

# Minister says a Pacific Island quota for Parliament is best left to MMP

by Sudesh Kissun

Pacific Islanders must learn to be part of New Zealand society and do not need a quota of seats in Parliament, says Associate Minister for Pacific Islands Taito Philip Field.

Field says the mixed member proportional (MMP) system has worked well to ensure all ethnic communities are adequately represented in decision making.

He told *Te Waha Nui* a quota for the Maori community in Parliament was to guarantee a voice for the indigenous people.

But he says the Pacific communities are no different from Asian communities who have settled here.

"If we are talking about nation-building then we have to start looking at the fact that we are all part of Aotearoa," he says.

"We have a democracy that has to work.

"MMP was really supported to some extent because of the need to have a Parliament that was reflective of the community."

He says the MMP system has so far ensured a fair ethnic and gender representation.

But Pacific Islands Advisory Council Waitakere chairman Taha Fasi says while representation has improved at central government level, more islanders should be appointed to local government bodies.

Fasi says the hands of MPs were usually tied by party policies and the time was right to

think about separate seats for islanders.

Fasi says some islanders appointed to statutory boards were not closely connected to the communities.

"Some of these people have recently come out of the woodwork and proclaim themselves as Pacific Islanders," he says.

Fasi accuses the Labour Party of abusing islanders' support and votes.

"If we are talking about nation building then we have to start looking at the fact that we are all part of Aotearoa."

"On paper there are policies for Pacific Islanders development and catering for their needs, but in reality these have not reached the grassroots where it all matters," he says.

"There is huge poverty among island communities, especially in Auckland and the question being asked is where the so-called Pacific



Taito Philip Field

capacity building programme is?"

However, Field says there has been significant progress among islanders during Labour's term.

He says there is a national radio network for island communities and their children's participation in early childhood education has increased from 65% to 90%.

Field says islanders are now enjoying greater access to housing and health services.

"Our unemployment is now at a record low over the last 18 years, down to 7.4% and rapidly heading downwards.

"We are doing better than Maori who are doing just under 10%.

"All these indicators show this Government's policies and representation of Pacific people has resulted in those huge gains."

Field admits Pacific Islanders need greater involvement in school boards and district health boards.

But he says the future of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand depends on how well they learn to be part of the society.

"We have the uniqueness of our cultures and our language, the skills and talents we bring," he says.

"And we have to offer that as part of our contribution towards the development of this nation.

"We must see ourselves as part of the diversity and richness of this nation."

Field says New Zealand is not



POLITICAL FUTURE: "We are all part of Aotearoa."

a satellite of Europe and is part of the Pacific region and its people.

"All these indicators show this government's policies and representation of Pacific people has resulted in those huge gains."

"We bring to New Zealand, together with the indigenous people, the diversity of Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia," he says.

Field says under the MMP sys-

tem parties have to recognise competent candidates from all ethnic groups and give them the opportunity to contest elections.

"If they ignore a competent candidate of a particular community, then why should that community give support to that party?"

"So far Labour has been at the forefront of giving recognition to competent Pacific candidates and selecting them as candidates," he says.

According to 2001 census, Pacific communities make up 8% of the population and would increase to 10% by 2021.

Field is the first MP of Pacific descent and second Cabinet minister after former Housing and Corrections Minister Mark Gosche.

## Call for Pacific people to become economic drivers

by Sudesh Kissun

Pacific Islanders need to become "economic drivers".

The Government catches the fish, cooks it up and dishes out to the Pacific islanders, while all they do is sit around on couches, watching television and eating fish.

Pacific Islands' community leader Taha Fasi uses this analogy to describe the community living in New Zealand, at least some of them.

Fasi, chairman of the Pacific Islands Advisory Council at Waitakere City Council, says Pacific Islanders are not economic drivers and most depend on the Government and other people.

He suggests the Government needs to invest heavily to create asset and wealth creation opportunities for them and funding should focus on older community members.

"Pacific Islanders will thrive in business as a community," he says.

"We come from collective structures in the islands so we need to use the skills.

"Many Pacific Islanders in the 40-plus age bracket have huge product knowledge of arts, craft, cultural activities, fashion and food.

"They are already engaged in community trusts and societies and they have huge product knowledge but no capital to raise these activities to marketable levels."

He says the Government should forget about teaching these islanders book-keeping and marketing.

"Let them concentrate on making the product and allow Pacific Islanders in accounting and marketing to support them," he says.

Fasi warns the future for Pacific Islanders in New Zealand looks bleak unless they start owning businesses.

"Economic power determines the type of lifestyle people have," he says.

"We can have all the political power in the world but without economic power or influence we will continue to be dependent on the key drivers of the economy.

"I say to Pacific Islanders that we can learn from the Asians and Indians who are building their economic power. Yet we depend on others to produce and create and own the assets for us."



TAHA FASI: "Economic power determines lifestyle."

PHOTO: SUDESH KISSUN

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