

Ministry for Primary Industries Cultural Celebration

Well-researched cultural capability programmes underway for staff at the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) are reaping significant benefits in business and relationship building with Chinese and Māori.

MPI employees are now equipped with the knowledge and skills to improve their interactions with Māori staff, whānau, hapū and iwi, as well as Chinese staff, national and international Chinese stakeholders and Chinese visitors to New Zealand.



The Ministry for Primary Industries is responsible for overseeing, managing and regulating the farming, fishing, food, animal welfare, biosecurity, and forestry sectors of New Zealand's primary industries. MPI has more than 2,200 staff working in 70 locations here and overseas.

MPI's Māori cultural capability programme was developed with input from Te Tauaki Puāwai, a group of employees working to advance the inclusion of tikanga and taha Māori at the Ministry.

It was designed to build awareness of Māori viewpoints and concepts and improve engagement. It assists MPI to support the growth and protection of Māori assets and interests in forestry, fisheries, biosecurity, food, economic development and investment.

Manager Organisational Development Lorraine Kamo says enhancing bicultural capability is essential so that MPI can meet its Treaty of Waitangi responsibilities and support the growing Māori economy. "MPI staff must be able to engage effectively with whānau, hapū, and iwi, and value and protect Māori culture and interests," she says.

The Māori capability programme includes:

- Waharoa ki te Manatū Ahu Matua - a week-long induction programme delivered to all new staff
- Six cultural modules on topics such as understanding and respecting tikanga and kawa and valuing Māori concepts and perspectives
- Learning waiata and kapa haka (MPI developed its own waiata and haka as part of the programme)
- Gaining fluency in Te Reo Māori (face-to-face lessons, available to all staff)
- An annual hui-a-tau (2.5-day marae-based hui that any staff member can attend) and noho marae, two-day marae-based programmes targeting specific work groups or sectors (e.g. forestry, fisheries, leadership).
- Monthly waharoa pōwhiri for new staff.

The Ministry's focus on China was due to the rapid increase in New Zealand's international trade with China. New Zealand is an increasingly popular destination for Chinese tourists and Chinese migrants are the fastest growing demographic in our country.

A China Experts Advisory Group was established to progress China awareness. The group is made up of a variety of staff who have experience of living and working in China or dealing with Chinese nationals.

The China capability programme for staff includes:

- China awareness workshops covering topics such as relationship building, communication, Chinese language and phrases, values, protocols and cultural practices, and increasing understanding of central cultural concepts such as guanxi (relationships) and mianzi (saving face).
- In-house conversational Mandarin classes
- A detailed Knowing China guide and specialist advice and input from China experts.
- An online learning portal, available to all staff, which houses a range of learning modules.

MPI's leadership strongly supports the initiatives, setting aside significant budget, time and staffing allocation.

Māori capability modules have been delivered to more than 930 employees, and 162 people have participated in immersive noho marae experiences. Many others have taken part in workplace learning, Te Reo classes and cultural events.

To date, 894 MPI employees have taken part in face-to-face China awareness training, with 180 participating in Mandarin classes. More than 90 per cent rated the training as excellent or very good and reported that they now have more positive interactions with Chinese people.

Director Market Access Tim Knox has seen how the China capability programme benefits New Zealand's economic opportunities. With China now New Zealand's largest export market for primary products and food, Tim says the programme is "an invaluable tool in helping our people build understanding of the contextual, cultural and dynamic operating environment they will be engaging with as we pursue our market access objectives with China."

Another positive impact can be seen at border control. All border clearance and compliance staff are encouraged to complete an e-learning module focused on dealing effectively with Chinese nationals. MPI survey feedback indicates that interactions have improved, including a greater ability to solve issues at the border and reducing occurrences of non-compliance.

The initiatives have had positive feedback from employees, who say they have increased in confidence, developed valuable new skills, and gained fresh ways of looking at the world.

Senior Adviser Jo Ferguson says: "Learning Te Reo and the MPI waiata made me feel like I was part of something special and gave me a deeper appreciation of Māori culture. I am more mindful of historic events, external protocols and my own interactions with Māori."

Frank Chen, from the Business Property Services team, says the China capability programme "has enabled my colleagues to have an increased understanding of my culture. It has allowed me to utilise my cultural differences as a strength and this is empowering."

Staff who complete the learning modules can achieve recognised competencies to progress their career pathway, says Lorraine Kamo.

"As the Ministry's cultural capability grows, so does our ability to attract and retain employees from diverse backgrounds. It also improves morale and staff wellbeing."

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