



Figure 1: Whakapara Marae

Te Kawa Waiora

Hui Wānanga Report

DATE	26 June 2021
VENUE	Whakapara Marae, Whakapara
WRITTEN BY	Charles Royal
ON BEHALF OF	Reconnecting Northland
FOR	Waimā, Waitai, Waiora

On the 26th of June, 2021, the Te Kawa Waiora team, in partnership with Ngāti Hau, convened a 1 day hui at Whakapara Marae, Whakapara, to discuss hapū perspectives regarding the waterways of their area. The hui commenced with a pōwhiri at 10am. This was followed by whakawhanaungatanga where hui participants introduced themselves and their connections to and interest in the topic of the hui.

Charles Royal then presented an overview of the Te Kawa Waiora project – its objectives, the way the research is being conducted and supporting aspects such as iwi research training. The presentation discussed the questions posed as the foci of the research, as follows:

- What is the traditional tangata whenua (iwi, hapū, whānau) view of the river and its tributaries?
- What is the tangata whenua (iwi, hapū, whānau) view of *change* in the rivers since the 19th century?
- What is the tangata whenua (iwi, hapū, whānau) view of the river now?
 - What do they believe needs to be done now?
 - How can we measure the mauri of the river?
 - How can the tangata whenua (iwi, hapū, whānau) help with improving the river and its tributaries?

Charles then introduced the topic of ‘a tangata whenua view of rivers’. The purpose of this presentation is to explore the deeper and inner aspects and wisdom of traditional indigenous knowledge. It is a kinship-based relationship with the natural world that underpins tangata Whenuatanga or indigeneity. This presentation included discussion of the traditions of iwi about rivers located in other parts of the country – including the Kaituna River, Mōhaka River and particularly the Whanganui River. Charles touched on the initiative to grant ‘legal personhood’ to the Whanganui River as a way of improving the management of the river and of achieving better outcomes for it.

The hui then discussed Ngāti Hau traditions pertaining to their waterways. Te Raa Nehua explained that there are several waterways in the area and that are of concern to Ngāti Hau; however, he drew attention to three in particular – the *Waiotū*, the *Waiariki* and *Whakapara* itself which is sometimes referred to as *Waimā*. Te Raa explained that these three waterways all flow into the Wairua River (which crosses the Hikurangi swamp) which in turn flows into the Wairoa River.



Figure 2: A detail from a series of stain glass windows entitled 'Ngā Wai o Puhipuhi' by Ngāti Hau artist Kathy Shaw. These stain glass windows are installed in the wharekai at Whakapara Marae.

A brief discussion took place concerning the meanings of the names of these waterways. Traditional placenames are often 'doorways' or 'avenues' into the traditional knowledge and perspectives a people hold about their environment. For example, in the case of Waiariki, this reflects the presence of geothermal water in the area. Te Rā Nehua explained that geothermal water in and near Whakapara connects to geothermal water located throughout the North Island – to places such as Waiwera north of Auckland City, geothermal areas in Hauraki (eg: Pūkorokoro, Te Puia, Te Aroha) and further south again.

Regarding Waiotū, there are several perspectives regarding the meaning of this placename – one such being that the name suggests that the waters were once used for the purposes of preparing for battle and for cleansing purposes following battle.

During the afternoon of the hui, the discussion turned to the question of *change* in the river and its tributaries since the 19th century and what the Ngāti Hau people believe needs to be done now to improve the health of these waterways. During this discussion, it was important to recall the reason why this hui was held at Whakapara which, on the face of it, is a long way from the Wairoa River. However, as Ngāti Hau explained, their waterways flow into the Hikurangi swamp. The Hikurangi swamp (which includes the Wairua River) flows directly into Wairoa River, the subject of this study. Like Te Orewai of Pipīwai, Ngāti Hau argue that it is not possible to address the poor condition of the Wairoa River without addressing the Hikurangi swamp which one hui participant described as once the 'food bowl of the hapū'.

Other matters raised in this part of the discussion included the presence of mercury in the local waterways (artificially raised through mining activities) and the question of the ownership of water. Like so many tangata whenua communities, hui participants also expressed their frustrations regarding the actions and inactions of local government, and they called for resourced, long term 'ground up' kaitiaki action. These frustrations are heightened further as a host of tangata whenua led projects are already taking place throughout the catchment, however, these projects are vulnerable as they continuously rely on volunteer contributions and limited funding. Meanwhile, 'resourced' local government activities continue with limited improvements in areas that really matter.

Project Oxbow Restoration

During the afternoon, Te Rā Nehua delivered a presentation concerning 'oxbow' restoration. An oxbow is an area of land that has been 'orphaned' through the straightening of waterways. An example can be found adjacent to Whakapara Marae. This oxbow was created when a new channel was installed in the Whakapara River to 'straighten' the river.

One of the outcomes of creating oxbows is that water bodies can become disconnected and stagnant because they are no longer connected to the main river flow. Te Rā Nehua is leading a project – 'Project Oxbow Restoration' – which is about rehabilitating the land and the waterways in oxbows near Whakapara marae. This includes a host of activities – such as water quality monitoring, the installation of a weir to increase the water flow in the disconnected water areas, planting and much more.



Figure 3: An image showing an oxbow near Whakapara Marae, created when a channel was installed – where the words 'Whakapara River' appear.

An aspect of Te Rā's presentation concerned relationships with local landowners. The owner of the oxbow land adjacent to the marae is supportive of 'Project Oxbow Restoration'. However, Ngāti Hau is conscious that not all landowners will be similarly supportive. Te Rā believes that a significant barrier to advancing this project relates to the quality of the relationships with local landowners across their takiwā. The question was therefore posed concerning the ability of this research project to develop tools, knowledge and ways of achieving good relationships with landowners across a takiwā/district such as Whakapara. The research team noted this question.

Visit to a Pump Station, Rushbrook Rd, near Hikurangi

Following the presentation concerning Project Oxbow Restoration, hui participants were then taken to one of seven water pump stations located in the Hikurangi swamp. The Hikurangi swamp is an enormous area that was once a complete swamp/rēpō system. It has been comprehensively drained to make way for farmland and only minor remnant wetlands remain. It is described as follows:

(The) Hikurangi Swamp Scheme is a land drainage and flood protection scheme managed by Whangarei District Council, providing protection to 5,600 ha of low-lying pastoral farmland within a catchment of 55,000 ha. The scheme was progressively implemented over the last century with major stopbanks and pump stations being installed in the 1970's and has extensively modified what was one of the largest wetlands in the southern hemisphere. This has resulted in major impacts on the eel fishery which is of significant cultural and historic importance for local landlocked iwi as well as a commercial source.¹



Figure 4: View of the Hikurangi swamp from Rushbrook pump station.

¹ From 'Managing Fish Passage in the Hikurangi Swamp Land Drainage and Flood Protection Scheme' by Conal Summers, Whāngārei District Council. See here: [https://www.waternz.org.nz/Attachment?Action=Download&Attachment_id=821#:~:text=The%20Hikurangi%20Swamp%20Scheme%20\(the,stopbanks%20and%20%20pump%20stations](https://www.waternz.org.nz/Attachment?Action=Download&Attachment_id=821#:~:text=The%20Hikurangi%20Swamp%20Scheme%20(the,stopbanks%20and%20%20pump%20stations)

Here is an image showing the extend of the Hikurangi swamp area:



Figure 5: An image showing the general area in which the Hikurangi swamp is located - showing Whakapara in the north, Pipiwai to the west, Tītoki and the Wairua Falls to the south and Ngā Rara-i-tunua in the south east (north west of Whāngārei). The Wairua River.

Ngāti Hau laments the change that has taken place in this area and its depleted and poor condition. They showed us a water pump station located near Rushbrook Rd which was installed to remove water during significant flooding events. The purpose is to protect farmlands. Each water pump station is located on enormous channels dug into the earth to straighten waterways and drain water away from adjacent farmland. The whole ‘scheme’ has been incredibly invasive and impactful upon the landscape.

One of the key issues that Ngāti Hau raised during this visit was the destruction of tuna through swimming into the pump stations. Ngāti Hau is deeply concerned about this and are working with local authorities to assist preventing this from happening. Ngāti Hau have a deep desire to continue to be able to serve healthy local tuna on their wharekai table as an expression of their mana whenua.

Other matters raised by Ngāti Hau include:

- Riparian and other planting is taking place here and elsewhere. Ngāti Hau are heavily involved.
- The water levels in the Wairoa, Wairua and Whakapara rivers are different. This is significant and important to understand for effective planning.
- Oxbow restoration throughout Hikurangi is required. This is an enormous project that will require significant coordination and collaboration with a variety of stakeholders (some landowners are supportive, some aren't).
- Addressing invasive species is also another urgent issue.
- There are many Government agencies involved in a place like Hikurangi (DOC, local government, MPI etc) as well as other entities (such as Fish and Game, Federated Farmers) making for a complex and confusing context in which to work.



Figure 6: A water pump station located on Rushbrook Rd, near the Wairua River and within the vast Hikurangi swamp.

Following the visit to the pump station, the group returned to the marae to conclude the hui by summarising the day.

Many thanks to Te Rā Nehua, Te Kawehau Hoskins, Lissa Davies and Ngāti Hau for a helpful and productive hui.



Figure 7: Whakapara Marae

Appendix 1:

Attendees:

Te Raa Nehua

Soozee McIntyre

Thelma Connor

Pamela Grace

Liam Ratana

Lissa Davies

Woody Riley

Deborah Kariwhaka

Keakealani Seve

Te Kawehau Hoskins

Violet Nathan

Moeawa Hall

Charles Nathan

Research Team:

Charles Royal and Celia Witehira

Apologies:

Hineāmaru Davies-Lyndon



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Whakapara Marae, Whakapara

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