

# Recent Actions by Maori Politicians and Health Advocates for a Tobacco-Free Aotearoa/New Zealand: A Brief Review

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## Background

Before colonisation Maori, like other indigenous populations, recognised the importance of healthy communities and also recognised the importance of a community-wide approach to ensure that this goal was met. It is this traditional shared belief in communal safety and collective responsibility that some Maori tobacco control advocates and researchers wish to restore and harness, as a basis for contemporary public health and policy interventions, and to reduce the high prevalence of tobacco smoking by Maori.

## Aims

To review recent Maori led key advocacy approaches and political party policy developments for indigenous tobacco control in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

## Results

### Bans on tobacco

Some Maori political leaders and national Maori tobacco control advocates have called for a complete ban on tobacco supply within Aotearoa/New Zealand; part of a plan for a tobacco-free Aotearoa/New Zealand within ten years. Maori have gathered support from a range of mainstream tobacco control advocates within Aotearoa/New Zealand for this approach. Maori political support has assisted this movement, with the drawing up of a private member's bill by Member of Parliament Hone Harawira of the Maori Party. The bill intends to make it illegal to produce or sell tobacco in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

### Advocacy language

The terms "auahi kore" smokefree, and more recently the shift to "tupeka kore" tobacco free, have been created by Maori advocates and tobacco control workers. In both cases ownership or control of the language used in health promotion is a key principle in best practice Maori health development.

### Focusing on the tobacco industry

Maori tobacco control advocates and politicians have used a variety of media and advocacy avenues to highlight tobacco industry actions, generating free media coverage. The activity has included direct action against the tobacco industry over the "Maori Mix" campaign; with Altria publicly apologising to Te Reo Marama at their Annual Shareholders meeting in 2007 for the exploitation and the offensive use of the term 'Maori'. The "Maori Murder and Endangered Species" social marketing campaigns have also targeted the role of the tobacco industry in sustaining smoking.



Figure 1. Maori Mix cigarettes before they were removed from the market in response to protests by Te Reo Marama in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

## Discussion

Key Maori health development principles have been utilised in the approaches examined; including interventions developed and delivered by Maori for Maori, and focusing on strengthened Maori identity. Maori leadership, both at a political, tribal and national advocacy level, can play a crucial role in changing both the policy environment and attitudes both nationally and internationally.

Further interventions to reduce ethnic disparities in tobacco uptake and consumption could include legislation that limits access to tobacco products, and further work with local Maori communities to influence tribal policy on tobacco access and use. National legislation could move the availability of tobacco from every corner store, to a greatly reduced number of strictly licensed retailers. Iwi (tribes) could advocate a tikanga (cultural) based position that would call on retailers to remove this harmful product within their tribal boundaries; this could complement (or even stimulate) a national licensing scheme with restrictions on tobacco retailer density. Other moves could include bringing the control of the tobacco taxes paid by Maori into Maori hands, so that the revenue is used for ending tobacco use.

For a full report see the online report by Gifford & Bradbrook at: <http://www.wnmeds.ac.nz/itcproject.html>

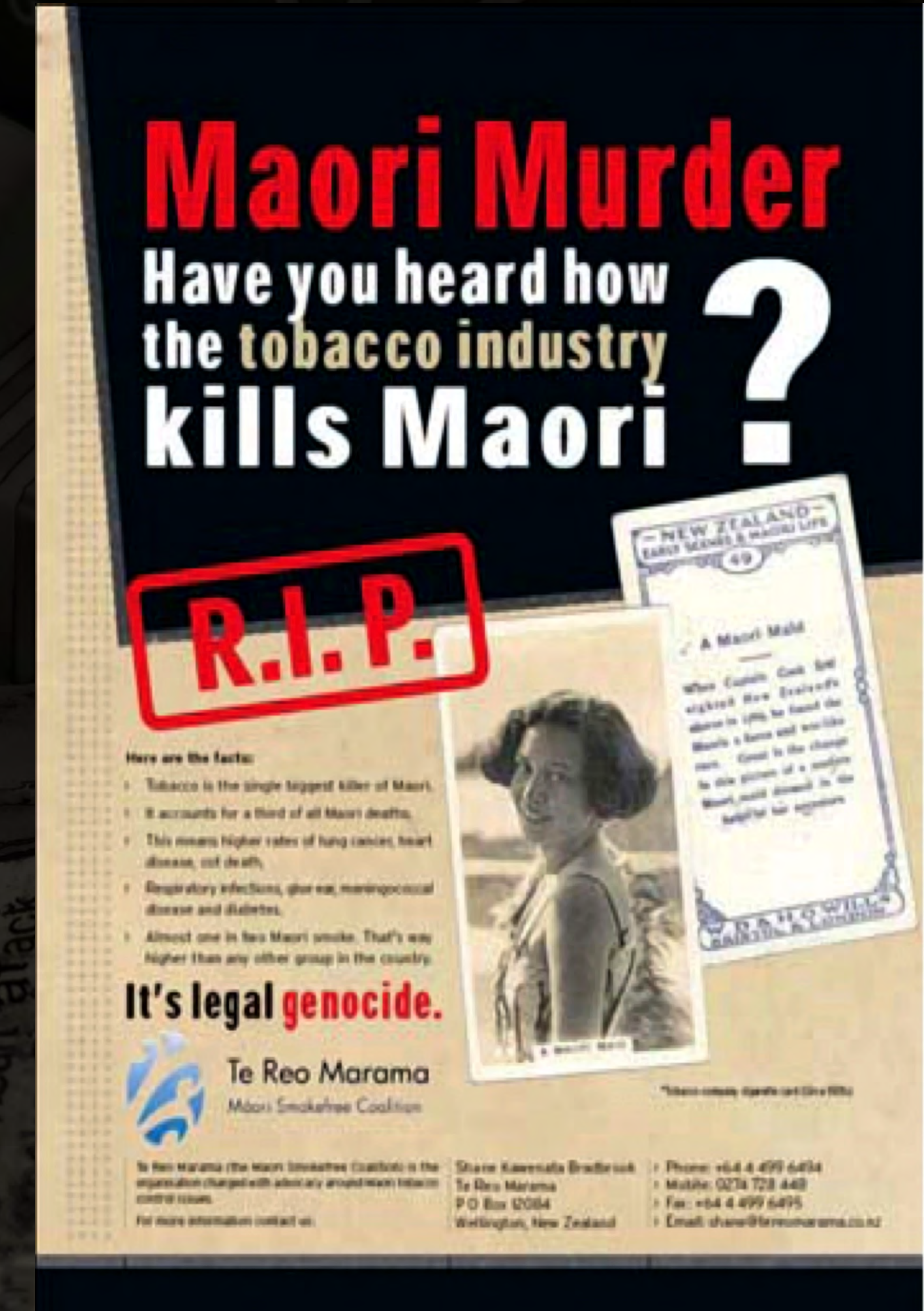


Figure 2. The first of the recent tobacco industry denormalisation media campaigns, developed in 2006, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, involved a "Maori Murder" poster.

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