

# Public servants attend Maori language course

A pilot course on Maori language and culture held at the Wellington Polytechnic School of Languages during Maori language week could be the forerunner of other courses if the enthusiasm shown by Mr Bing Lucas, Director-General of Lands, is an indication.



Mr Bing Lucas in the whare korero.

The course was one of the initiatives taken by the State Service Commission to make the public service more sensitive. It was attended by 16 people from the Department of Lands and Survey, two from the State Services Commission, two from the Commission for the Environment and one from the Tourist and Publicity Department.

Run over five half-days, the course covered marae etiquette and an introduction to the Maori language using the polytech's language laboratory. Talks were given by Mr George Asher from

the New Zealand Planning Council, Mr Stephen O'Regan of the Wellington Teachers College, and Professor Hirini Mead of Victoria University, on aspects of Maori culture and the Maori attitude to land.

A week after the course Mr Lucas invited Lands and Survey staff who had taken part to join in a korero to assess its value and determine what changes might be called for in departmental policy as a result of the course.

All the Lands and Survey participants felt that they had gained greatly

from the course, particularly from the intensive work in the Maori language and from the close contact with Maori groups in a marae situation.

For Mr Lucas the most significant aspect of the course was the change in attitude toward Maori issues by many of the participants.

"It certainly opened my eyes," he said. "Although I had an intellectual awareness of the grievances held by some Maori people over land matters, this was the first time I had really seen the problem from their point of view and felt some of their anguish."

"The change in attitude by those participants who are directly concerned with land administration was most apparent too. I am convinced that lack of understanding that sometimes met Maori approaches to Government departments in the past could have been minimised if administrators had shared the insights that we gained from this course.

"Resentment was sometimes caused by failure to consult Maori people in advance over decisions concerning their interests and sometimes because the Maori people were diffident about consulting us or lacked confidence in 'the system'."

"I would certainly respond sympathetically to requests from staff to undertake further language study where this is directly relevant to their work," he said.

"I also believe it is desirable to emphasise Maori connections with National Parks and reserves by the use of the Maori language wherever possible and by the use of signs and literature which would inform visitors of Maori names, and legends attached to various places, historical facts of importance to the Maori people and the Maori cultural uses of various plants and trees.

"I would like to see greater recognition of Maori aspirations toward gathering of plants for food and as raw materials for traditional cultural activities.

"As a response to these issues, a number of changes to the general policy for national parks were approved by the National Parks and Reserves Authority at its last meeting. I am hopeful that one consequence of this will be that the historical Maori involvement with land now set aside in national parks will become more widely known and that future visitors will be more aware of Maori links with the land.