

BCNZ makes a house call But was the patient invited?

Late in November a hui was called to discuss Maori broadcasting and consider the option for a Maori radio network. It was held at the Takupuahia marae, Titahi Bay, Wellington. It was backed by the Broadcasting Corporation and co-chaired by Sir Graham Latimer (representing the Board of Maori Affairs) and the Bishop of Aotearoa, Whakahuihui Vercoe. Tu Tangata was represented by the editor, Philip Whaanga, a former broadcaster himself. Here is his reaction to the hui.

Maoridom has now been consulted about a Maori radio service and has agreed to have a nine-member board under the wing of the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand.

For many, that's an encouraging development — a dramatic signal, even, of Radio New Zealand's commitment to Maori broadcasting.

John Bennett — on the selection panel. He's chairman of the Kohanga Reo Trust.



But others may be left wondering if the hui was a Claytons consultation. Sincere no doubt, but still not a genuine examination of the real issues.

There's no question about the mana of the people invited by the BCNZ.

They were almost a who's who of leaders from national Maori organisations — the New Zealand Maori Council, Maori Women's Welfare League, Te Kohanga Reo Trust, and the Board of the Maori Affairs.

But the BCNZ was proposing a particular approach to developments in Maori radio. And, if there was to be an intelligent response to that, there had to be time and broadcasting expertise.

The hui had too little of both.

It was short of time because the proposal was circulated *at* and not *before* the hui.

And it was short of Maori broadcasting expertise, firstly because there's not a lot of it about, and secondly because only a handful of those with the relevant experience were there.

They included RNZ's three-man team from Te Reo o Aotearoa, Haare Williams, Tepere Curtis and Henare Te Ua. Well and good. They are full-time broadcasters, currently employed to gather and present Maori news.

Piripi Walker was another full-time professional, with a first-hand knowledge of runanga radio, although he works for RNZ's continuing education unit.

But after that the assembled expertise was less relevant even though it included professionals like former RNZ broadcaster, Marama Martin, and Graeme Edwin, who brings impressive credentials from private radio.

The broadcasting experience of the others tended to be that of part-timers like Bill Nepia (a University of Canterbury lecturer) and Bill Ohia from



Georgina Kirby — on the selection panel. She's president of the Maori Women's Welfare League.

Tauranga; those who've been operating at BCNZ board level — like Tipene O'Regan, Katarina Mataira, Mira Szaszy and Whata Winiata; or those, like the co-chairmen, Sir Graham Latimer and Bishop Vercoe, who are more familiar with the front end of the tv camera and microphone, and readily acknowledge that.

Early in the hui Hugh Rennie (BCNZ chairman) and Bev Wakem (RNZ director general) announced that they wanted to listen to what Maoridom wanted.

But once the network proposal was circulated it choked off all the other options that might have been pursued by a well briefed, experienced gathering of Maori broadcasters.

The clamour was to climb aboard the BCNZ bus. Never mind whether it has any real chance of getting to its destination.

Never mind, in fact, where it's going. Let's grab a seat before we miss it. You never know, it could be another 50 years before the next one comes along.

That reaction was understandable given the heady sight of BCNZ executives going out of their way to co-operate — especially as kaumatua with cultural clout, like John Turei, Ossie Huata and Sonny Waru, were recommending the bus trip.

There is still, however, an urgent need for the kind of analysis and debate that should have taken place at the hui.

We need to get a Maori radio service started. But we need to get it right, too.