

# H debate should remain a 2009 woe

**I**T HAS become rather tiresome, this H debate thing. Been going on for years — more than 100 some would say — albeit with somewhat less intensity than during past year or two. It has brought out the best in some of us and the worst in others. The hundreds (maybe thousands) of letters to this newspaper are evidence of that.

There have been those whose opinions on the H were overtly racist. Their views were expressed in way that denigrated Maori, their language, culture, traditions and customs.

Other letter writers held slightly less jaundiced views of Maori and their place in our society and what they should or should not expect in terms of recognition of their language. Some even supported the Iwi application to the New Zealand Geographic Board to have the H restored to Whanganui.

It's difficult to prove, but the vast majority of letter writers on all three sides of the H debate — absolutely against, absolutely for and bob each way punters — appeared to be Pakeha. Very few writers clearly identifiable as Maori actively entered into the debate, at least not in the columns of the *Chronicle's* Opinion page.

It would be drawing a very long bow indeed to suggest that correspondents to the *Chronicle* had any significant influence on the Geographic Board's decision in favour of the restoring the H, any more than it was swayed by Wanganui District Council's claim that its ratepayers had spoken through two referenda on the H issue.

Then along came Lands Minister Maurice Williamson and with something less than the wisdom of Solomon, gave us his either-or decision.

With the coming of Christmas, the H issue disappeared behind the haze of warm fuzzies that go with the season.

But that has now dispersed and the H debate looks set to enter another phase — the looming scrap between Mayor Michael Laws and his council and the electronic media over how Wanganui/Whanganui should be pronounced.

One suspects that those who determine how our (State-owned) radio and television station pronounce Maori place names will hardly be quaking in the ivory towers because a predominantly Pakeha council want it their way while local Maori (the guardians of te reo) have made it clear they don't share that view.

Perhaps the advice given by the young women in the television advertisement in which a young man is bleating about her ill-treatment of his special bread could apply here: "Let it go Michael . . . it was last year."