

Language programme jeopardised

by Sonya Haggie

A Maori language programme developed by a Hamilton woman could be jeopardised by Government education cuts.

The woman behind the two-year-old programme, called Te Ataarangi, is Katerina Mataira, who will unexpectedly end her official association with it at the end of this year.

Her Waikato University fellowship, which allowed her to develop the programme, was to have ended next January and could have been extended for at least another year.

But education cuts mean an extension is unlikely. And the programme could be adversely affected.

As programme developer Mrs Mataira travelled throughout New Zealand conducting tutor training seminars. The trained tutors then taught others to become programme tutors as well as teaching those wanting to learn the language.

Mrs Mataira's salary was paid by the university. The Maori Affairs Department covered travel expenses.

Working with Mrs Mataira was National Council for Adult Education field officer, Ngoi Pewhairangi.

Mrs Pewhairangi will also lose her official association with the programme.

Despite the termination of their positions Mrs Mataira said she saw the programme continuing in some areas of the country.

"In most areas there are several people who know enough about the programme to keep it going," she said.

The programme was a three-stage one that began last year and was into its second stage this year. The running of the third stage next year would now not be possible unless funding for it was found, she said.

"The people will have to take full responsibility for their own programmes. That was ultimately the ideal but what I



Katerina Mataira

would hate to see is for them to have to take that full responsibility before they are ready and before they have all the resources they require.

"If it (the programme) is going to work, to make a significant difference to the survival of the Maori language, then it has got to keep going."

Mrs Mataira said she would be prepared to continue working on the programme without a salary but could not afford to pay her own travel expenses to tutorials. It was doubtful whether the Maori Affairs Department would continue its support, she said.

Groups interested in the programme could not be expected to have the finance to pay travel expenses, she said.

Her future when her fellowship ended had still not been decided, she said.

Response to the programme had so far been "particularly positive".

"People who have always thought they had no skills are now superb teachers. So many people have gained a new confidence in themselves, have acquired a new status within their communities."

Waikato University Maori Studies and Research Centre acting director Professor Jim Ritchie has labelled the cuts a "national tragedy and shame".

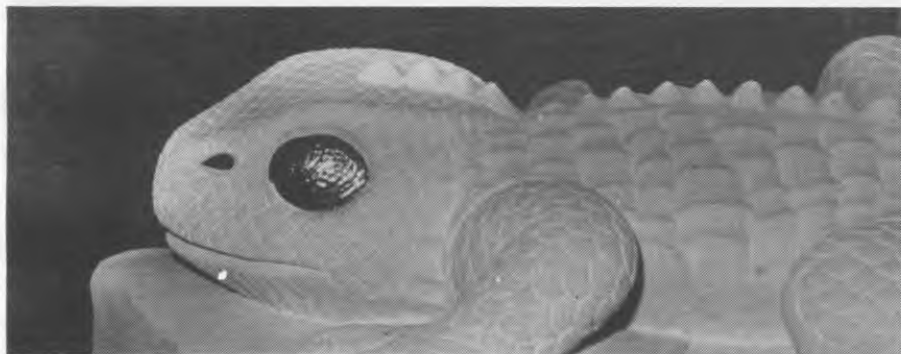
It would be a tragedy if Mrs Mataira was not allowed to continue work on her oral Maori language programme, he said.

Evidence that the language was "far from being a dying tongue" had been shown in a resurgent and growing interest by both Maori and Pakeha adults in recovering the use of it, he said.

Mrs Mataira's teaching method had caught on fast and was of "demonstrable effectiveness".

"It is a national tragedy and shame that this work cannot now continue unless new funding sources can be found," Professor Ritchie said.

Approaches for financial assistance will be made to the Internal Affairs Department, the Lottery Board, and possibly UNESCO to save the programme.



Te Ngarara O Peketua — the lizard of Peketua — after the Minister of Maori Affairs, Hon. Ben Couch, and carving tutor Louis Kereopa unveiled a dedication plaque in Porirua to the carvers of the giant tuatara.

Under Mr Kereopa's guidance 10 carving students from the Maraeroa Carving School crafted the magnificent reptile from a two tonne block of Oamaru sandstone, with the addition of paua shells for the eyes and nostrils.

The carving school was established by Wellington Polytechnic in the Porirua community of Waitangirua in July 1980. The Polytechnic provided tutors, the Department of Maori Affairs offered a training allowance to cover accommodation and travelling expenses for the students who came from all over New Zealand, and the Maraeroa Marae Committee provided workshop facilities.

Te Ngarara does not represent traditional Maori carving but is a blending of Maori and European cultures, and a variation of media which the carving school is developing. Traditional styles have been worked in wood and bone.

According to Maori legend in many parts of the North Island, Peketua was a demi-god who created the first egg. Not knowing what to do with it he took it to Tane, God of the Forests, who breathed life, knowledge, and wisdom into it. From this first egg was hatched the Tuatara, named to honour Peketua.

Te Ngarara O Peketua, a guardian of knowledge and wisdom, is now on permanent vigil in the foyer of the Porirua Museum — an impressive first sight for visitors as they enter the building.