

THE SAMI PARLIAMENT — edited by Anahera Herbert-Graves

¹ As part of their constitutional transformation mahi, members of [Matike Mai o Aotearoa](#) (the Independent Iwi Working Group) researched other models of indigenous governance. Additionally a number of participants at the [hui](#) held between 2010 – 2015 tabled information about indigenous government institutions they had visited or were familiar with.

Everyone recognised the different circumstances of those institutions, as well as their limitations. However they did provide helpful starting points about how constitutionalism is understood by other [tangata whenua](#) and how it can be given effect. The hui found three examples of particular interest, the first being the Sami Parliament.

The [Sami Parliament or Samediggi](#) was established in Norway in 1989. It has an elected plenary body of thirty nine representatives and deals with political initiatives relevant to the Sami people.



Although its current practical powers are modest it recognises the idea of different “spheres of influence” that the [Waitangi Tribunal](#) referred to in the [Paparahi o te Raki](#) claim. Its importance is the practical recognition it gives to the Sami and their rights. A former member of the Sami Council, the late [Leif Dunfjeld](#), commented –

“What has always been vital to us is being able to give some institutional and constitutional form to our right of self determination. Moving it from a right just talked about or an ideal just argued over with the [Norwegian government](#) to

what is now a functioning practice has been a reclaiming of who we are ... We are in a different constitutional relationship with the State now which is based on our political authority and we haven’t had a mechanism to exercise that for centuries”.

Some contributors at the hui had met or hosted Sami delegations and were aware of the restrictions under which the Samediggi currently operates. However they also regarded the constitutional and institutional recognition of it by the Norwegian government as an important precedent for [Māori](#) and other Indigenous Peoples –

“The situations are really different but having some place where their [rangatiratanga](#) is exercised is much better than the kind of ad hoc process we have here where [the Crown](#) doesn’t even acknowledge a constitutional role for us unless it’s on their terms and in their system. At least they have a Parliament where they can come together as a people in a constitutional framework rather than just the hui we have to have whenever we need to react to something the Crown is doing”.

“When they were here they talked about the [hara](#) they used to have deciding mandates and ... and all of the other issues that most of our [Iwi Authorities](#) are plagued with. But now that they are in a formal constitutional relationship with the Norwegian government and have their own institutions and governing body, a lot of those problems seem to have disappeared.”



¹ Twenty-first edited extract from pp. 63 – 64 of [He Whakaaro Here Whakaumu Mō Aotearoa – The Report of Matike Mai o Aotearoa](#)