



# metiria Turei



Metiria Turei may have become the Green Party's Co-leader in June 2009 but even after the fact, she wonders when she developed such aspirations. It's in these condensed moments of self-analysis that Metiria's political personality is most obvious, and that you begin to gain insight into how the three-term Green MP has been able to exert such disproportionate influence in the House and in the community.

Metiria's life is peppered with challenges that have been successfully converted into opportunities. She remains resolutely unbound to any particular ideology ("the dusty tomes of old, dead guys") and developed her political theories alongside the practical application of dissent and organisation.

Like her Party colleague Sue Bradford, much of Metiria's political action centred on the rights of beneficiaries. She well remembers unemployed life as an 18-year old in Wellington and says that, after heading to Teachers' College in Palmerston North, she continued to volunteer within the Unemployed Rights Movement.

"The work started as a social outlet but it soon became a full-time job," she says. "I became a co-ordinator for the National Maori Beneficiaries Network and it was a tough role organising some very hardcore men, especially when my age and gender at that time were massive disadvantages in certain people's eyes."

Wiser and a little older, Metiria then moved to Auckland where she came into contact with three groups that would prove instrumental in developing her political conscience: the anarchist movement, NORML, and the McGillicuddy Serious Party.

"We had fantastic discussions on the exercise of power and crucially I came into contact with many young Pakeha who, just like my Maori contemporaries, felt disenchanted with the state," she says. "The truth was there were lots of people excluded from Government."

***"It's our time to seize the moment for the benefit of all."***

At just 22, Metiria became pregnant and along with the excitement came a sense of panic. "I thought 'I can't rely on a man or the state to look after us' and coming from a poor family, there was no fall back plan. So, I had to come up with a way to ensure we could take care of ourselves."

In true Metiria fashion, she applied to law school ("A friend of mine had applied and I knew I was at least as smart as her!"), was accepted, and duly graduated, all while maintaining significant links with her political contemporaries.

"I pushed for law firms to engage more with Maori students when it came to summer clerking roles and I remember accepting a job with one particular firm purely because I was impressed that they asked me to interview," she laughs.

With legal professionals to complete, a certain wedding to attend (as the bride!), the acquisition of two extra children (by virtue of the aforementioned nuptials), and a fulltime law clerking role, Metiria decided that 1999 would be her year of political silence. What a year to keep her mouth shut.

“Nandor and Sue both became MPs that year and I just remember being fascinated by the success of the Green Party and by the fact that here were two people I knew who were having their ideas taken seriously enough to claim a list position that saw them enter Parliament,” she says.

Her first reaction was pure Metiria: “I mean, if their ideas could be taken seriously, so could mine!”

Sure enough, her year of political silence came to a swift end. She joined the Greens in 2000 and, instantly making up for lost time (“That first meeting I talked a lot!”), Metiria threw herself into Treaty of Waitangi issues.

“I was obviously keen for our charter to reflect the Treaty, but only in a meaningful way,” she says. “I spent



two years travelling around the country discussing the issue with Party members, learning how to form consensus through shared information. When we passed the charter amendment in 2002, it was a wonderfully rewarding experience.”

Metiria’s work during this time also made her a well-known and well-respected member of the Greens and in 2002 she entered Parliament at number eight on the Party list. Her first act was, quite literally, to make a song and a dance.

“I sung part of my maiden speech – Blam Blam Blam’s *There is no Depression in New Zealand* in Te Reo – before the rules allowed waiata in the Chamber,” she says. “I can still remember the translator being deadly serious through the entire thing and thinking to myself ‘How did I end up here?’”

As has been the case through most of Metiria’s life, the self-doubt didn’t hang around too long and soon she was taking the daily grind of parliamentary life in her stride. Her background as a corporate lawyer, an urban activist and a politician who has spoken out on environmental issues such as preserving the wild Mokihinui River has made her hard to pigeonhole, but she says the battle for credibility has been interesting.

Today, how she’s seen by the broader public is perhaps even more relevant than ever, but for Metiria the Co-leadership is less about her personality and more about the changing face of the Green movement.

“This entire political landscape is changing,” she says. “Young voters are well-educated, ecologically aware and focused on social justice. Gone is the ‘me first’ attitude that prevailed in New Zealand a decade ago; so it’s our time to seize the moment for the benefit of all.”

**Date of birth:** 13 February 1970

**Family:** Married 10 years to my beloved, one lovely daughter 16, two wonderful grown stepchildren

**Hobbies:** taniko weaving, science fiction novels, performance art

**Favourite NZ animal or bird:**  
The kaka and the tuna

**Favourite movie:** *I’m Not There*

**Favourite novel:** *The Baroque Cycle* by Neal Stephenson

**Music I play on Saturday mornings:**  
Cat Power, PJ Harvey, The Band

**My never-fail recipe:** Thai beef salad, with coriander dressing

**Greatest sporting achievement:**  
My first half marathon, major blisters, ridiculously slow, didn’t stop to walk once

**Year entered Parliament:** 2002

**Green Spokesperson for:**  
Conservation, Corrections, Fisheries, Alcohol & Drug Issues, ICT, Law & Order, Maori Issues, Tertiary Education, Youth, Treaty of Waitangi (Assoc)

**First political action:** Protest against unemployment in 1989

**Most embarrassing political moment:** Wearing a Frog Hat on national television. It was National Frog Day after all

**Proudest political moment:**  
Becoming Co-leader of the Green Party

**Hero:** Millicent Baxter, peace activist, wife and mother