Northland iwi back 'yes' vote in debate

Lindy Laird | Thursday, August 6, 2009 18:00

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A Northland iwi consortium has thrown its weight behind supporting the anti-smacking referendum and is asking people to say "yes".

Leaders from the seven Northland (Te Tai Tokerau) iwi who  comprise the Amokura Family Violence Prevention Consortium are urging the public to read past the controversial referendum's wording.

"We are voting 'yes' as good parents want their children to have the same protection as adults," Ngati Whatua chief executive Allan Pivac said.

The referendum asks: "Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in New Zealand?"

He and other iwi leaders say attitudes should be based on the need to give children protection and a legal voice, not on criticism of the wording.

"Our  No1 responsibility is manaakitanga, the care of our people, and our children need to be protected from all forms of abuse," Ngapuhi chief executive Teresa Tepania-Ashton said.

Amokura has made prevention of violence in whanau a strategic priority since 2003, executive director Di Grennell said. The consortium comprises Ngapuhi, Te Aupouri, Ngati Kahu, Whaingaroa, Te Rarawa, Ngatiwai and Ngati Whatua.

Trustees of Nga Manga Puriri, a network of Northland kaumatua which oversees a range of community and youth services, are also urging people to vote to keep the smacking bill.

"Young people have a right to be protected from harm," the group's chairman Mare Clarke said. "We support the 'yes' vote."

The referendum has been  criticised in many quarters, including by a large number of MPs who say they will not vote at all because of the ambiguous nature of its wording.

A Research New Zealand poll taken during June suggested three-out-of-four New Zealanders believe the non-binding "anti-smacking" referendum - which will cost $8.9 million - is a waste of money.

Child health welfare agencies, including Women's Refuge, Unicef and Plunket,  are against the referendum, saying it is unnecessary as the child protection law, passed by Parliament in 2007 with an overwhelming majority of 113 to eight votes, is working.