



## *Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs*

*Social and economic prosperity for Pacific peoples*

**Media release**

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### **Cook Islanders online**

IT'S not quite a Pacific Island holiday in the privacy of your own home, but almost. A new online resource will now allow New Zealanders to hear the songs of the Cook Islands, visit the villages and experience traditional art and performance.

Most importantly the Tuatua Mai website, launched today, will enable New Zealanders of Cook Island descent, and others, to learn the language of the Cook Islands.

"Tuatua Mai is a wonderful and tangible demonstration of our commitment to fostering and preserving Pacific peoples' languages, vital for a whole raft of reasons," Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs chief executive Colin Tukuitonga says.

"The 2006 census showed us that only five per cent of New Zealand-born Cook Island people could hold a conversation in their heritage language.

"Our objective is to turn that around: Language is so clearly a key aspect of cultural identity and young Cook Islanders want to be able to talk to their parents and grandparents, hear their stories, understand their values and points of view."

The median age of Cook Island people in New Zealand, according to Census 2006, is 19. Forty one per cent of them are under 15.

"Young Pacific people as well as community elders told us this was something they wanted. We have listened, and Government has supported us.

"While our immediate focus is on assisting the original migrants, now ageing, to share cultural knowledge and practices, we believe this access to a technologically relevant learning tool will also support young, pan-Pacific culture.

"Studies by sociolinguists and Pacific community experts say that the ability to speak one's heritage language has a positive impact on personal and collective self-esteem, identity and sense of cultural and personal belonging," Dr Tukuitonga said.

The website, developed with Cook Island community representatives, complements earlier print resources. It boasts an innovative approach to language learning in New Zealand, offering interactive elements such as the ability to test pronunciation. The site was developed with iSite, 2008 Qantas media award winners for best subscription-based and special interest website.

It is a significant part of the Ministry's Mind Your Language project which initially targeted Niuean, Tokelaun and Cook Island languages as the most endangered. - ([www.tuatuamai.co.nz](http://www.tuatuamai.co.nz)).

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