



## Māmari Stephens

### *Me he kōrero tūi: te reo Māori, parliament, and some thoughts about language rights*

As early as 1828, legal documents were being written in Māori. The Legal Māori Project based at Victoria University's Faculty of Law, has collated more than eight million word tokens of printed Māori legal texts up to the present day, in a Māori legal corpus much of which can be downloaded via the New Zealand Electronic Text Centre at <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/teilegalMaoriCorpus.html>. The corpus presents a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) historical record, as well as a fascinating picture of Māori legal language. One of the most interesting sources of te reo in this western legal context is Parliament. Since 1985 the amount of te reo Māori spoken in Parliament has increased dramatically. Picking up on the theme of an earlier MANU AO presentation by Dr Poia Rewi, this presentation looks at the re-emergence of te reo Māori in that environment over that time, but I will also look at some of the factors that have led to Māori-speaking members of the House choosing to use te reo Māori in an environment that has been, unsurprisingly, a hostile one. Some of those factors include the importance of customary obligations, the "legal framework" of the right to speak Māori in the House, the tenacity and personalities of individual members, and the availability of interpretation resources.

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