

Te Pou Tupua; Annual General Meeting; 27 September 2020

Turama Hawira

At Putiki Marae, on 18 March 1994, then chairperson of the Whanganui River Maori Trust Board, the late Sir Te Atawhai Tairaoa, was the first speaker to open the people's submissions in the Whanganui River claim.

He told the hearing that the people

“are embarrassed after 118 years of making applications to different forums, to different levels of government, trying to prove who they are, trying to say ‘This is our tupuna awa, this is our ancestor’”.

We are forever conscious in our role as Te Pou Tupua of all those who have walked before us. We know that it is impossible to escape the weight of history and the presence of those who refused to give up the struggle: Hikaia Amohia, who brought the claim; Titi Tihu, who was petitioner in 1927; Hekenui Whakarake, who gave the evidence of loss to the Native Land Court and the Royal Commission.

From the first parliamentary petitions in 1873 to this day, 147 years later, our focus has remained the same : to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of Te Awa Tupua.

Ko te awa te mātāpuna o te ora

The river is the source of spiritual and physical sustenance.

Section 3 of Ruruku Whakatupua – Te mana o Te Awa Tupua and schedule 3 of the Te Awa Tupua Act set out the role for Te Pou Tupua to be the human face of Te Awa Tupua and to act in its name. Our role is purely and simply to represent and advocate for the interests of Te Awa Tupua; to uphold Te Awa Tupua status and Tupua Te Kawa.

For this, our annual general meeting, I want to talk specifically about our strategic goal to advance te Awa Tupua health and wellbeing; Dame Tariana will follow with a focus on our other principal role of creating and achieving enduring relationships.

As part of our annual plan, Te Pou Tupua seeks three particular objectives that I want to reflect on today:

- Empower everyone to take responsibility for Te Awa Tupua
- Complete the establishment and appointment of Te Karewao
- Oversight on the design of the establishment and terms of operation for Te Korotete o Te Awa Tupua.

Before we can have any success in encouraging a whole of community responsibility to Te Awa Tupua; we must have absolute clarity about the landowner functions of Te Pou Tupua. As we know, these things are not clear cut.

We are due to meet with the Commissioner of Land Information New Zealand (known as LINZ) in the next month to sort out the process for inquiries pertaining to the land owner function.

Over our term as Te Pou Tupua we have received queries from hapu about islands that are in the middle of the awa. We have received other queries about pieces of land that are on the edge of the river.

It is now also well known that our experience over the Upokongaro Cycleway Bridge was not as straight-forward as we would have all liked.

There is no clear map that delineates what is Crown land and what is not; what is the responsibility of Te Pou Tupua and what isn't - it appears it has to be tested on a case by case basis.

What we saw with Upokongaro was that in the first instance the developer and consenting authority took a narrow approach until it was brought to

their attention that Te Awa Tupua settlement required a more thorough engagement and inclusion of the hapu, Nga Tangata Tiaki and Te Pou Tupua.

We wanted to support the position of Nga Paerangi; and also uphold the landowner functions that are vested in Te Ara Tupua. This was our first real example post settlement and we would have dearly liked to have seen greater engagement and inclusion.

Our consistent position is that hapu hold the decision-rights in terms of what occurs on, in and around Te Awa Tupua. Our role is to support our hapu, ensuring of course that the decisions and practice are consistent with Tupua Te Kawa.

There are been a couple of good examples where we know that change is occurring. These are instances where people have appeared with a genuine intent to engage early and ensure that Te Pou Tupua are aware of their activities. Uppermost in their minds has been that they seek to minimise and manage any impact on Te Awa Tupua.

Just as with the situation at Upokongaro, Te Pou Tupua seek to first understand the engagement with hapū and then any impact/risk management strategies for their activity or event. The difference of course with these examples has been their intent to be proactive; to be inclusive; to work collaboratively.

We need a clear channel of understanding; to ensure the Crown is responsive and that we use the appropriate resources of the Crown to ensure momentum.

As the wisdom of our whakatauaki instruct us;

Ngā manga iti, ngā mana nui e honohono kau ana, ka tupu hei Awa Tupua: the small and large streams that flow into one another form one River.

Our river is a living and indivisible whole, and that is how we as hapu should work – to achieve all we desire under Tupua Te Awa and Te Pa Auroa na te Awa Tupua.

The other area I want to touch on is the design, establishment and operation of Te Korotete o Te Awa Tupua. A major part of our immediate role as Te Pou Tupua was the transfer of Te Korotete putea of \$3m from the Crown and then accordingly the investment management of the fund. We needed to be confident about the application processes; the financial structure and the assessment processes around the fund. Importantly we also needed to be assured around accountability and reporting requirements.

Recently we have completed our draft statement of objectives for the investment of Te Korotete Fund. This is currently being independently reviewed before being ratified.

In our Annual Plan there was mention that one of the priorities moving forward in progressing Te Korotete is for the strategy, Te Heke Ngāhuru to be developed to guide the implementation of the fund.

In Ruruku Whakatupua it was clear that a strategy document, Te Heke Ngāhuru ki te Awa Tupua, would be instrumental in guiding future direction of environmental, social, cultural and economic health and wellbeing of Te Awa Tupua. Te Heke Ngāhuru would be developed by a strategy group, Te Kōpuka nā Te Awa Tupua – and be reviewed at least every ten years.

This is a major driver for us in taking us forward. Both Dame Tariana and I are committed that as we track towards the last eight months of our term that we start to see significant progress in the development of this strategy.

It was with much relief that we received the letter from Hon Kelvin Davis in his capacity as Minister for Māori Crown Relations and Gerrard Albert, as Chair of Nga Tangata Tiaki o Whanganui extending our terms in office until 3 June 2021. This will allow us sufficient time to see Te Heke Ngahuru in a position to guide the ongoing implementation of Te Koretete.

It will also allow time for the next nomination and appointments process for Te Pou Tupua to be completed by both the iwi of Te Awa Tupua and the Crown through the Minister for the Environment.

We have worked hard over these last three years. It has been helpful to have at our disposal some key reports – landcare research a scoping report; a cultural report commissioned from Te Atawhai o te Ao and the work that Jake has been doing in relation to cultural mapping of Te Awa Tupua.

Our belief is entrenched; te mana o te wai; te mana o te awa; is inherently about respecting, protecting and caring for the rights of our awa in their fullest expression.

What we know and live by is to understand that the full intent of Tupua Te Kawa o te awa tupua is to reflect the innate relationships of the river to the people and the people to river as guardian and sovereign partners in protecting the mana of the river. It is to this point – the intrinsic value of our relationships – that I now turn over the time to Dame Tariana.

Te Pou o te Whakatupua!

Te Pou o te Whakatawhito!

Te Pou o Ranginui e tu nei!

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Hon Dame Tariana Turia

In speaking to the hearings of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1994, the late Dardanelle Metekingi told us:

The awa is a beautiful thing. You need the people. It lives with the people. The spirit of the awa has to be the people. It's not a separate thing. It's part of who you are - like a soul partner. Sharing everything with you, and it gives it back to you.

'You don't get your strength from what you see, but from what you believe!'. These things that nature has given us are our inheritance, are our family.

I stand today, in honour and gratitude for all those who have spoken up, about and of te awa tupua reaching back to the time of Hikaia Amohia and the nine board members who brought the claim for and on behalf of Te Atihaunui-a-Paparangi, each of the board members encapsulating a customary association with Hinengakau for the upper, Tama Upoko for the middle, and Tupoho for the lower reaches of the river.

As we know these three tupuna were siblings – it is this whakapapa that binds us and connects us; links us together as a collective.

In our annual plan for Te Pou Tupua we drew on these teachings, to prioritise engagement. Our desire was to gather insights and understanding from the whānau of Te Awa Tupua; to be engaging directly with hapu, marae, runanga and the iwi leadership.

It matters to us that we knew of your needs and aspirations; that our work was informed by your insights.

We wanted also to hold those high expectations of Ministers of the Crown. We saw it as befitting of our role, that Te Pou Tupua be engaged on policy and legislation that impacts on our functions – and accordingly, that Ministers and government agencies recognise and provide for the role of Te Pou Tupua.

The unity of our people with our land and river is intrinsic.

The relationship of our iwi to their awa transcends the mere physical world.

Te Awa Tupua is a sacred taonga and the essence of our life. It is not a convenient conduit for sewage or farm run-off, a means of electricity generation, a transport link or source of food.

It is the font of spiritual sustenance and renewal, a friend and a companion. It is a caregiver, a guardian, and a symbol of unity. In the words of the late Niko Tangaroa:

The river and the land and its people are inseparable. And so if one is affected, the other is affected also. My father mother and our tupuna lived on the Whanganui River. They knew the river well.

The river is the heartbeat, the pulse of our people. Without the Awa we are nothing, and therefore I am reminded of the korero when one of our elders Taitoko Tawhiri said of the River, if the Awa dies we die as a people. Ka mate te Awa, ka mate tatou te Iwi.

I am always in awe of the foresight that our people had in presenting our river claim ahead of the lands. They knew that it was our river that binds us.

We must not forget that. We must return to the awa to be restored; to go to our special places like Mangapapapa and Poukaria – to heal, to hold space.

We must follow the awa as we follow the Maramataka – stay close together at times when the energy is low; utilise the healing power of our awa to connect and bind us together.

This is particularly important in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic which affected our ability to complete the processes we were committed to in the time we had agreed upon.

Our relationships must drive us forward as fundamental to our future. We know that the land claims take our people in all sorts of different directions. We know too, the real battles we confront with connections with our younger generations through the distancing that comes with communicating by technology.

Even this format – of an online AGM – brings with us complexities and challenges which are inevitable. There will be some of our whānau that can't access this forum – either by being out of zone, or not having a device from which to receive this. We are thinking of ways how we can include the widest reach across our whānau.

But we must not give up hope.

The untapped potential to make our awa living; to restore to ourselves the fullness of a sanctuary for healing; a place to clear our minds and decolonise our thinking – excites me.

We have a suite of documents about the physical landscape – as Turama shared – but we must also remember we have an amazing rich archive of stories available through the stories recorded and documented through the tribunal hearings.

Those stories tell us about the social, cultural and spiritual associations to te awa tupua. We have the recordings; we have the whakaaro – all we need is the will and the way to remind ourselves of the legacy we are born to uphold.

We need to familiarise ourselves with the essence of these stories – and we need to ask ourselves, is what they said still true for us today?

It is through our own histories and memories that we will bring ourselves together and stay connected.

In the last few months of our term, Turama and I are dedicated to doing all that we can to bring our stories back to life; to look to our knowledges as the motivation to stay collective.

We know that our relationships still need work. It is for that purpose that as Te Pou Tupua we want to bring together a wananga about how we maintain our whakapapa through all these dynamics that flow between and within us.

For more than a century the law, regulations and the actions of the Crown have broken the Whanganui River down into parts. That changed with Te Awa Tupua framework – it put the Crown on notice that from this point on, all of the waterways and networks, the relationships and partnerships are viewed and managed, not in isolation, but with reference to the whole River as an interconnected ecosystem.

That is what we want for ourselves – that the mana and the mauri of te Awa tupua is intrinsically connected to the health and wellbeing of our people. We must live up to that ideal as the vision and the framework that we have set in place for all future generations to flourish.

E rere kau mai te Awa nui mai te Kahui Maunga ki Tangaroa
Ko au te awa ko te Awa ko Au.