over the setting up of Radio Polynesia some ten years ago under a Labour Government. She says the hui in Auckland was all enthusiasm and for a while it looked as though Maori broadcasting could be a reality, but that bubble was burst by a change of government that left a fully equipped radio station in Polynesian South Auckland without a transmitter.

Wakem says that was the time of Derek Fox and Haare Williams trying to work with the Broadcasting Corporation to produce an environment within

which Maori broadcasting could be nurtured.

In the face of recent criticisms of Broadcasting Corporation performance in the forums of the Waitangi Tribunal and Royal Commission on Broadcasting, Wakem says there have been many attempts to launch the waka, but that has been compounded by the many differences of opinion within Maoridom on what should be done.

In fact she says that given the guidance and advice she's taken on board over the past ten years, she feels like she has been swimming in shark-infested custard. What's more is that even after the first ever hui called to seek Maori representation on a Maori Radio Board, she still feels no more confident than she ever did.

She says she's made her own visits to marae to test Maori opinion on what is wanted in the area of Maori radio, and says she recently sought Dame Te

Atairangikaahu's views.

Wakem says all this swimming in shark-infested custard hasn't soured her enthusiasm for Maori broadcasting. Part of the reason she gives is that as the daughter of Lebanese immigrants to the shores of this country, she has a sympathy for racial minorities. From her parents she says she learnt what it was to be lumped in with Syrians and denied their own cultural expression.

In this country that expression, according to her father, was for her to learn her native tongue of Arabic, but instead she's recently opted for the Maori language. She along with other Radio New Zealand executives, is taking lessons under the eye of Mrs Kahu Tapiata, a Te Atarangi tutor.

She's also taking advantage of the recently produced Tu Tangata Maori language tutorial cassette and booklet put out by Replay Radio, a division of Radio New Zealand.

She values very highly what language she has learned and especially the insights that has given her into the Maori world. But she admits that the Broadcasting Corporation structure is as much a problem as are the many views of Maoridom.

She says the structure itself within the BCNZ resists change and freely acknowledges not all in the waka want to sail into Maori waters.

As a public broadcaster, she says the need has always been to bring Maori radio into the commercial heart of broadcasting, to find the formula to achieve that.

But she is always aware of the backlash from what she terms 'majority listeners', who over the years have continued to react to any moves to introduce a Maori presence.

When asked why a public corporation should be limited by what some people don't want to hear, she said the BCNZ is a big structure and it takes time to change. She believes she's made mistakes over the years in what paths to go down, but says there have been changes and the BCNZ is learning from the mistakes. She likens the BCNZ to a battleship that has voyaged a long way.

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