



*Te Kōwhai Marae*

# Te Kawa Waiora

## Hui Wānanga Report

---

DATE	<b>27 November 2021</b>
VENUE	<b>Te Kōwhai Marae, Ruawai</b>
WRITTEN BY	<b>Charles Royal</b>
ON BEHALF OF	<b>Reconnecting Northland</b>
FOR	<b>Waimā, Waitai, Waiora</b>

---

## Introduction

The Te Kawa Waiora team was delighted to hold our seventh and last hui at Te Kōwhai Marae, near Ruawai, Kaipara on Saturday, 27 November 2021. The team is grateful to the whānau of Te Kōwhai for hosting this hui at a time when Covid-19 remains a considerable threat to our communities.

Given that a primary concern of this research project was to ensure that it was run within iwi/hapū/whānau/marae communities and involved the rivers and other waterways as much as possible, given too that Covid-19 has prevented the team from visiting as many marae as originally planned, the Te Kawa Waiora team is particularly grateful to Te Kōwhai Marae. It would have been disappointing to conclude Te Kawa Waiora without running a kanohi-ki-te-kanohi hui. As it turned out, the Te Kōwhai Marae hui allowed us to ‘touch base’ again with our marae communities and with the Waiora itself.

The hui commenced in the usual fashion with a pōwhiri and kai. The hui itself opened with whakawhanaungatanga where hui participants introduced themselves and offered some introductory thoughts regarding the kaupapa of the day. During the pōwhiri and again during the introduction to the hui, Charles took the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the whānau of Te Kōwhai Marae for hosting the hui.



*Image 1: Hui wānanga participants outside Te Kowhai Marae.*

Charles then presented an overview of the project – its aims and objectives – and discussed the three primary questions posed 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 to improve the health, wellbeing and mauri of the river including its tributaries and environs.

---

The day was spent discussing responses to each of these questions.



*Image 2: The Waiora River landscape looking up towards Ruawai and Dargaville.*



## 1. What is the traditional tangata whenua (iwi, hapū, whānau) view of the river and its tributaries?

During the pōwhiri and the whakawhanaungatanga session, local kaumātua Mikaera Miru spoke of a pepeha and a series of statements about the mana whenua/tangata whenuatanga of Ngāti Whātua in the Wairoa and Kaipara areas. The pepeha and statements – customarily used during pōwhiri and other events – refers to taonga that are critical to the identity and mana whenua of Ngāti Whātua in this area. During Session One, therefore, the hui spent time exploring this pepeha and statements as a way by which to respond to Question One of this research. Here is a summary of the points made during this discussion:

- **The Kaipara and Wairoa as a source of kai and sustenance:**

The pepeha referred to the Kaipara as ‘Te kete kai o Ngāti Whātua’ or ‘the food basket of Ngāti Whātua’. The theme of kai does not just refer to the actual kai obtained from the waterways, but also the mātauranga and tikanga associated with gathering kai (when, where and by whom?), with preparing kai and with presenting kai. The tikanga of kai is not just about obtaining the resource. Kai o te rangitira, Ngā Kōrero tuku iho.

- **The presence of taniwha:**

Reference was also made to Rangiriri and Pokopoko, the two taniwha of Wairoa and Kaipara. Rangiriri was further referred to as ‘Rangiriri whakangau tai’ (sometimes also ‘Rangiriri e ngau i te tai’), the taniwha who was able to swim against the tide. Pokopoko was referred to as the fighting taniwha.

- **Three Ngaru or waves:**

Reference was made to three ngaru or waves (Tokotoko Retimana named the three ngaru as hoeroa, kahukura and rangimārie). Some discussion took place as to their meaning. Some thought that the ngaru referred to inland freshwater moving during storm and deluge events. Others wondered whether the ngaru referred to the movement of seawater from the seaward side toward the land, particularly at the mouth of the harbour, much like the three ngaru tradition of the Hokianga Harbour (Ngaru-nui, Ngaru-roa, Ngaru-pae-whenua).

- **An Ancestral Waka:**

Reference was also made to Māhūhūkiterangi and Rongomai, waka and tupuna respectively of Ngāti Whātua. The waka arrived in Kaipara before being taken elsewhere in Te Tai Tokerau. There was a famous incident where Rongomai was drowned and when his body was recovered, it had been eaten by the *araara* or trevally. Since that time, there has always been a sanction/tapu against eating the araara.

- **Wāhi Tapu:**

Finally, reference was also made to Tāporapora, a peninsula of land that once jutted out from the land toward the mouth of the Kaipara, which created a greater division between the Kaipara to the south and the Waiora to the north. At some point, a great storm rose and caused the bulk of Tāporapora to be covered in water. The two distinct waterways of Kaipara and Wairoa became more of a single body of water and hence the modern-day idea of the ‘Kaipara Harbour’ arose.

All these aspects speak to the mana whenua/tangata whenua relationship to the Wairoa and Kaipara.

---



*Image 3: Looking to the end of the Poutō peninsular from Te Kowhai.*

## 2. What is the tangata whenua (iwi, hapū, whānau) view of change in the rivers since the 19th century?

After lunch, the hui then turned to discuss Question Two which concerns the tangata whenua view of change in the river and environs since the 19th century. Here are some notes taken during this discussion.



*Image 4: Kelly Retimana sharing his research of old maps of the Kaipara and the changes observed.*

- Living in poverty, living with the effects of colonisation.
- Decolonising the diet, diet arising from poverty, pastoral farming ('when did brisket become a Māori kai?').
  - All sorts of things we believe to be traditional today are things that have come into our culture through living with pastoral farming.
  - Sometimes people ate a combination of foods from the land and kai bought from elsewhere. For example, cakes and sweets (using ingredients from elsewhere) were eaten after eating vegetables, for example, grown locally. One result was the introduction of diabetes, and how some people became reliant upon diabetes pills.

- It was customary to ensure that there was no waste of fish. Pākehā fishermen knew this too, they never allowed fish to go to waste.
- In later times, commercial fishing came into the harbour and over fished the fishing stocks. Such was the level of frustration that one day, shots were fired in protest.
- Mikaera Miru talked about ‘hundreds’ of flounder jumping in the sea just below the marae at Tino Pai. “You could hear the splash, splash, splash and you could see the mullet jumping out of the water... the mullet has gone. Right in front of the marae there was a sand ledge... and you could walk along that ledge and there were millions of pipis... And then snapper used to come in to feed on the pipis. But all those pipis have gone... the mullet has been decimated... there were pupu... there were kutae... hundreds of crabs... Today, I tell the kids don’t you touch those crabs... you leave what few crabs there are... This is all gone...”
- “Was it over fished or was it mud?” A mixture of environmental changes and increased fishing caused the depletion of fish stocks.
- Mina Henare-Toka talked about how we would watch people from outside the area “coming in to take a thousand scallops, go home and put it in their freezer.”
- Causes of environmental degradation, including species loss, include:
  - Sedimentation
  - Unmanaged fishing
  - Toxins and fertilizers released into the waterways
  - Algae bloom
- Mikaera talked about a farmer using helicopters to spray gorse and then aeroplanes to release fertilizer on his land immediately adjacent to scallop beds. Although the farmer is careful to ensure that the fertilizer falls on his land, it still makes its way into waterways. This is also aided by rain.
- Diane Bradshaw talked about her experiences of gathering kai with her kuia. She talked about how quick and efficient they were, and how they knew the waterways intimately. They didn’t waste energy and knew how to move with the water and the currents. “The kuia were absolute experts at collecting kai.”
- Lyvia talked about orchards and gardens (tāpapa) ‘everywhere’ in the valley. Then there were a small number of cows. They would also eat kaimoana, of course. “In my time in the 1970s, I used to live to eat. I used to come up here and get oranges... go down to Auntie Sophie’s and raid the feijoa and figs, over to Curtis’s and raid some peaches, go down to Auntie Greta’s and raid whatever was down there...”
- Farming caused change in the valley and the orchards slowly disappeared. “We got into the farming thing... got a cow shed with an electric motor... milked maybe 40, 50 cows each day...”
- Urbanisation too caused huge change; the people left. “The boys left... went down to Silverdale...”



- Some land remains in whānau ownership, but the largest amount of land has been alienated.
  - Diane Bradshaw spoke about Hori Wetini coming to the district in the 1870s from the Hokianga, seeking work. When the first generation began to age, “Hokianga would come to take those tūpāpaku home...”
  - There are contemporary examples of people being taken back to Hokianga and Muriwhenua.
  - Mikaera, “Our parents had to go away to get jobs, Māori couldn’t get loans to improve their lands, but Pākehā could... my father moved across to Te Hana because of the dairy factory there... as they moved away, they moved deeper and deeper into the Pākehā world... One of the biggest impacts upon us as Māori has been the loss of our tikanga... we need to come back to this marae and leave the Pākehā world outside... on the tikanga of our tupuna... we need to teach our tamariki... we have all this raruraru of the Pākehā world washing over us... it’s time to kick all that Pākehā stuff to touch...”
-



### 3. What is the tangata whenua (iwi, hapū, whānau) view of the river now?

During the afternoon, the hui visited an elevated location behind the marae where one could see the full length of the Poutō Peninsula to the mouth of the Kaipara. The remains of Tāporapora could also be seen in the distance.



*Figure 1: Map showing location of Te Kowhai Marae and the elevated location at the end of Gee Road.*

After the visit, the hui returned to the marae to discuss the final question of the research. Notes from this discussion as follows:

- Diane Bradshaw: There is a need to protect the whole water space including the bed, air above it to give the Kaipara its own rights [e.g. legal personality in nature]. There is a need to address the legal status of the Kaipara and Wairoa, much like the way Whanganui River is protected. Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017, what emerged in the Te Awa Tupua Act – a social and cultural connection for the people of the river.
- Freda: We need to understand the Ngāpuhi view because the river begins in the north. What are their thoughts on cleaning it up?

- Mikaera: The Government does not take tikanga Māori effectively into account. “We have got to stand on our own tikanga...” Problems with statutory boards representing iwi, “we have this obsession with pleasing the Crown and I’m sick of it... we have to come back onto our marae... we need to come back together as Māori... we need to start learning our tikanga... our connection to Ranginui and Papatuanuku... so that all our decisions come from the marae... all our maraes come together... we are developing a framework for moving forward into the future... our tikanga moving forward... we go collectively together to the Council after having hui amongst ourselves... this is how our awa is going to be managed going into the future... we want that partnership of Crown and Māori at the table together... always the Crown running the whole process... it’s like a machine gobbling us up...”
  - The Dome Valley resource consent process had inadequate cultural advice “where was the power of mana whenua to have a say?”
  - “We need to talk about the mana over the river... the mana of tangata whenua to actually have a say...”
  - “the mauri of the Wairoa River, of the whole of the Kaipara has been desecrated...”
  - “We have to have a balance at the governance level, at government level to have a meaningful say in the management of the harbour. For me, I believe the way forward is for all the marae to come together, to talk about this *take*...”
- Toko: “If I was to challenge the validity of the Kaipara, I would do it under this basis, I would prepare for total war. It would be last man standing... I would get rid of all the councils and all the iwi committees... then I would call on the whare tapu of Ngāpuhi... because the streams and the awa come from their area... I would set up a war council, left right and centre...”
  - “I would get the dredges in to clean the rivers...”
  - “The Kaipara is the food basket...”
- Diane Bradshaw: Te Kirihihi, the Treaty for Ngāti Whātua.
  - Flag *Te Aweawe o te Rangi*
  - Land and related issues
  - The settlement of the Te Uri-o-Hau claims cultural and heritage protection.
  - “Our rangatira sold our land, a lot of it... they gave land too for things like hospitals, public facilities.”
- Lyvia: “land and water do go together, we have to look after our land...”
  - “We have to try and find a way to look after our land a lot better...”
  - 54 flood gates, something like that.

- Diane Bradshaw: e.g; today dams are a priority with water storage for agriculture “we have to ask, what is available for our marae and papakāinga?”
  - Is there is nitrate in our waters?
  - “Three Waters?”
  - “Is the data about the Kaipara available?”
  - Likely increases in temperature and changes in rainfall trends is a result of climate change. This is likely to lead to a reductions in aquifer recharge rates and increased potential for saltwater intrusion in coastal aquifers.
- Lyvia: “What water are we drinking now? Are we drinking water that was rain 100 years ago?”
  - “Finding a way to manage our waste better.”
  - “If you get a really good rain... it’ll be about an hour, and here it is all flooded...”
- Freda: Grace used to have a ‘hoe waka’ here.
- Mikaera: “The approach has got to be to stop asking the Crown, we gotta stop that crap... we keep on asking... we have to say this is how it is going to go... we have to continue to uphold that mantle of mana whenua... we’ve got to stand up to the Crown...”
- Mina: “We are the Kaipara, therefore, how can you have a Kaipara remediation plan without me in it?... where the Kaipara is sick, so is the people... for me it is about the future generations that we can mould... don’t wait until you are 58 to find out who you are... you start researching what happened to you as a person, assimilation, if you start understanding that... it’s like the movie the Matrix, you’ve got to unplug, you’ve got to take that blue pill...”
- Charles: “what would it take to create a new Kaitiakitanga?... We need to achieve a sense of deep renewal of our identity... if we remain in this fragmented state, we will not see progress... we need a renewed sense of common purpose... get out of our anger with the Crown and into an inspired vision of Kaitiakitanga in the future...”
- Mina: We have been met with doubt and cynicism; however, we have also had some gains.
- Kelly: Ruawai primary school has done some work with the story of the five brothers. Some children now know this story.
- Liam: Empowerment is the tool, is the key. Victim mindset is disempowering. The most powerful thing is to impart empowerment to our children.
- Lyvia: The schools are open to hear our stories.
- Diane Bradshaw: Kaitiaki are often expected to make contributions voluntarily. There seems to be no recognition of time and costs.

- Mikaera: NIWA estuary monitoring tool kit, *Ngā Waihotanga Iho*, Te Uri-o-Hau were the first iwi to roll this out to the schools. We taught them history of the marae and the area. The kids were doing real science. Rodney College, Ōtamatea High School. It was a successful programme, however, for some reason, it was not able to continue. A later version appeared which was just science and ‘dial a kaumātua’, real ‘tick the box’ stuff. Also discussed how a Te Uri-o-Hau hapū environment plan was ignored by the Te Uri-o-Hau Settlement Trust. Advocates for the marae to come together to get behind this environment plan. Then invite the Council to the marae to go through the plan in detail. There is a real need to unify the hapū and the marae behind the plan. This can also be communicated to developers while applying for resource consents.
- Mina: The three key ideas of the plan are ‘Empower, Educate, Enact’.
- Mikaera: The plan came out of the settlement negotiations.
- Toko: “Our people have to be involved, if our people want change, they have to be involved... it’s not use for giving an opinion after the fact... a lot of our people do not know anything about the Wairoa...”
- Kelly: “What we are doing today is one of the most important things... it’s important to find out about our own history again... it’s good to find out versions of the same truth...”
- Freda: “Tikanga is number one... ki te kore tātou e tū ki te mahi i ngā tikanga, me pēhea ngā tamariki?... I offered my services to Rodney College on ngā tikanga me te mau rākau, but they turned me down. They said they didn’t need it... where’s the resolution, we’re still at the table... I know the Council, tino hōhā... mā te wā, kua tae ki tā mātou nei wā...”
- Diane McCormick: “We need more hui, need more people involved, we need to be more public... I’ve listened to the stories here, it’s very sad...”
- Mikaera: “One of the most immediate things we can do is bring our rangatahi onto our marae to talk about their whakapapa, their connections to the whenua, tell the stories of their tupuna... to their tikanga, that’s what’s missing, our tikanga has been obliterated... it starts at home, we can make a difference, I’ve got to encourage our young people... my focus is to bring in young people... we want our tamariki to be as powerful as they can be...”
- Toko: “Are we ready for change... we’ve gotta be the ones who do the change...”
- Kelly: When it comes to tangihanga, we must think about whether we want to embalm our loved ones or not given that they are chemicals that can leach into our whenua. We must think about these things and make the change.





*Image 5: Hui wānanga rōpū on the top of the maunga behind the marae overlooking the Wairoa River.*

---

The hui concluded at 7pm.

## Attendees:

Mikaera Miru, Diane Bradshaw, Tokotoko Retimana, Kelly Retimana, Mina Henare-Toka, Te Miringa Tito, Martha Toia, Adrianne Manuel, Lyvia Fitzgerald, Liam Ratana, Katy Edmonds, Diane McCormick, Freda Allen, Ronda Renton

**Te Kawa Waiora Team:** Celia Witehira, Charles Royal

---

*Extract from an article published in the New Zealand Herald, Volume XXIX, Issue 8847, 8 April 1892, Page 6*

Our dusky neighbours, the Maoris, living out at the little settlement Te Kowhai, have lately been celebrating one of their peculiar observances, namely, the unearthing, cleaning, and carrying away the bones of one of their people. In this case it is not the remains of any distinguished chief, just simply the last remnants of mortality of a little girl, but she was the relative of Hokianga people, and last week they came all that distance to fulfil this peculiar ceremony. It appears they were very anxious to carry away with them at the same time other remains belonging to two children of **Hori Wetini** that were buried side by side with the little girl, inside a neat little enclosure on the farm of Wetini, but though for several days the *hui hui* was persistently carried on in order to effect this, the father would not consent, telling his people, for he belongs to Hokianga, that when he dies and lies buried there, they can then come and take all. The Maoris are no doubt in many respects a peculiar people, but in this matter of veneration and respect of those that have passed away, they are far in advance of some of their pakeha brothers.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18920408.2.59>



## **Te Kawa Waiora**

Hui Wānanga Report

**27 November 2021**

**Te Kōwhai Marae, Ruawai**

---

**[www.reconnectingnorthland.org.nz](http://www.reconnectingnorthland.org.nz)**

email: [admin@reconnectingnorthland.org.nz](mailto:admin@reconnectingnorthland.org.nz)