

Walk the Talk Award Entrant: Mai Chen - Chen Palmer Partners



Mai Chen is a champion of diversity within her own organisation, New Zealand's oldest public law firm Chen Palmer Partners, but is also working hard to spread the word with many other organisations.

As well as being the Founding and Managing Partner of public and employment specialists Chen Palmer, Mai is also the Chair of the Superdiversity Centre for Law, Policy and Business, the Chair of New Zealand Asian Leaders, an Adjunct Professor at University of Auckland School of Law, a Director of the Bank of New Zealand, and the inaugural Chair of New Zealand Global Women.

In 2013, Mai established New Zealand Asian Leaders (NZAL) because she was concerned leadership and governance of New Zealand businesses was at odds with the way New Zealand wanted to do business with Asia. There was a noticeable lack of Asians in top leadership positions in New Zealand companies. Some New Zealand companies were also finding it difficult to identify and recruit Asian leaders to boards and senior management. It was in New Zealand's economic, as well as social equity, interest to fill this gap and support Asians into key leadership positions where they are the right person for the job.

The mission of NZAL is to promote, educate and build a critical mass of top Asian leaders and emerging leaders in New Zealand who will have an active role in the future of the country and promote cultural understanding in our diverse communities. New Zealand

Asian Leaders provides a place for Asian New Zealand leaders to have visibility with New Zealand companies doing business with Asia or wanting to. It also allows Asian leaders to provide valuable knowledge on current and future focused Asian business issues where they have expertise.

Two years after setting up NZAL, Mai Chen established the Superdiversity Centre, in 2015. The vision for the Centre is to enable Government, business and not for profit organisations to maximise the benefits of diversity as New Zealand transitions to a super diverse society. This has involved providing research, analysis and advice. Examples of this work include providing cultural capability assessment and development training, including an assessment tool; advice on recruitment and retention of diverse staff, and training on Asian leadership

In November 2015, Mai wrote the Superdiversity Stocktake, New Zealand's first stocktake of the implications of New Zealand's ethnic superdiversity for business, government and citizens.

The Superdiversity Stocktake has been downloaded nearly 100,000 times. Mai's speech at the launch of her Superdiversity Stocktake last year is illustrative of the approach she takes to open-sourcing her encouragement of others to make the most of a diverse workforce: "Ideas like the Superdiversity Centre for Law, Policy and Business and the Superdiversity Stocktake only happen because people support you, help you, or get out of your way. The room tonight is filled with people who believed in the idea that an inclusive society can make for a stronger economy; that you can leverage off New Zealand's ethnic diversity for competitive advantage; that racial harmony and strong social capital are fundamental to strong financial capital and require investment and thoughtful management."