

## First hearing



A sprinkling of rain was seen as a blessing during the pōwhiri of the Waitangi Tribunal to the first hearing of the Wai 2200 hearing at Hato Pāora College held earlier this year. This is one of the larger Treaty of Waitangi claims and the Raukawa Confederation began presenting a raft of claims against the Crown and in particular maintained the Crown purchase of a significant part of the Manawatū was defective.

The iwi comprise Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga, Ngāti Kauwhata, Te Reureu, Ngāti Tukorehe and Ngāti Wehiwehi. Former High Court judge Sir Taihākurei (Eddie) Durie (Ngāti Kauwhata, Ngāti Raukawa, Rangitāne) was a key speaker on the first day and he presented an opening statement for the Northern Claims of the confederation. This extends north from the Manawatū River to the Rangitīkei River. Feilding is the venue for the first of twelve tribunal hearings which will run through to 2022.

The confederation refer to the taking of lands as “pene raupatu” or confiscation by the pen. Sir Taihākurei contends most of Manawatū and Rangitīkei, some 320,000 acres was deceitfully acquired by government without the consent of the resident hapū of Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Kauwhata and Te Reureu. So instead of land taken by armed conflict it was through the power of the pen.



One purchase, of some 240,000 acres, is described as one of the most fraudulent in New Zealand history, and which was backed by a Native Land Court decision that was described as corrupt. The purchases and the Native Land laws that removed the capacity of each tribe to manage its lands meant that the Rangitīkei, Manawatū and Horowhenua iwi became the most landless in the country. They lost more than most iwi in the proportion of their land that was taken by the Government and in terms of cultural loss, loss of papakāinga and therefore self-sufficiency; and a greater loss than others in the opportunity to participate in the country's economy.

The incomparable quality and accessibility of the land which extended across the greater part of the Manawatū plains was also a factor.

“It was mostly flat with rich soils and wetlands and some easy, rolling land. Nearly all was arable. There was very little steep hill country. In the Oroua valley the vast tracts of well-timbered forest and plantations of flax provided an immediate return to settlers to meet development costs. All was within easy reach of where the settlers were landing, at Foxton and Wellington.”

The proportion of land acquired by the Crown, in relation to the total land which the hapū possessed, was probably the highest in the North Island. As a result, from as early as the 1870s, Ngāti Raukawa became one of the most landless, North Island, iwi.

“It has been amongst the most landless for over 100 years, and may have been *the* most landless. The critical issue for tribal survival is not the amount lost but the amount that remains for the people at the end of the process. It is this extent of landlessness that most calls for a fulsome reparation, to settle the past by providing for a more secure future for the hapū.”

Significant is the fact that Sir Taihākurei was born in 1940, one hundred years after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi and he has borne witness to the “parlous state of the iwi and pain of the elders in their assumption the land, the language, the marae and the identity of hapū was on the verge of being lost forever.”

This is the first of 12 hearing that start in Manawatū and progress to Horowhenua and Ōtaki following a historical sequence of events. The original claim was lodged in 1989 by kaumātua – Whata Karaka Davis, Ngārongo Iwikatea Nicholson, Te Maharani Jacob and Pita Richardson. They have now all passed on. The inquiry will proceed intermittently covering north and south over about three years.

Kahu Ropata from Ngāti Toa, who are closely related, described the taking of the district by Te Rauparaha in the early 1800s. Jerald Twomey (Ngāti Manomano) introduced the relationships of the various iwi and hapū of the Raukawa confederation. Te Kenehi Teira of Ngāti Ngārongo described the migration of the various hapū of the Ngāti Raukawa confederation who came as a support group.

The rest of the week was taken up on hearing from teams of researchers commissioned by the Waitangi Tribunal and the Crown Forestry Rental Trust to investigate the claims and who have completed substantial reports.

Because of the Covid19 pandemic the Tribunal postponed the next hearing which was to be held in May.

Photo caption 1: Speaker Hemi Te Peeti welcoming the Waitangi Tribunal to Hato Pāoro College.

Photo caption 2: Deputy Chief Judge Caren Fox (Ngāti Porou) greets kaumātua

Photographer: Whare Ākuhata