

Mayor to broach China's human rights stance

By LAURA MCQUILLAN

WELLINGTON'S MAYOR has assured pro-Tibet campaigners she will tackle Chinese leaders over human rights when she travels to sister-city Beijing for the Olympics later this year.

The assurance is an apparent about-face from Mayor Kerry Prendergast's original stance. In May she told *The Wellingtonian* it was the New Zealand Government's role to talk to Chinese Government about Tibet and human rights, and while in China her focus would be on Wellington's sister

city relationship with Beijing and Xiamen.

However, Ms Prendergast now says she's aware many Wellingtonians are concerned about human rights issues in Tibet and wants to hear what they have to say.

"I can assure those people that I do hope to convey their concerns to city government officials in Beijing while I am there."

She says the nature of the sister-city relationship with Beijing means discussions are usually centred on cultural, educational and business links, but she will use the opportunity to discuss human rights.

"The Olympics will probably provide a time of greater openness and press freedom in China so that will give us a good context for discussing human rights in an official capacity.

"Human rights per se are not usually on the agenda for

discussion, as detailed discussions on such issues are more appropriately had at national government level, but I do intend to raise the issue during this trip in the spirit of friendship we share."

Wellingtonian Natalie Osborne created a petition through the city council website last month calling for dialogue between Wellington and Beijing's authorities during Ms Prendergast's trip to Beijing.

Ms Osborne says the petition is an effective way to show Ms Prendergast that she has support in talking about Tibet while she is in Beijing for the Olympics in August.

The petition asks Ms Prendergast to urge Chinese leaders "to respect the human rights of Tibetans and to free those held for peacefully expressing their beliefs, to allow UN monitors and journalists access to Tibet to ascertain the situation, to negotiate with the Dalai Lama for a meaningful solution to the Tibetan issue".

The petition has more than 100 signatures online and Ms Osborne says there are several hundred signatures on paper copies.

Ms Prendergast will attend the Olympics Opening Ceremony on August 8 and watch New Zealand athletes compete over the following two days.