



Connecting across the Tasman

Common challenges were discussed and cultural understanding was shared during a recent visit by a New Zealand parliamentary committee.

EXTRA

When New Zealand MPs recently visited the dusty town camps that surround Alice Springs, they saw firsthand the many challenges facing Indigenous children and their parents in outback Australia.

Maori Affairs Committee member Metiria Turei said the main focus of their visit was to investigate how governments in Australia deal with the many issues confronted by Indigenous children.

“We know that the situation for Aboriginal children is quite similar to Maori children in our own country,” Ms Turei said. “We’re looking at what’s working, what’s not working and how government policy plays out on the ground. The Maori Affairs Select Committee is undertaking its own inquiry on the wellbeing of Maori children, and so this visit will inform that inquiry.”

Members of the Maori Affairs Committee met with Australian MPs and organisations in Sydney and Canberra, before heading inland to Alice Springs, where they spoke with women’s councils, community leaders and schools to

see how government policies are being implemented on the ground.

Committee member Louisa Wall agreed it had been enlightening to see firsthand what works and what doesn’t.

“I was actually hoping to develop relationships and to understand from the community’s perspective what their needs and aspirations were and the intersection between this and government policy,” Ms Wall said.

In Alice Springs, the MPs visited the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) and Imparja broadcasting studios, where they learnt about the success of a TV show promoting healthy lifestyles and personal hygiene.

CAAMA manager Gerry Lyons, who has been building links between his own native Maori culture and Aboriginal communities since moving to Alice Springs 24 years ago, said they saw a snapshot of how Aboriginal people live.

The delegation leader and deputy chair of the Maori Affairs Committee, Parekura Horomia, was impressed with the way the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjarra and

Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council was tackling difficult issues like family violence and alcohol abuse.

“So I think give it 10 years, and you’ll see lots of difference through the influence of those women,” Mr Horomia said. “And I think the thing we learnt from them today, they’re strong leaders in their own right and they’ve learnt how to articulate their argument in the modern world without losing their culture and who they are as first nations people.”

Committee members believed the exchange visit was a great opportunity for both nations to learn from each other.

“For me it’s always a two way process,” Ms Wall said. “I think the teachings we can bring is about us living and breathing our culture.”

Mr Lyons hoped this Maori visit can also inspire Australia’s Indigenous people.

“What they’ve learnt from the Maori is to have a very strong voice, don’t give up, if you have a purpose and it’s about your people, make it known. Don’t be ashamed. Be proud of who you are and speak with one voice.” ●