

TE KARAKA





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**NGĀ HAU E WHĀ
FROM THE
EDITORIAL TEAM**

By the time you are reading this issue of TE KARAKA, Matariki will have come and gone. The intentions for the year ahead will be coming to life for many, while others take the time to emerge gently into the future.

Against the challenge of all things Te Tiriti being stripped from the very fabric of our society – increasingly by the day – it is reassuring to see the amazing mahi being done around the takiwā that holds firm to mana motuhake and authentic Te Tiriti partnership. This is timely as the iwi begins the next phase in its post-Settlement journey guided by Mō Kā Uri – Kāi Tahu 2050. In this issue we feature several examples: the first, *Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai* (page 20), an environmental restoration project along the south-western edge of Te Waihora which has been led by Taumutu Rūnanga. The initiative is a powerful example of what mana whenua-led, voluntary co-governance can achieve. And at the southern end of the takiwā, Te Pōhā Mātauraka o Murihiku, an education initiative in partnership with Awarua, Waihōpai and Ōraka Aparima rūnaka, has seen local mātauraka and pūrākau being taught in many schools throughout Southland with amazing outcomes for both taura and kaiako (page 34).

As *Mō Kā Uri* moves from vision to action, the Moeraki whānau are embodying the tenets of the three tuturu – rebuilding the community from the ground up, asserting their influence to ensure outcomes that uphold their mana motuhake and creating opportunities for whānau connection with place and culture – see page 26.

Three previously unsung kaitiaki: Gail Thompson and Russel and Teresa Trow, were honoured in the New Years Honours for their lifelong commitment to environmental advocacy in the Murihiku rohe. Their tireless efforts over decades has led to the restoration of many native flora and fauna (page 42). Their accolades are so deserved.

And finally, congratulations to our kaimahi and assistant editor of TE KARAKA Sascha Wall and husband Keiran on the safe arrival of their pepi ātaahua – Te Ahikaea. While Sascha is off enjoying her time as a new māmā, it is great to welcome back Anna Brankin to our editorial team.

**Nā ADRIENNE ANDERSON-WAAKA,
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Rīpeka Pōtiki



**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
TE RŪNANGA O NGĀI TAHU
BEN BATEMAN**

*Ka tū te ata, ka haea te ata, ka hāpara te ata, ka korokī te manu, ka wairori te ngutu,
ko te ata nui ka arahina, ka taki te umere a kā tamariki, he awatea.*

This edition of TE KARAKA comes at an important inflection in our tribal journey.

In the first 25 years post Settlement we have re-established a Kāi Tahu presence, strengthened capability, and laid the foundations for the future. *Mō Kā Uri - Kāi Tahu 2050* is the iwi vision for the next 25 years. Over the past two months, it has been a privilege to culminate the last two years of mahi into the strategic architecture, translating vision into action: Kai te Haere, the Te Rūnanga Group strategic direction, and Uruuruwhenua, the Office of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu operational plan. Together, these documents bring clarity on how we will contribute to *Mō Kā Uri*: what we will prioritise, where we will focus, and how we will move together as one Te Rūnanga Group. These milestones mark our transition into a new generational chapter, and the start of an ambitious transformation to deliver enduring outcomes for our people.

At the heart of Kai te Haere are four transformational shifts that will shape how Te Rūnanga Group thinks, organises, and invests. These shifts will strengthen our ability to operate as a connected ecosystem; deepen participation of our tribal members; shape systems on our own terms; and expand our Kāi Tahu presence.

Now feels like a time of confluence. In 2023, Au ahi Au ora gathered feedback from kā Papatipu Rūnaka about how Te Rūnanga could be better positioned to bring them to the fore of strategic decision-making. The Tū Kātahi Tū (working as one) Kai te Haere shift builds on this momentum. Central to the Kai te Haere strategy is a collective focus on our culture, heritage, and identity – our Kāi Tahutaka – as the foundation for how we move forward together.

It is against this backdrop, that I acknowledge and congratulate Ngāti Kuri on securing Matariki Pā in June. After generations, the whenua is now back where it belongs – with mana whenua. Working together as one, to support Papatipu Rūnaka aspirations for whenua of significance to both hāpū, and our iwi, is *Mō Kā Uri* in action. Through the Kai te Haere and Uruuruwhenua, we will use our platform to continue to support investment in expanding Kāi Tahu presence.

With strong foundations, an ambitious strategy, and an inspirational operational plan, it is an immensely exciting time for our tribal organisations. In the coming months and years, tribal members will begin to see changes in the way Te Rūnanga Group and the Office deliver; how we engage with whānau, which programmes will evolve, which will be strengthened, and where we deliberately stop activities that no longer serve. This is not reductive. It is about building momentum and seizing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create big, visionary gamechangers.

Our tribal history is one of adaptation, innovation, and intergenerational leadership. Every generation has been asked to make courageous choices so that those who follow inherit greater opportunity than those who came before. Kāi Tahu is now more than 90,000 strong. We have a significant journey of transformation ahead to implement the choices of today. With the strategic architecture now in place, we know how we will do this; honouring the voices of our whānau through our contribution to *Mō Kā Uri*.

The outcomes of our new strategy will be felt across the tribal ecosystem. It is with immense pride and optimism that we step forward into our future, ready to play a part in this next chapter of our Iwi.

*Kia turuturu taku ao Kāi Tahu; Tūturu te noho, Tūturu te hono, Tūturu ake nei.
Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei.*

TE KARAKA

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FRONT COVER



Te Ahikaaroa performing at the International Taptoe Festival in Belgium, 2025.

PHOTOGRAPH: SUPPLIED



Whenua

TE WAIMĀTAITAI is a lagoon located near Kātiki Point at the southern end of the Moeraki Peninsula. Bordered by sandhills a few metres above sea level, it is a shallow lagoon with a narrow entrance to the sea. Its name (wai – water; mātaïtai – brackish) reflects its position as a tidal lagoon at the northern end of Kātiki Beach. Te Waimātaïtai is a significant early Māori archaeological site dating to at least the 13th century. Its sheltered setting and access to abundant kaimoana made it an ideal place for food gathering, with excavations showing food resources included moa, seals, dogs, fish, and coastal birds.

2016-315-017, TE RŪNANGA O NGĀI TAHU COLLECTION, NGĀI TAHU ARCHIVE | PHOTOGRAPH: TONY BRIDGE



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Nā HAZEL TE KOETI



Pūrākau as our political navigators

Whether it's voting in your rūnaka elections, your local electorate or for your favourite celebrity to make it to next week's episode of 'Dancing with the Stars,' we are often asked to make a choice. These choices generally reflect our morals, values and future goals, and can represent how we perceive ourselves. This November, we will be asked to make a choice on which political party we want to see lead Aotearoa. After three years of what can only be described as one of the most controversial governments in the history of Aotearoa, the upcoming general election casts a cloud of gloom over us all. For Māori, this cloud is particularly dark. Since the late 1700s our rights have been continuously under attack, and under the current coalition government, these attacks have only become more visible and vicious. In the face of uncertainty about what lies ahead, we must draw strength from our tipuna to understand how we can actively exercise our own agency.

Our atua pūrākau hold infinite gems of ancestral mātauraka gifted down, through generations, for us to utilise. A great example lies within the pan-Māori pūrākau of the separation of Rakinui and Papatūānuku. This pūrākau tells the story of a band of brothers who come together to separate their mother and father so that they can walk in te ao marama and provide their offspring with a chance to thrive. It speaks of the atua coming together to kōrero over how they can achieve their shared goal. Tūmataueka suggests killing Raki and Papa. However, the other atua agree that death is not needed. Tānemahuta suggests separating Raki and Papa so that the others can bask in the warmth of the light between them. Over eons of heated kōrero, the atua agree that the separation must be done, all except Tāwhirimātea, who remained loyal to Rakinui.

One by one, atua such as Rokomātāne, Takaroa, and Haumia-tiketike attempted to separate Raki and Papa but alas, they failed. Tānemahuta was up next, planting his

THIS NOVEMBER, WE WILL BE ASKED TO MAKE A CHOICE ON WHICH POLITICAL PARTY WE WANT TO SEE LEAD AOTEAROA ... IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHAT LIES AHEAD, WE MUST DRAW STRENGTH FROM OUR TĪPUNA TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE CAN ACTIVELY EXERCISE OUR OWN AGENCY.

hands on Papa and thrusting his legs against Raki, he successfully began to separate his parents. However, his strength was fading; to complete this great task he sought the guidance of his tuakana Pāia who had the mātauraka and karakia, and knew the kawa needed to champion this task. Together, the two were able to place four toko that kept Rakinui in the heavens and Papatūānuku down on earth. The atua rejoiced at their success and lived in the light with their mother, whilst Tāwhirimātea remained with his father in all his anger.

The myriad of perspectives in this pūrākau reflect the competing personalities and positions that characterise our current government. Although it seems simple to align Tūmataueka with the coalition government, especially in his habits of extremity, I think he is misunderstood. Tūmataueka to me represents the inherited frustration that arises from shared trauma and the continual betrayal by a government meant to act for our benefit. In his frustration, he sees there is no change happening and feels helpless; his judgment is clouded by rage, and he sees his only viable path forward is to burn the world down with him — a feeling that many of us can relate to.

Then there is Tāwhirimātea; Tāwhiri disagrees with his brothers as he remains loyal to Rakinui. Tāwhiri teaches us a valuable lesson by disagreeing with his brothers; he stays true to himself and his beliefs even when his entire whānau thinks differently. As a result, he isolates himself from his whānau and although he

is filled with rage, chooses to protect his peace. Many of us may relate to Tāwhiri, particularly those of us raised in a whānau that consistently supports a particular party whose values we do not share. Or, maybe because we feel mamae if we don't vote for a Māori candidate. Tāwhiri shows us it's okay to go against the flow; our beliefs are personal to each of us. They may be reflective of our whānau or they may not be, but either way, they are ultimately ours to make.

Although we may be familiar with the separation of Rakinui and Papatūānuku, it is important not to overlook the lessons we can learn from it. This pūrākau displays the first democratic vote. All our atua came together to discuss the future they wanted; they argued, found common ground, and eventually voted on what action they thought should be taken. We see different methods and strategies taken to achieve this goal but ultimately, it was only achieved once the brothers came together and Tāne leaned on the mātauraka of his tuakana. It shows us the power of using our voice and our vote. The atua achieved their goal when they exercised their rakatirataka, and in doing so, created the future they wanted for their offspring — the first example of mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei. 

Hazel Te Koeti (Kāti Māhaki) is a proud born and bred Kaiapoi girl. She is the kaitiaki of her whānau whakapapa, being the first in three generations to reconnect with her Kāti Tahutaka. Hazel has a passion for sharing the stories of mana wāhine, this currently being the topic of her Master's thesis at Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha. Hazel has been working in the Ngāi Tahu Whakapapa team since 2024, growing her love for serving our Kāti Tahu whānau.

Nā MEGAN PŌTIKI



Let them choose their own path

I have three children, a daughter (Ripeka) and two sons (Tīmoti and Tūkitaharaki). When I gave birth to Tīmoti, my oldest son, and held him in my arms for the first few moments, my husband said that I gasped with a deep love, an incredible sound he hadn't heard before. There is an unusual connection between a mother and son, an aho that is unbreakable, an emotional and profound bond that is unexplainable. I have this with both my sons. The connection with Ripeka is the same but different; her father acutely felt this bond with her in a way that was different to the boys – all connections that are unique and special.

It is important I set the context by way of explaining my relationship with my children, because the moment Tīmo told me he wanted to go to boarding school I started to weep (on the inside haha). I would never have dreamt of sending my beautiful baby boy to a school exactly 954km away. I was grieving before he even left.

The reason he decided to go was fairly complex, but simply put his father was terminally ill for a long time and subsequently died, leaving my boy struck by deep grief and anger. His aunty suggested that we consider sending him to Hato Paora Māori Boys College. She recognised his need for a Māori brotherhood and male Māori leadership as he felt bereft of this when his Dad passed away. That idea stuck with him and not long after he appeared from his bedroom saying he needed to go to that boarding school. He was just 12 years old.

I think that part of my sharing here is to say that this journey isn't for the faint hearted, nor is it for everyone. If there is one takeaway, I hope it's that readers will see that it's horses for courses – different pathways for everyone. Ripeka went to a local school and I absolutely believe that was the best decision for her.

Tīmo and I decided to go to the open day. We flew to Wellington, hired a car and drove to the school, 10 kilometres out of Feilding, down a long road in what felt like the middle

ITĪMOTI'SI AUNTY SUGGESTED THAT WE CONSIDER SENDING HIM TO HATO PAORA MĀORI BOYS COLLEGE. SHE RECOGNISED HIS NEED FOR A MĀORI BROTHERHOOD AND MALE MĀORI LEADERSHIP AS HE FELT BEREFT OF THIS WHEN HIS DAD PASSED AWAY. THAT IDEA STUCK WITH HIM AND NOT LONG AFTER HE APPEARED FROM HIS BEDROOM SAYING HE NEEDED TO GO TO THAT BOARDING SCHOOL. HE WAS JUST 12-YEARS-OLD.

of nowhere. A Catholic school (we are non-denominational, a family of athiests but with a back history of Anglican and Methodist religion) and as we sat in chapel, he lent over to me and whispered, "thank you māmā, this school is for me".

So the journey began. A uniform from Gracies in Feilding, enrolment, packing up duvets, towels – all the things we were told he needed and more – and a naughty scholarship (my description) from the MoE. Tīmo wasn't a leading star at that point, so getting support to attend the school was straightforward – he was in. We all went to his pōwhiri and they called out his name and his iwi, "Tīmoti Huriwhenua Pōtiki Karetai, nō Ngāi Tahu me Te Ātiawa" and he crossed over the marae ātea and he was theirs. We said goodbye, I hugged him, no tears, turned away, went to the car and drove away. It was wrenching to say the least, but I summoned some inner strength to do it.

Tīmo kept the reality of his experience from me for a few years. The first year was brutal, I am not going to sugarcoat it. Four to five KPs (Kingpins) were removed after an incident, and the ramifications of the bullying were evident when I picked him up for weekend leave four weeks into his first term. He was from the farthest south they had had, and he was on a mammoth cultural learning curve. His brotherhood was thrown together, all Māori boys from diverse backgrounds, forced to live together.

It took about a year and a half before he settled in. There were tears rolling down his face every time I put him on the plane back to school and I would say, "stay home, you can go to a local school, you don't have to go back", and he would tell me it was his choice and he was sticking with it. Eventually his brokenness, grief for his father, anger and deep sadness started to unfurl like a phoenix rising from the ashes. He connected with his brotherhood unlike anything I have ever seen. He stood tall, engaged in rugby, led haka, became absolutely determined and fixed on his fitness, stoic, comedic and resilient. The school was a game changer.

Watching on was his quiet younger brother, Tūkitaharaki. Quite a different character. Tuki spent three years in a local mainstream school, was a natural leader and academically astute. He is talented (biased māmā) and liked by all, including the teachers. He is that high achieving kid who is never a problem. Last year he told me he wanted to go to Hato Paora and honestly it's as if he has been there a lifetime. He adores the teachers and his mates, is playing guitar like it is an extension of his body and absolutely loves everything about the school. Suffice to say my boys have become a part of the DNA of that school and vice versa, and what a journey, for all of us.

I want to mihi to Hato Paora College, the leadership, kaiako, dorm parents, the whānau who have taken my boys in at various points, to everyone and everything about that school that has made it what it is for my boys, I salute you. 🇩🇪

Megan Pōtiki (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Waitaha, Te Ātiawa Pou Tiriti) hails from Ōtākou, and is Māmā to three children. Her husband Tahu Pōtiki passed away in 2019. She currently works at Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka and has a background in tertiary education, teaching and research, and loves to write.

TE WHARE HAKA O TE AHIKAAROA

A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO KAPA HAKA



“IT STARTED IN A BAR, LIKE ALL GOOD THINGS,” RANGIMĀRIE SAYS, laughing. “What happens when you get more than three Māori in an Irish bar at the same time? You start making plans.” They called themselves *Te Ahikaaroa*, the long burning fire, recognising a lifelong commitment to kapa haka. “Haka is the vehicle to keep our connection to our reo, to our pūrākau, to our waiata and mostly our whānau.”

Most members of the founding group had come through Māori boarding schools, carrying with them the muscle memory of singing and moving together, that they wanted to continue. Once the small group had formed, they booked their first practice at Te Iringa o Kahukura, Cashmere High School, where Tauira was teaching alongside fellow founding member, Whaea Miriama Setterington.

The rōpū grew over time the way all good things do, slowly and then all at once. For the first four years they didn’t compete, honing the strong, distinguishing feature that continues to this day: “We’ve always, I think, prided ourselves on having a group that can sing,” Rangimārie says. “I think that would probably be one of our signatures. And then, ironically encouraged by Tauira’s father from Ngāti Porou, we decided to sing in our Kai Tahu dialect – that was a steep learning curve! And most importantly, we started singing about our own pūrākau.” From the beginning, the uniforms were made by hand, guided by Taua Reihana (Doe) Parata QSM. “Everything was ground up, home grown, homemade.”

Rulon Nutira was there amongst it before he could even walk. His mother was one of the aunties in those early lines and he was one



Kapa haka is a record of our people: our losses, our achievements and our moemoeā. A vehicle for learning, teaching and carrying the mātauraka of our tipuna into our contemporary lives. Te Ahikaaroa has understood this since 1993 when its founders decided that keeping the fire burning was worth showing up for, week after week, decade after decade. What began over a beer and evolved over a kapu tī has since grown into a puna reo, a kura-ā-iwi, and a competitive kapa that has nurtured generations of Kāi Tahu and pan-tribal whānau. Now under the capable and talented leadership of Thomas Aerepo-Morgan, the Ōtautahi-based rōpū continues to achieve and surpass the aspirations first envisioned by its founders, Rangimārie Parata Takurua and Taura Takurua. Nā **SASCHA WALL**.

Left: Te Ahikaaroa, Waitaha Matatū Regional Competition 2026.
PHOTOGRAPH: ERICA SINCLAIR

of the babies who were, as he describes, “dragged to practice,” sitting on the floor while the pakeke moved and sang above and around him. At that point, he didn’t realise what he was absorbing. “It was just normal,” he says. “Turn up, make friends with everyone who’s not already your cousin, run around. The kaupapa was just part of life.”

By the time Te Ahikaaroa reached its first Te Matatini in Waikato in 2000, the group had already changed shape in ways no one had entirely planned. With more pēpi and tamariki appearing in the lines, practices that had started over drinks had shifted, in the way that life shifts when children arrive, to cups of tea and a different kind of kōrero.

It was over one of those cups of tea that something honest surfaced: whakamā about the loss of te reo Māori and the barriers to enrolling

kids in kōhaka reo. Rangimārie remembers telling her cousin to bring her baby along to kōhaka. “She said, ‘I can’t do it. I’ve already failed in the Pākehā system. Why would I want to go and fail in the Māori one?’” So from the collective determination of the group, made up of many educators, Nōku Te Ao was born in 2002, a full-immersion early childhood centre built to meet whānau wherever they were in their haereka.

“Nōku te ao – the world is mine,” Rangimārie explains. “That’s what we wanted to cultivate in our kids: that they’re masters of their own universe.”

The babies of Nōku Te Ao grew, and the question of where they would go next became impossible to ignore. Too many tamariki



Above: Rangimārie Parata Takurua in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, 2025; above right: Tairua Takurua; right: Thomas Aerepo-Morgan. PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED



“HAKA IS THE VEHICLE TO KEEP OUR CONNECTION TO OUR REO, TO OUR PŪRĀKAU, TO OUR WAIATA AND MOSTLY OUR WHĀNAU.”

RANGIMĀRIE PARATA TAKURUA

were disappearing into a system that hadn't been built for them and Te Ahikaaroa had the collective skills to do something about it. In 2015, Te Pā o Rākaihautū opened its doors. “We didn't need another school,” Rangimārie says. So what they set out to build was a pā wānaka, a village dedicated to learning, surrounded by people who “first and foremost love these kids like their own.” Rangimārie speaks on the fundamentals of student success: “two core things our kids need to thrive are to feel loved and to be well-fed. These kids are loved by their kaiārahi and are fed by our māra kai. They know what soil grows kai well and that there is a connection between their kai and the health of Papatūānuku. They know how to prepare the soil, to plant the kai, and harvest it.” Te Pā o Rākaihautū is a place where the front yard is the moana and the backyard, the mauka.

By the end of 2025, Te Pā o Rākaihautū had its largest ever cohort of Year 13 graduates all achieving their NCEA L3, with 70 percent achieving University Entrance before exams. And with haka a core part of the curriculum, it feeds the ranks of Te Ahikaaroa.

Like all rōpū, Te Ahikaaroa has evolved through different eras, successive leaders leaving their mark and building on what came before. Tairua Takurua led the first decade, using the skills that came naturally to him as a descendant from a long line of composers,

including his Nanny Tuini Ngāwai, Ngoi Pewhirangi and his father, Anaru Takurua in Tokomaru Bay. That kind of talent, Rangimārie says, is “just in the water where he grew up.”

Tairua's style is “coasty,” melodic and built up by tunes that stick and carried by strong voices that can hold them. He composed the waiata that gave the rōpū its spine, and established the whakapapa of strong singing that still defines Te Ahikaaroa today. Tairua took them from that first practice at Cashmere High School to the national stage.

When Tairua and Rangimārie moved north around 2002, Haani Huata-Allen stepped up. Described as generous, hard-working, steady, Haani had recently arrived in Ōtautahi and, along with her siblings and whānau, kept Te Ahikaaroa burning and flourishing for the next decade. Waipounamu Te Karu joined the rōpū during those years, aged 17, and remembers being surrounded by aunties who had been part of the kaupapa from the beginning, sharing kupu and actions along with the strong values that underpinned them.

Haani's instruction on balance was direct: you can go and play hard on the weekend, but you better be on the floor at nine o'clock the next morning and still give one hundred percent. “That was a huge lesson in commitment and discipline,” Waipounamu says. “Haani would say: your lack of sleep, that was your choice. You still better give me everything.”



“I’M BIG ON IGNITING POTENTIAL. EVERYONE HAS IT. THEY’VE JUST GOT TO REALISE THEIR OWN. WE PREACH IT HERE: REMOVE THE BOULDERS OF RESISTANCE SO OUR PEOPLE CAN THRIVE ON THEIR OWN TERMS.”

[THOMAS] SPEAKS OF FIVE GENERATIONS SHARING THE PRACTICE FLOOR AND THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT SITS IN THAT IMAGE. “THAT INTERGENERATIONAL APPROACH IS CRUCIAL TO HOW WE RUN THINGS. OUR CULTURE IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VESSELS FOR TRANSMITTING MĀTAURAKA AND SHAPING OUR OWN UNIQUE APPROACH TO WHĀNAU DEVELOPMENT.”

THOMAS AEREPO-MORGAN

Tauira and Rangimārie returned around 2011, just as Haani was moving back up north, so the rākau was passed back. The style of haka shifted after the earthquakes and the notes got higher with mature voices, the singing pushed into new but somewhat familiar territory. For Waipounamu, then in her late 20s, the challenge had begun to feel familiar in a way she wasn’t ready to settle for. She left to find a new challenge, but has since returned. The reason she came back? Thomas Aerepo-Morgan. “I was told by Thomas to come back to the group. When he took over, he brought this new flavour, new energy,” she says. “That’s what I was looking for.”

The handover happened at Te Matatini Herenga Waka, Herenga Tāngata in Tāmaki Makaurau in 2023, but it had been building for longer than that. In the weeks before the competition, Tauira began pulling Thomas forward during the practices leading up to their performances, asking for his ear on the singing, his eye on the lines and his judgement on what needed lifting. Everyone in the rōpū could see where it was heading.

Then came the day of their performance. “We all knew Uncle Tau was the man,” Rulon says. “But Thomas walked out on stage as our kaitātaki.” The formal leadership handover came the following morning, at Te Taua Moana marae in Devonport. Tauira rose to give his mihi and

when he finished took his korowai and placed it on Thomas’s shoulders. The rōpū erupted. Rulon, who had been called up to sit beside his uncle beforehand without knowing why, watched Thomas’s face the moment it happened. “I could see the unleashing,” he says.

Rangimārie had seen Thomas coming for a long time. She had first met him as a young boy in Bluff, where she had gone to help his aunt Aimee Kaio with some mahi. Aimee had mentioned a nephew who was coming for tea and described him as “just absolutely haka mad and really keen to meet [Rangimārie].” Thomas had grown up watching Te Ahikaaroa perform from the depths of the south, absorbing the rōpū and its performance style from a distance. “He knew every lyric, every move and where I was standing in every performance,” she remembers.

By the time Thomas arrived in Ōtautahi, encouraged by his aunt and uncle to join Te Ahikaaroa, he was already carrying a thousand compositions in his head. “That’s the superpower that Tauira has always held for the group,” Rangimārie says. “We were looking for who was going to keep those beautiful compositions coming. Thomas arrived already with lots of ideas and waiata he wanted to test with his uncle. It became very clear very quickly that he had what the group needed.”

She says that Tauira was the first to acknowledge Thomas’ own superpower, saying: “You can take it where I couldn’t. I’m not Kāi Tahu.



Above: Te Ahikōmau, Waitaha Matatū Regional Competition 2026. PHOTOGRAPH: ERICA SINCLAIR

Below: Te Arani Huia, Waipounamu Te Karu, Horowai Wetini at the *International Taptoe Belgie*, in Oostende, Belgium 2025.



"I WAS TOLD BY THOMAS TO COME BACK TO THE GROUP. WHEN HE TOOK OVER, HE BROUGHT THIS NEW FLAVOUR, NEW ENERGY. THAT'S WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR."

WAIPOUNAMU TE KARU



Above: Four Generations, Te Whare Haka o Te Ahikaaroa, March 2026.

I don't know your dialect. You can take it where it needs to go now." What he has done with that trust is something the rōpū still reaches for words to describe. Waipounamu says: "He can sing, he can haka, he can do the poi and execute all of those perfectly. His knowledge for his age is out the gate. But it's his passion and his belief in his iwi, how proud he is of his Ngāi Tahu tanga, that comes through in everything." Rulon adds: "Thomas is coming through with a new generation of reo speakers who are faster-paced and energetic. But it's the mita that sets it apart. I don't think what he's doing has ever been done in the world."

"I'm big on igniting potential," Thomas says. "Everyone has it. They've just got to realise their own. We preach it here: remove the boulders of resistance so our people can thrive on their own terms." He speaks of multiple generations sharing the practice floor and the responsibility that sits in that image. "That intergenerational approach is crucial to how we run things. Our culture is one of the most beautiful vessels for transmitting mātauraka and shaping our own unique approach to whānau development."

This is his fourth campaign as leader. Each one has elevated further than the last. Waipounamu, who has been in the group across those four

campaigns, says candidly: "It's one hundred times elevated from when I first joined, compared to now. And it just keeps going."

In 2025, Te Ahikaaroa stepped onto a stage none of them had expected to find themselves on. The *International Taptoe Festival* in Belgium – a long-running military tattoo tradition, brass bands and bagpipes and sellout crowds of roughly 10,000, that had never previously included kapa haka.

Thomas took a delegation of 15 and changed that. Rulon laughs as he remembers the call coming through to his wife. Thomas rang her, to test out the idea as he hadn't told anyone yet. Rulon describes the moment she got off the phone and mentioned that Thomas wanted to take Te Ahikaaroa to Belgium. "My wife said, 'Why not?' And I said, if kapa haka is going to take us there, let's go. Let's take who we are to the world."

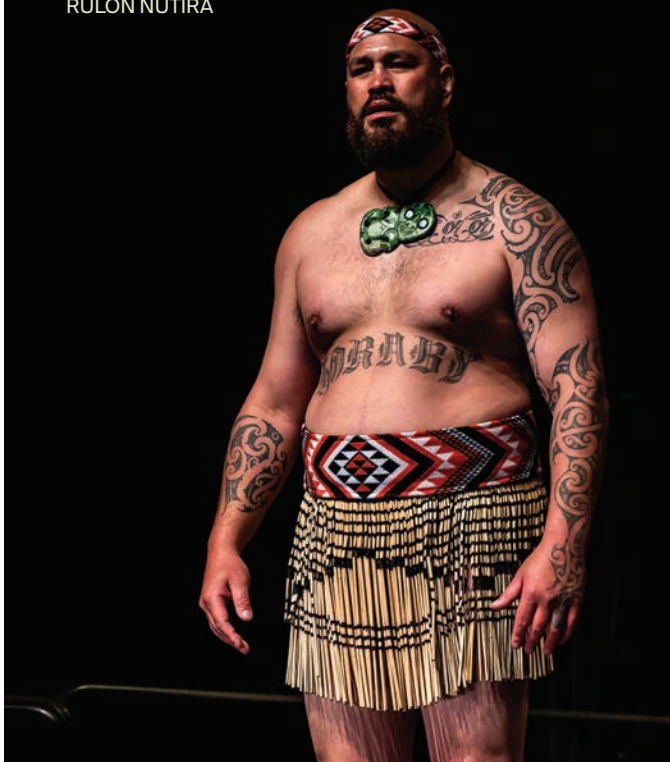
Te Ahikaaroa arrived in Belgium early and ran a rehearsal near a local school. Rulon described how the children came out of their classrooms and sat down on the ground to watch. The teachers stood along the walls as Te Ahikaaroa moved through their bracket. For them, just another practice, had the teachers in tears by the time they finished.

"THOMAS IS COMING THROUGH WITH A NEW GENERATION OF REO SPEAKERS WHO ARE FASTER-PACED AND ENERGETIC. BUT IT'S THE MITA THAT SETS IT APART. I DON'T THINK WHAT HE'S DOING HAS EVER BEEN DONE IN THE WORLD."

RULON NUTIRA

**"TE AHIKAAROA IS NOT JUST KAPA HAKA.
KAPA HAKA IS JUST SOMETHING WE DO.
THE KAUPAPA IS MUCH, MUCH BIGGER.
THE ORANGA OF THE WHĀNAU, THE
ORANGA OF THE IWI."**

RULON NUTIRA



Above: Rulon Nutira, Waitaha Matatū Regional Competition 2024; right: Te Ahikaaroa, at the *International Taptoe Belgie*, in Oostende, Belgium 2025.

The children sat in silence, eyes wide open. "They didn't understand what we were saying," Rulon says. "But they could feel it. They could feel the energy we were portraying. And they came running up to us afterwards." Thomas reflects on that moment in terms of what it revealed about haka itself. "Each takahi, each wiri, each head turn is deliberate," he says. "It stands as a physical acknowledgment of our times, our people, the kōrero being shared into space."

On a stage in Belgium, that language transcended all borders. The performances themselves were held in a packed arena. Te Ahikaaroa opened singing the New Zealand national anthem and returned to close the final night. A sellout crowd, eight to ten thousand people, a bill full of military bands and cultural performers from across the world.

"It's definitely opened up new opportunities and areas to explore," says Thomas. After Belgium, they went to Paris and performed in front of the Eiffel Tower. Rulon laughs at the memory of it. "How many people can say that?"

In the preparation for the Waitaha regionals, Thomas wrote and composed a waiata – *Aoraki Matatū* – acknowledging the lifelong mahi of Tā Tipene O'Regan, as well as the passing of several rangatira whose lives contributed to the advancement of Kāi Tahu. When the time came, Thomas took Te Ahikaaroa to the whare of Tā Tipene in New Brighton. The group was too big to fit inside, so they set up on the beach opposite his home, and delivered one of the most significant pieces in their 30-plus year history. Performing in the Kāi Tahu mita, the performance moved Tā Tipene to tears.



At this year's Waitaha Kapa Haka Regionals, two groups from Te Whare Haka o Te Ahikaaroa took to the stage. One, the current competitive rōpū under Thomas, elevated, energetic and pushing forward into the future. The other, Te Ahikōmau, the 'OGs' who have been singing and dancing together for more than 30 years, reunited to perform waiata from the group's earliest days and to honour the late Hemi Te Hemi. Their wānaka have been running alongside Thomas' group. "We are so excited about our next generation," Rangimārie says. "And us in our fifties and sixties took a wee while to warm up but can still belt out some of our favourite waiata, even though we were very careful to choreograph out any sudden moves or knee drops."

It is not just sentiment that brings the founders back to the stage, but the same instinct that opened Nōku Te Ao and built Te Pā o Rakaihautū: the understanding that you do not carry something forward by leaving the origins behind. You bring them with you, allowing the past to steady and strengthen every step into the future.



Rulon laughs about how his son corrects his father's words at the parakuihi table and often clocks the kapa actions before he does. Waipounamu's daughter swings a poi in the car on the way home from practice, having absorbed the words to waiata that are still accompanied by the pattering of tiny feet that, like Rulon, are brought along to practice. The babies of those years are now among the pakeke who have evolved into the leaders holding the fort for now. "My daughter said to me, 'Oh my god, Mum. We were looking around, it's us. We have to do this now,'" Rangimārie says, and there is something in her voice that is not quite laughter and not quite tears. "And I thought, yes. That's exactly right. That's the whole point."

Thomas speaks about looking ahead with the kind of clarity that comes from knowing exactly who you are, what you are building, and what is on the horizon for our people – a once-in-a-lifetime performance

with Six60, a trip to Rarotonga in July to perform with Te Pā o Rākaihautū senior students at the Te Maeva Nui Festival and of course the next campaign to prepare for Te Matatini, returning to Waikato where it all began for Te Ahikaaroa in 2000.

Rulon, who was carried onto the practice floor as a baby and is now a member of the competitive group, perfectly encapsulates its essence: "Te Ahikaaroa is not just kapa haka," he says. "Kapa haka is just something we do. The kaupapa is much, much bigger. The oranga of the whānau, the oranga of the iwi. Without the people in the back, we can't stand on stage looking pretty. Without the teachers at Te Pā, the babies at Nōku Te Ao, the ones who hold the finances and the constitution and all of that, without all of those things, none of it stands. Our goal should be to be world class at kaupapa. And just do kapa haka." 

IN SAFE HANDS

As the new Secretary for Children and Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, Amanda Malu oversees an agency of nearly 5,000 people working to protect our most vulnerable tamariki. She comes to the role with deep roots in the children's sector and a vision for an organisation that truly serves those at the front line. Kaituhi ANNA BRANKIN reports.



WHEN WE LAST SPOKE TO AMANDA MALU IN 2018, SHE WAS THE CEO OF Plunket and determined to overhaul one of New Zealand's most beloved institutions, with a focus on equitable care for all pēpi. She spoke then of being a woman on a mission, and the description fits just as well now – although these days, that mission is bigger and more complex as she heads up one of the most scrutinised agencies in Aotearoa.

Amanda took on the role as CE of Oranga Tamariki in February, and the first months have been, by her own description, intense. There was no chance to settle in, no grace period to find her feet. “Day one, my team sat me down and said, ‘here’s a decision you need to make today.’” But she is up for the challenge, and says that one of the first things she did was make her intentions unmistakably clear to staff: she has signed a five-year contract, and she means to see it through. In an organisation that has cycled through multiple chief executives in recent years, this simple act of commitment has already made a difference. “It’s the thing that people are most relieved about – not that I’m here, but that I’m here

for the long haul,” she says. “Meanwhile, I’m just determined to make sure that in five to ten years, things are in better shape than when I arrived. That’s the plan, really.”

It is easy to see why Amanda was drawn to Oranga Tamariki, and equally easy to see why she is a good fit for the role. Her career has been shaped by a consistent thread: a deep affinity for organisations with a purpose beyond themselves, and a talent for galvanising people behind a shared direction. She spent four years at the Families Commission, rose through the ranks at Plunket from chief marketing officer to CEO, and then went on to serve as the Deputy Chief Executive, Service Delivery at ACC and the Chief Executive of Education New Zealand.

The aspiration to work at Oranga Tamariki emerged during Amanda’s years at Plunket, as she found herself increasingly frustrated by the limits of advocacy from outside the system. As an NGO – and one reliant on government funding – Plunket could push for change, but only so far. “You’re such a small voice in comparison. I realised that if I do want to



make lasting change, the only way I'm going to be able to do it is from the inside." Now she is on the inside, and she is not underestimating what that means. "There's so much to navigate, and so many agencies and people to influence. But you definitely have more opportunity in a role like this."

In her first few months, Amanda has made a point of getting out of Wellington as often as possible – visiting sites, youth justice residences, talking to staff and to the children and young people in care. "That has been really grounding. It gives me a strong sense of what we're here to do, and it helps me understand where we need to focus."

The challenge she has fixed most firmly in her sights is the pressure on frontline staff. Reports of concern have risen sharply across the country, and everywhere she visits, she hears about stretched

caseloads and overworked staff who are struggling to do more with less. "I'm so proud of the fact that our people care so much, they turn up every day knowing that the list of tasks and the amount of work they have to do is just growing. At the same time, I want to change things so that they can focus on what's most important – the relational, human-to-human work that only they can do."

Amanda's response to this challenge is not simply to add resource, but to entirely change the organisation's approach. She talks about reading reports by the Independent Children's Monitor when she was preparing for the role, which spoke to a tension between the national office and frontline staff. This led to one of her key ambitions: to pivot all operations so that in five years, that tension is no longer mentioned. "Everything we do here should be about making it easier for our social

Above: Amanda Malu at her pōwhiri, welcoming her into her new role with Oranga Tamariki in Wellington. PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED



Above: Amanda Malu addressing colleagues and whānau during her pōwhiri.

workers to do their job," she says. "We have three floors of staff sitting in an office in central Wellington, and as I see it, we're here to support the workers on the frontline across the country."

The weight of her role as Secretary for Children and Chief Executive is something that Amanda is very conscious of. "I don't ever want to find myself signing things off without considering what it really means for the children at the end of that decision. I want to make decisions like I would for my own family, to fight for the children in my care just as I would for my own children."

She is also very aware of the public narrative that surrounds Oranga Tamariki – a narrative that is too often driven by headlines rather than the daily reality of the work. "Travelling around over the past couple of months, it's really clear to me that the vast majority of the work that we do is very valued by the families we work with, and is actually all about keeping children out of the care system," she says. "But those stories are simply less newsworthy than the cases where things don't go as smoothly."

Amanda feels the pressure of negative coverage most keenly on behalf of her staff, who she knows would never make the decision to remove a child from their family lightly. "It's the hardest decision for any social worker to make," she says. "These are people with huge hearts and the absolute best of intentions, who sometimes have to make really tough decisions in order to put the needs of the child first." She is clear

that Oranga Tamariki doesn't always get everything right, and equally clear that the organisation navigates extraordinary complexity on a daily basis.

That complexity points to another of Amanda's missions – improving the interagency approach to children's wellbeing. As a result of Dame Karen Poutasi's 2022 review of Oranga Tamariki, there is now a hub in Auckland that brings together staff from the health, education, justice and social sectors alongside Oranga Tamariki, which Amanda says is making a huge difference. "There is genuine information sharing happening around the needs of children, and how we can work together to address them. Our next step will be scaling what works locally into something consistent across the whole country. We've got to turn it from rhetoric into reality."

Other important partnerships include those with iwi, including Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, and Amanda is committed to growing these. The long-term aim, she says, is for many of the services currently delivered by Oranga Tamariki to be led by iwi. "Ultimately, no whānau wants the state intervening in their lives. If we can empower iwi, and support and enable them to be able to work with whānau – whether at the early stages of prevention, or perhaps delivering some of our services – then that is fantastic. That would be an incredible outcome."

Amanda has already visited Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and met with Rākihia Tau, chair of Te Tauraki, the organisation that leads health and

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AMANDA MALU



“ONE OF OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES IS WE OFTEN CANNOT FIND PLACES FOR CHILDREN THAT WE TAKE INTO CARE. ESPECIALLY BECAUSE, IN THE CASE OF TAMARIKI MĀORI, WE TRY TO FIND HOMES WITH A WHAKAPAPA CONNECTION. FOSTER CARERS DO THE WORK OF ANGELS, IN MY MIND.”

wellbeing kaupapa for the iwi. It's a relationship that matters to her personally as well as professionally. "Because of my own whakapapa, it is significant to be able to work with the iwi as a strategic partner, and to have their support," she says.

Amanda is also thinking creatively about how iwi might contribute in ways that go beyond formal service delivery. Her sister planted an idea in her head that she hasn't been able to let go of: a database of whānau who might be interested in becoming caregivers. "One of our biggest challenges is we often cannot find places for children that we take into care. Especially because, in the case of tamariki Māori, we try to find homes with a whakapapa connection. Foster carers do the work of angels, in my mind."

The work is deeply important to Amanda, but she knows it also

requires balance. Although Amanda's husband and adult children are used to her holding demanding roles, they have been especially protective of her since she began this one, keeping a watchful eye on her tendency to work too hard. "The work doesn't end at five o'clock on a Friday. There's always something happening," she acknowledges. "I have to be very strategic about making sure I'm across everything that absolutely needs my attention, and otherwise making sure I unplug from time-to-time and look after myself."

Finding that balance appears to be paying off. Despite a hectic first few months, Amanda is still certain she's exactly where she needs to be. "I'm really enjoying it," she says simply. "I get to lead an organisation full of amazing people who do the most incredible work, and my job is just to make it as easy as possible for them to keep doing that." 



WHAKAORA TE WAIKĒKĒWAI



An award-winning five-year project to restore the catchment along Waikēkēwai Stream on the south-western edge of Te Waihora has been completed. Led by Te Taumutu Rūnanga, in partnership with Environment Canterbury and funded by the Ministry for the Environment's Freshwater Improvement Fund, and governed by the Te Waihora Co-Governance Group, Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai stands as a powerful example of what mana whenua-led, voluntary co-governance can achieve. Kaituhi **ILA COUCH** reports.



Above and right: Ngāti Moki Marae hosts a celebration of the mahi completed as part of Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai, including Te Repo o Papatahōra, a traditional wetland on whānau-owned land adjacent to the marae. PHOTOGRAPHS ILA COUCH
Previous pages: Waikēkēwai Stream, Te Pā o Moki. PHOTOGRAPH: KATHRYN TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Mā whero, mā pako; ka oti ai te mahi

A MĀPUNGA (BLACK SHAG) FLIES OVER THE PŌWHIRI IN PROGRESS AT

Te Pā o Moki, a tohu for the day as manuhiri and mana whenua gather to celebrate the achievements of a significant wetland restoration project, Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai.

Waikēkēwai Stream extends six kilometres upstream from Te Pā o Moki, and over the past five years, Te Taumutu Rūnanga has led its restoration. What makes Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai special is that it is the first project of its kind in Aotearoa, co-designed and co-managed by rūnanga and local government.

Flowing through the ancestral pā of Te Ruahikihiki and his son Moki II, Waikēkēwai Stream is a whakapapa connector for the rūnanga. Once a great mahinga kai site, the awa meandered through rich wetlands before reaching Te Waihora. Following European settlement, the catchment landscape was converted to farmland, and as a result, the wetlands disappeared, the water course changed, and the water quality became severely degraded. Opportunities to gather mahinga kai were lost, but the moemoeā of the hapū to restore the mana, mauri, and ecosystem of Te Waihora and its catchment has never wavered.

Over cups of tī and kai, the rōpū have time to mingle before assembling for a group photo. From there, they head toward Te Repo o Papatahōra, a traditional wetland on whānau-owned land adjacent to the marae. The sun glistens on the water and tamariki, under the watchful eye of their mātua, lean perilously close to the edge of the repo, looking for signs of life.

Taumutu Project Lead Sophie McGregor addresses the rōpū from the viewing platform.

"This was a dry paddock, but once we started taking out the trees, it started reverting into a wetland. We've got the wooden boardwalk along this side, and it connects to what will be a grass pathway to allow for a full 360-degree view of the wetlands. We're seeing kōtuku flying around the marae, where there weren't any a year ago. I haven't seen a bittern yet, but one has been seen here at the marae. It's nice to be able to see the benefits of this mahi for whānau, hapū, community and iwi because the environment should be for everyone. Water should be for everyone."

Sisters, Bridget and Rachel Robilliard, stroll along the boardwalk with their tamariki. Bridget holds her tama close, Rachel swings her tamāhine out and over the water. Both work in the environmental space: tuakana Bridget in environmental law, teina Rachel in landscape architecture.

In 2013, when Bridget was still a student, she was contracted by Taumutu to prepare a long-term restoration plan based on the visions and aspirations of the hapū.

"I was very much brought up with the fight for the health of our awa being passed down from my tipuna," says Bridget. "Mahinga kai and Te Waihora are who we are as Taumutu whānau, but our identity wasn't reflected in what our whenua had become. My Aunty, Cath Brown, talked about swimming in the lake growing up, and how it was clear."

The restoration plan started with a whānau hīkoi around the Waikēkēwai catchment.

"The section of awa that runs behind the marae was all retained with concrete power poles. It was so far from the values we held and the aspirations we wanted. That hīkoi with whānau, and the kōrero



around the history of our sites fed into the mahi that's happened with Waikēkēwai – creating a healthy habitat, having the whenua look and function the way we want it to, and restoring the mauri of the water.”

The pathway to realising hapū aspirations for Waikēkēwai began in 2012, when Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and Environment Canterbury signed the Te Waihora Co-Governance agreement – the only voluntary co-governance agreement for a water body in Aotearoa. The partnership grew over time: Selwyn District Council joined in 2014, Christchurch City Council in 2016, and the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai in 2019. Their shared vision – to restore and rejuvenate the mana, mauri, and ecosystem health of Te Waihora and its catchment – is pursued through Whakaora Te Waihora, the long-term ecological and cultural restoration programme under which the Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai project was born.

The application to the Ministry for the Environment's Freshwater Improvement Fund in 2021 was a success. Te Taumutu Rūnanga and Environment Canterbury, under the banner of Whakaora Te Waihora, got to work fulfilling the objectives of the project: enhancing mahinga kai habitat, improving water quality, and restoring indigenous biodiversity.

Andy Spanton, Environmental Team Leader at the Selwyn District Council and Te Waihora Joint Officials Group member, says the mahi has been a great opportunity for learning.

“It's giving daylight to an incredibly important cultural waterway, and the kaimahi working with this project will have learned a lot to take to the next project. Some of the areas are emerging fields like constructing wetlands and improved waterways management. The best work is done in partnership, joining in knowledge and resources.”

Vital to the success of the project has been the partnerships formed with neighbouring landowners. The project team worked with landowners to plant and fence the riparian margins along both sides of Waikēkēwai Stream and its tributary Papatahora Stream, complementing existing native plantings and enhancing biodiversity.

Sophie says time and patience were required to build meaningful relationships with the nine participating landowners.

“We've built a good reputation for being able to work with those landowners and finding some common middle ground and making compromises on both sides. Most of the work has been on private land, and it has needed the landowners to be on board with retiring some of their farmlands or doing riparian planting. They're taking on the responsibility for those planting corridors post-project.”

She acknowledges Taumutu kaimahi Nicci Delahunty and Jess Leptinella, the project kaimahi who have worked closely with landowners, schools, and contractors to make the mahi happen on the ground. Their relationship-building and coordination have been instrumental in turning project plans into action.

“I WAS VERY MUCH BROUGHT UP WITH THE FIGHT FOR THE HEALTH OF OUR AWA BEING PASSED DOWN FROM MY TĪPUNA. MAHINGA KAI AND TE WAIHORA ARE WHO WE ARE AS TAUMUTU WHĀNAU, BUT OUR IDENTITY WASN'T REFLECTED IN WHAT OUR WHENUA HAD BECOME. MY AUNTY, CATH BROWN, TALKED ABOUT SWIMMING IN THE LAKE GROWING UP, AND HOW IT WAS CLEAR.”

BRIDGET ROBILLIARD



Over 50,000 native plants have been planted across the nine participating properties, including nearly two kilometres of continuous planting on both sides of Waikēkēwai Stream. Nine springheads have been fenced and planted, and the Department of Conservation's Weed Strikeforce has undertaken pest plant control across 17 hectares.

A mātauranga Māori and water quality monitoring programme started in early 2023, gathering data across nine sites along Waikēkēwai Stream, Papatahora Stream, and Taumutu Creek. What is reflected in the data is encouraging. As more native planting takes hold, good numbers of tuna and inanga are returning. The awa is gradually coming back to life.

Mapihi Martin-Paul, Pou Waihora Whata Rau for Te Taumutu Rūnanga, is proud of the way skills and expertise within the hapū have been strengthened and refined through the project.

“In my professional capacity as a Strategic Advisor Māori at Boffa Miskell, I've been on the other side working for clients. What makes this project special is that it's the first time the hapū have been ‘the pilot’ and not ‘the passenger’. I was at a hui yesterday, and I thought, ‘We've got some wicked people within our own whare.’ You need external collaboration and partnerships, but we know as a hapū, what it takes to save our lake.”



“THE VALUES BEHIND THIS MAHI – KAITIAKITANGA AND MANAAKITANGA – ARE THINGS I’VE GROWN UP WITH. THEY’VE BEEN PASSED DOWN THROUGH MY WHĀNAU, WHO HAVE ALL PLAYED A ROLE IN CARING FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT. BECOMING A PARENT MYSELF HAS MADE THAT EVEN STRONGER. IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT THE WORK WE’RE DOING NOW, BUT ABOUT WHAT WE’RE LEAVING BEHIND FOR OUR TAMARIKI AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.”

SOPHIE MCGREGOR Taumutu Project Lead

As a Project Lead and one of the “pilots” for Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai, Sophie says the project has meant a lot to her on a personal level.

“The values behind this mahi – kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga – are things I’ve grown up with. They’ve been passed down through my whānau, who have all played a role in caring for our environment. Becoming a parent myself has made that even stronger. It’s not just about the work we’re doing now, but about what we’re leaving behind for our tamariki and future generations.”

The celebration was as much about the relationships forged – between mana whenua, private landowners, local government, and contractors – as the environmental outcomes.

Dr Fiona Shanahun, Director of Science at Environment Canterbury, and Environment Canterbury’s Joint Officials Group member, welcomed the shift from rūnanga being involved in council-led projects, to rūnanga leading projects themselves.

“This is a wonderful example of a highly successful mana whenua-led project. It shows how local councils and the Department of Conservation can work alongside rūnanga to collectively enhance

te taiao. The structure and approach we have through the Whakaora Te Waihora Joint Officials Group ensures that everyone is on the same page, so we can resolve any challenges as well as celebrate success together. I’m really delighted to see this work flourish under Sophie’s leadership and look forward to what comes next.”

The rōpū follows a walkway linking the two old pā sites, providing access from the marae to Hone Wetere church and the urupā, where information panels detail the natives that have been planted. The water is clean, clear, and sparkling.

David Murphy, co-project management, and Team Leader Partnerships Programmes at Environment Canterbury, reflects on what has made this project unique.

“This area of co-governance around whenua is voluntary co-governance. No one is saying we have to work together; we want to work together because it works. Today, where you see the water flowing, wetlands and plants, that’s the true testament to the work. This kind of arrangement is a really good template for the future of Aotearoa, how we can come together with mana whenua leadership, farmers, local government, central government, working together to deliver good stuff.”



Above: Joining together to acknowledge the mahi and relationships formed over the five-year project to rejuvenate Waikēkēwai stream and the surrounding wetlands of the marae grounds of Ngāti Moki Marae.

Left: Project Lead Sophie McGregor and Puamiria Parata-Goodall, interim Tumu Whakarae, share the history of Waikēkēwai and thank everyone involved in the project.

Opposite: Te Pā o Moki and Te Repo o Papatahōra. PHOTOGRAPH: EOS ECOLOGY



“WAIKĒKĒWAI PHYSICALLY CONNECTS US ALL THE WAY THROUGH OUR PĀ DOWN TO WAIHORA.”

PUAMIRIA PARATA-GOODALL Interim Tumu Whakarae

The achievements of this project have not gone unnoticed. In October 2025, Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai received Te Waka o Aoraki Trophy at the Canterbury Aoraki Conservation Board Award for outstanding conservation efforts in the Waitaha Canterbury region.

Completing the loop, the group breaks for lunch at nearby Sedgemere Hall, where the rūnanga has displayed aerial photographs on the old hall walls showing before-and-after views of the work, a two-kilometre corridor, dense with green riparian planting along both sides of Waikēkēwai Stream. With the help of programmes like Te Ara

Kākāriki's Kids Discovery Plant Out Days, local school children have planted over 2,000 native plants across three separate sites. In the process, tamariki learned about riparian planting, species identification, raranga, habitat creation, and storytelling.

Planning for the next project, the restoration of Muriwai o Whata (Cooper's Lagoon), is well underway. One of the tribal properties returned through settlement, the Muriwai komiti has spent the last three years getting restoration, implementation, and pest management plans put together.

“With the Whakaora Te Waikēkēwai funding agreement ending, this phase of environmental works is also ending; however, the work doesn't stop here,” says Sophie. “We simply progress to the next significant area in our pathway towards the overall Whakaora Te Waihora vision... Hydrologically linked to Te Waihora, Muriwai o Whata is a natural next step, made easier as the project is ready to deliver.”

As the day comes to a close, interim Tumu Whakarae, Puamiria Parata-Goodall, shares a final thought about the motivation behind the mahi of restoration.

“Waikēkēwai physically connects us all the way through our pā down to Waihora. We came here for mahinga kai, we came for the lake, the waterways, we came for the whenua. It produced for us, and that's why we've been living here for over 700 years. Ngāi Te Ruahikihiki is committed to its environment, to a vision that restores that cultural livelihood and the values of our ecosystem. It's generations' worth of work we are committing to.” 





HE KĀHERE KEI TE HAERE A FOREST-IN-WAITING

Ten years ago, the whānau of Moeraki started to turn their gaze from Te Kerēme and the post-settlement era to what comes next. They've been quietly planting and watering seeds of all sorts and starting to bring whānau home. Kaituhi **NIC LOW** reports.

TORI ROSS NOSES HER TRUCK ACROSS A NARROW BRIDGE, BARELY WIDE enough for one vehicle. The stream flowing underneath runs into a mirror-perfect hydroelectric holding pond that looks, if you squint, like a lake. Verdant farmland rolls west towards the blue ranges behind Te Kohurau, but we're heading east towards the coast, past tangles of pink-tipped willows and forests of gorse. It's whenua that's been badly neglected in the past. The weeds were well over head height back when Moeraki's Whiria Te Waitaki team started looking after this block.

Now, everywhere you look, green shoots shine through. Hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of tipu, from tī kouka to harakeke to makomako, push up towards the light. Round a bend we reach the frontier of the work, where mountains of cleared willow trees stand ready for a bonfire that may well be visible from space. In five years the Whiria team has planted more than 135,000 natives here, all in the service of restoring the mana of a significant site.

The area is associated with Te Huruhuru, a chief of the Ngāi Te Ruahikihiki and Ngāi Taoka hapū. He lived in tumultuous times, helping ambush Te Rauparaha near Kaparategau/Lake Grassmere in 1833 and likely driven from his home at Lake Hāwea by northern raiders in 1837. The survivors relocated to the lower Waitaki, where Te Huruhuru was a chief. When the first Pākehā explorers arrived, he provided them with information and maps and likely learned to read and write. Edward Shortland described him as, 'a man of singularly pleasing manners and address'. Te Puna a Maru, where we are today, encompasses the seasonal kaik where he and his wife Mokehe and their hapū lived. Through the work of Whiria it is slowly being revealed; restoring the connection between people and place.

At the end of the track, we park up beside the awa. Kauri Tipa (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāpuhi, Ngāi Te Aotauarewa) tilts back his black leather cowboy hat and points out the latest areas they've cleared and planted. He was one of the original crew, back in 2021. He grew up in Ōtautahi,



Above: Upoko David Higgins and Kaiwhakahaere Justin Tipa lead the blessing for the reopening of the Katiki Point walkway, 2022. PHOTOGRAPH: RICHIE MILLS
below: Boulders Café by night; previous pages: A series of contemporary pou designed by Ngāi Tahu artist Ross Hemera, now welcome manuhiri to the Boulders Café. PHOTOGRAPHS: JASON BOBERG



and while his whānau attended marae kaupapa at Moeraki, he'd rarely visited the Waitaki. At 16, he landed his first job with Whiria and relocated to Moeraki. Now he works daily on the whenua alongside his uncles and cousins. He's still learning the stories of the area but knowing there are ancestral connections gives the mahi purpose. "That's our why. Our tīpuna came here and worked and lived off the land here. Why can't we, why shouldn't we?"

Since the time of Te Huruheru there are many reasons why Moeraki whānau haven't been able to work, live off the land or even live in Moeraki. In TE KARAKA issue 96, our feature on Tūtakahikura outlined some of those reasons — clearance of land and destruction of mahika kai, unjust reserves, lack of work, lack of services — which, like so many other pā, meant that few whānau could remain as ahi kā. People scattered, moved to the cities, went up north. Those who stayed put their energy into getting food on the table and fighting the claim. As upoko David Higgins says, there was no chance to dream.

"I used to go over to the urupā and sit there with the old fellas and talk to them. When they went through the Smith-Nairn Commission [an 1879 inquiry into land purchases], they weren't aspiring to anything because they didn't know what was going to come out the other end."

"THE NEW STRUCTURE IS ABOUT KEEPING UP WITH THE PACE OF GROWTH WITHIN THE TE RŪNANGA O MOERAKI ECOSYSTEM AND ENSURING WE HAVE THINGS IN PLACE TO DELIVER FOR OUR WHĀNAU INTO THE FUTURE."

JUSTIN TIPA Kaiwhakahaere Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu



Above: CEO Trevor McGlinchey and Kaiwhakahaere Justin Tipa.
Below: Moeraki whānau gathered at the Boulders Café. PHOTOGRAPHS: JASON BOBERG

It's only very recently, with Te Kerēme behind them and the settlement firmly under control, that the hapū has been able to think about rebuilding their own backyard. "Ten years ago, we started reshaping our rūnaka," David says. They started by encouraging families to move back, and Patrick and Nola Tipa were the first to take up the wero. But for people to return they needed homes, jobs, education. They needed good healthcare, healthy whenua and awa. Fully addressing these challenges is intergenerational work. Last year, that slow process took a leap forward with constitutional change, with monthly rūnaka meetings and volunteer executives replaced by something new.

"Closing in on three decades post-settlement, the time felt right for a discussion on what being fit-for-purpose looks like for Te Rūnanga o Moeraki," says kaiwhakahaere Justin Tipa (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Mamoe). "The new structure is about keeping up with the pace of growth within the Te Rūnanga o Moeraki ecosystem and ensuring we have things in place to deliver for our whānau into the future."

On the drive south towards Otago, Kaihīnaki is among the most significant Kāi Tahu sites on this stretch of coast. That's been the case since the Araiteuru waka arrived, but recently, something has changed. Outside the Moeraki Boulders Café, new laser-cut steel pou from Ngāi Tahu artist Ross Hemera signal that the hapū now owns the place. And inside the café, I meet the man tasked with taking the operations of the rūnaka forward, CEO Trevor McGlinchey.

Sitting down to bacon and eggs while the winter sun rises from the sea at his back, Trevor tells me he started out as a freezing worker and apple picker before moving into social services. In his late 20s he founded Te Mahi o Waitaki Trust to help disadvantaged whānau in Ōamaru. Since then, he's done long stints as Chair of Te Rūnanga of Moeraki and held a range of executive roles in education and social services across the motu, all with a focus on Māori wellbeing. It's his responsibility to coordinate the vision of the hapū across its many businesses and activities — in new ways.

For decades, the monthly rūnaka meeting has been the heart of Kāi Tahu politics — endless Sunday hui full of debate and digression, laughter and anger and cups of tea, run by a volunteer executive, part governance, part operational, part social. At Moeraki, those meetings and the volunteer executive are no more. And Trevor, as a former chairperson, is not sad to see rūnaka meetings go.

"The monthly meeting cycle sucked up the energy of the staff and didn't deliver outcomes in a way that you would expect an organisation that had a multi-million-dollar capital base to operate." He gives a dry smile. "I think someone on the executive described it as operating something like a netball club."

Now, the rūnaka has an 'executive board' which operates more like a company board, with a wider range of responsibilities that can be delegated to staff. That board appointed Trevor as the CEO, and part of his job is ensuring whānau are actively involved in more meaningful ways. "Our whānau obviously still want to be connected, to understand





Above, l-r: Pita Fa'au, Tori Ross, Ranui Te Maiharoa, Damien McNamara and Stephanie Barlow. PHOTOGRAPH: SUPPLIED

WITH THE CULTURAL SIDE IN HAND, DAVID [HIGGINS] SAYS THE NEW LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE MEANS IT'S FAR EASIER TO GRAB OPPORTUNITIES WHEN THEY COME ALONG.

THE NEW WILLINGNESS TO POUNCE COMES FROM WHĀNAU HAVING CONFIDENCE IN THE CHANGED STRUCTURE AND NEW LEADERSHIP. IT'S ALSO POSSIBLE BECAUSE ECONOMICALLY THE HAPŪ IS IN A GOOD PLACE.

what's going on and be a key part of strategic decision-making, but [we're] taking the mundane out of the system."

Whānau are still welcome to attend executive meetings online, but the new focus instead is whānau hui held around four times per year. There, leaders provide updates and seek guidance on key kaupapa, such as the annual plan and budget, or responding to climate change impacts like the erosion of their urupā. The thousands of smaller decisions required to get the work done aren't brought to the whānau. The result: a big increase in the number of people turning up compared to the rūnaka meetings of old, from 25-30 people to close to 50.

Better efficiency means renewed energy for cultural mahi interspersed throughout the year, from Matariki to kapa haka to numerous wānaka. The week before my visit, the rūnaka took 63 whānau members to Awarua, Waihopai, Ōraka and Rakiura, connecting with their relations as they went. As David had told me, "That's huge for our little pā... It was cool to arrive at Half Moon Bay and look at all the big fishing boats there and say, 'all those are our cousins'. And you could see the smiles of pride in their faces."

With the cultural side in hand, David says the new leadership structure means it's far easier to grab opportunities when they come along. When the Jobs for Nature fund ended in 2025, many iwi and hapū had to shut down their ranger programmes. Whānau lost their jobs and regeneration

and pest control work started going backwards. At Moeraki, Whiria Te Waitaki was on the chopping block.

"Trevor and the team came over to us here and Justin one day at a rūnaka meeting," David recalls, "and he said, 'Well, we've got to keep Whiria going. We need a million dollars. What do you think?'"

David snaps his fingers. "Done. That quick. Amazing. We knew that we had to do that. The other day we did another one – Milford Sound Tourism. Bang."

Previously, economic opportunities had "driven past the gate." The new willingness to pounce comes from whānau having confidence in the changed structure and new leadership. It's also possible because economically the hapū is in a good place. Earlier savings got a major boost from last year's relativity payment and the Waitaki Kawenata agreement. They're now well placed to ramp up rebuilding the whole community.

"How can we do that in order to fan the flame of ahi kā within our village?" Trevor says, "And then from that strong base, how does that radiate out and attract others to participate and be at home?"

Last year two new papakāika houses went up across the road from the marae, with more planned. In January 2025 Ana Faau and her husband Pita moved into one, bringing their five tamariki into the pā. Jamie Carroll moved in next door with her two tamariki. They were drawn to the whanaukata that comes from village life, and having their kids



grow up at the marae where manaakitaka is simply absorbed. Everyone benefits. In the previous 20 years there were no kids in the pā.

“All of a sudden, I’ve got a whole lot of kids,” David says. “That’s a delight for someone of my age, to have these little ones rolling around all over the place... Those kids will never forget their upbringing.”

As kids grow up in the district they need kaupapa-Māori development pathways. Te Pōhā, the youth leadership programme, works with rakatahi teaching life skills, mahika kai and mahi toi. They’re regularly out and about on the whenua, learning about their ancestors and the importance of being kaitiaki. It also means regular involvement at Uenuku. When they have important manuhiri, Trevor says, “those kids will come and support the pōwhiri, they’ll come and do the cooking, they’ll serve, they’ll support our day and showcase what they’re able to do outside of the government system.”

In a small community, young people also need jobs if they’re to stick around. Whiria Te Waitaki and Te Hā o Maru, the health and social service arm, offer pathways in environmental work and health respectively. Since the hapū bought the cafe in 2024, there’s now a hospitality pathway as well. Last summer they ran a hospitality course for 20 local teenagers, with another scheduled for later this year. The programme is open to all kids in the community, part of the desire to care for everyone in the takiwā.

You’ve probably heard the slogan ‘by Māori, for Māori’. But it’s not one that Mani Malloy-Sharplin subscribes to. Mani is Toihau Chief Executive of Te Hā o Maru. “I don’t actually agree with that,” he says. “I think for us to be proper kaitiaki of all of those people living within our takiwā, it should be ‘by mana whenua, for everyone.’ So, our services are open to every demographic in our region, Filipino, Māori, Pasifika, Pākehā the whole lot.”

Mani has whakapapa to Tuahiwi, Kaikōura and Te Pātaka Kai a Rākahautū. He grew up in the Bay of Plenty where, as a kid, he was in and out of hospital with severe asthma and croup. “Urgent,” is how he describes his early years in the Pākehā health system. His mother worked as a home-birth midwife. She was “hard for the old natural remedies... she had a huge belief in what the female body can do.” He remembers her coming home upset after big days at the hospital, frustrated by interventionist doctors. “So, I grew up with a bit of a mistrust of the health system.”

IN THE PREVIOUS 20 YEARS THERE WERE NO KIDS IN THE PĀ.

“ALL OF A SUDDEN, I’VE GOT A WHOLE LOT OF KIDS. THAT’S A DELIGHT FOR SOMEONE OF MY AGE, TO HAVE THESE LITTLE ONES ROLLING AROUND ALL OVER THE PLACE... THOSE KIDS WILL NEVER FORGET THEIR UPRISING.”

DAVID HIGGINS

Above: Moeraki whānau performing at Hui-ā-Iwi, Kaikōura 2024.

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHIE MILLS

Below: Moeraki whānau, coastline and boulders. PHOTOGRAPH: JASON BOBERG





Above: Te Hā o Maru kaimahi and whānau gathered outside their tari in Ōamaru; right: The Whiria Te Waitaki team have planted some 135,000 natives over the past five years. PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED

WHEN TE HĀ O MARU OPENED FOUR YEARS AGO, SOME PĀKEHĀ PATIENTS WOULD SAY THINGS LIKE, “OH, MY GRANDMOTHER USED TO GO DOWN MOERAKI TO THE MĀORI HALL. SHE WAS A MĀORI, BUT I’M NOT.’ SO, THEY WERE MĀORI, BUT IT WAS SHAMEFUL. AND THAT REALLY DROVE US TO MAKE IT NORMAL AND COOL TO BE MĀORI.”

MANI MALLOY-SHARPLIN

Given this, he never set out to work in health. But while running programmes for at-risk youth, he met remarkable Māori nurses and social workers who took a holistic kaupapa-Māori approach. When someone presented with severe anxiety or depression, for example, before turning to medication they focused on the spiritual side. Tohunga would come in to do karakia and provide spiritual support to the person – and their whānau. Next was social health: whānau connections, engagement with your marae and hapū, cultural activities, diet, finances. Mani says that nine times out of 10 if those issues could be resolved, people’s health dramatically improved. Rongoā also played a big part. “It was really amazing to witness these mātanga that I was mentored by.”

This kaupapa Māori lens underpins Te Hā o Maru, which opened in Ōamaru in 2022. Many of the staff whakapapa to Moeraki, and the team

offers everything from rongoā to social work, Whānau Ora Navigators, GP services and crisis support. Their first duty is helping the marae. If they get the call, “we drop tools and we support as ngā ringaringa me ngā waewae o Te Rūnanga o Moeraki. We embody the values,” Mani says.

The hapū provides the values and tikaka – but not the money for operating costs. “To date we haven’t taken a cent off the rūnanga,” Mani says. In his view, almost all the ills they treat stem from colonisation and systemic Western racism, “so they can pay for it,” he laughs.

Providing hauora in Waitaki presents unique challenges. Whānau are spread out, and many subscribe to the good old kiwi attitude of ‘you only go to the doctor on your deathbed.’ There’s a significant meth problem in the wider community, with waste-water testing showing the highest per-capita use in the country. In just six months last year, 12 people in the district committed suicide, an incidence rate Mani says is 10 times the national average. And being on the border between Otago and Canterbury sometimes means the district gets overlooked. People need to travel to Dunedin for addiction services, and Te Hā has been unable to secure funding for suicide prevention despite the horrifying numbers.

“We love our community, so we will just create a service for suicide prevention,” Mani says. “We can’t let the government dictate everything; we just need to look after people.”

For Dr Lily Fraser (Kai Te Ruahiki, Kāti Huirapa), looking after people starts at the clinic door: “having your name pronounced correctly puts



you on the right foot.” Lily, who spent a long time working in Te Ika a Māui, returned home three years ago so her daughter could grow up with a stronger Kāi Tahu identity, and to start Te Whare Kōiora, a GP practice under the mantle of Te Hā o Maru. Her strong Pūrākaunui whakapapa allows her to find connections with many from Moeraki and Puketeraki, where she runs a weekly satellite clinic.

According to Mani, when Te Hā o Maru opened four years ago, some Pākehā patients would say things like, “oh, my grandmother used to go down Moeraki to the Māori hall. She was a Māori, but I’m not.” So, they were Māori, but it was shameful. And that really drove us to make it normal and cool to be Māori.”

For years now Te Hā o Maru has been running public events like concerts, free hāngī or performances with school kapa haka groups. People are joining their books in part because they want to spend time in a Māori environment and get to know the Māori team. Together, this

“IT FEELS AMAZING, HAVING KNOWN WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE AT THE START. COMING BACK NOW AND ACTUALLY SEEING NOT QUITE THE END GOAL – THAT’S HAVING TREES ABOVE YOUR HEAD, WALKING THROUGH A NATIVE FOREST – BUT IT’S GETTING THERE. THESE ARE THE FIRST STEPS.”

DAMIAN MACNAMARA

has produced surprising results. Between 2018 and 2023, Waitaki’s total population grew 5.2 percent, whereas the Māori population grew 22.8 percent. New arrivals and births account for some of this, but Mani believes the rest is down to people starting to embrace their whakapapa. “What we’re seeing is those whānau who were shy to say they’re Māori go, ‘Yeah, I’m Māori, and I feel really good about it.’”

Back at Te Puna a Maru on the banks of the Waitaki, Whiria project manager Tori Ross is one of those who’s recently reconnected. She’s the first in her whānau to do so after growing up in Palmerston North. She trained as an archaeologist in Dunedin. But five or six years ago, working on a “very boring” archaeology job on the Moeraki peninsula, she ended up in a car with David. He asked where she was from.

“I said I was from here. Flora Orbell was my tūpuna. And he was like, ‘Mine too!’” She beams at the memory. “So, I just kept coming back.” Occasional visits became daily visits after getting the job with Whiria. “Becoming part of the pā, becoming one of the Moeraki whānau, has been awesome.”

It’s a common story, proof that the hapū is fanning the flames of ahi kā and attracting people to come home. Of all the people I talked to, all but two had moved into the area to be close to their hapū: a kind of reverse-urbanisation. Another of the Whiria team, Stephanie Barlow (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Waitaha, Ngāti Kahungunu), moved back from Australia last year seeking whakapapa and reo, and hands-on knowledge of the bush. “I’d like to plant rongoā plants that were used by Ngāi Tahu... so that we can come in here and this can be like a medicine cabinet.”

A kai cabinet, too. Damian MacNamara (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe) has been involved with Whiria as a drone operator from the outset. After a stint at Waihao as general manager, he’s recently joined the team on the tools and is happy working out on the whenua. “It’s about regenerating the land to a point where my kids and us can come out and camp in the weekend,” he says. “If we want to chuck a hīnaki in and feed ourselves, we could.”

By now it’s late afternoon. The winter sun is sinking in the west. The last golden light strikes thousands of native saplings. The Whiria team are nearly done for the day, but they won’t be done at this site for several years – the time it takes for this forest-in-waiting to stand on its own. There have been challenges – dry spells, floods, snow, theft. Whether people grew up locally or have recently returned, life isn’t always easy, either. It’s a small, isolated place. Living here means spending a lot of your time in the car. The harsh weather dictates everything. But is it worth it?

“It feels amazing, having known what it looked like at the start,” Damian says, “coming back now and actually seeing not quite the end goal – that’s having trees above your head, walking through a native forest – but it’s getting there. These are the first steps.”

Trevor stresses they’re still at the beginning, with a huge amount of work to come. But the vision remains strong. “In terms of aspirational stuff, jeez, man,” David says, “I don’t know where we’re going to stop.”

NOURISHING TE MATAURAKA O KATAMARIKI NO MURIHIKU

Nā ALANA DIXON



SWOLLEN, BOUND, AND WITH THE TEXTURE OF THE OCEAN STILL ON

them, pōhā appear as though they are living. Some are glossy, others wrinkled and folded like weathered leather, each carries its own distinct shade somewhere between bronze and black.

The journey of the pōhā begins where the wind comes whistling hard off the water, and the swell heaves giant ribbons of rimurapa – bull kelp – from the jagged rocks of the southern coastline. It calls on knowledge handed down from one generation to the next, passed from a weathered hand to one that is soft in its youth. Learned before it is ever taught.

Te Pōhā Mātauraka o Murihiku (Te Pōhā) is a rūnaka-led mātauraka collaboration between Waihōpai, Awarua and Ōraka Aparima. Project manager Keri Milne-Ihimaera says it was matua Gary Davis, from Ōraka Aparima, who suggested the name for the kaupapa to reflect its role in nourishing the knowledge of tamariki mokopuna of Murihiku. It instantly made sense.

“Our tītī tradition is only here – so the pōhā being that traditional way

of storing food is something that is just here in our takiwā. We wanted to have a name that reflected our Murihiku identity and couldn’t be confused with anywhere else. You go into the pōhā when you need to, and you take out of the pōhā what you need – so it is likening the tītī to the abundance of knowledge,” Keri says.

“Our pōhā feeds their knowledge and feeds their minds, feeds their whānau and the community around them, with the stories and information that come from and connect with this place.”

Rolled out in schools at the beginning of 2025, Te Pōhā is an educational contact point designed to enable kura to support, promote, and preserve mātauraka Māori within the takiwā.

Working with Keri are two kaihāpai mātauraka, Raiha Johnson and Wiki Burdon (both locally-trained kaiako), and project coordinator Antonia Notoa. Together they have created something new and intentional for the deep south.

After returning home to Murihiku about five years ago, Keri was struck



“YOU CAN GO INTO A NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AND SEE A PICTURE REPRESENTING TE TIRITI – BUT INSTEAD OF SEEING A PICTURE OF THE SHIP OFF RUAPUKE, YOU SEE THE CHIEFS IN THE TENT AT WAITANGI. THAT’S PART OF THE STORY, BUT IT’S NOT OUR STORY.”

KERI MILNE-IHIMAERA Project manager Te Pōhā Mātauraka o Murihiku

by how inconsistently te reo and mātauraka Māori were embedded within the schooling and education framework of the deep south.

At the time, she was a trustee for Awarua Rūnaka. She realised other rūnaka were also facing the same challenges in education – and that in order to bring change to life, the kaupapa needed to be bigger, its reach further.

Early kōrero centred on whether the Papatipu Rūnaka ki Murihiku could work collectively to shape educational outcomes for ākoka within the region. The idea, Keri says, was simple: if each rūnaka was ultimately striving for the same aspirations, why not build something shared across the takiwā?

“We started by saying, what are the things we’d like our tamariki and mokopuna to have?”

What has emerged is an initiative that has seen Waihōpai, Awarua, and Ōraka Aparima leaders and whānau being given the opportunity to direct the learning of Southland’s children, to ensure place-specific narratives and knowledge is shaped and shared within schools. “That approach has ensured that the knowledge being passed on is both culturally accurate and authentic,” Keri says.

The programme unfolds progressively over three years – beginning with Kāi Tahu creation narratives, and an introduction to te reo, tikaka, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi foundations, before moving into deeper and

more localised kōrero that explore mahika kai, culturally significant places and waterways, Te Kerēme, local pūrākau and narratives specific to the histories and stories of each rūnaka. All three years support ākoka learning about tākata rokonui from Murihiku, and the contributions they made in shaping the takiwā.

“You can go into a number of schools and see a picture representing Te Tiriti – but instead of seeing a picture of the ship off Ruapuke, you see the chiefs in the tent at Waitangi. That’s part of the story, but it’s not our story,” Keri says.

“If you’re a Bluff kid and you’re learning about Motupōhue, you can literally see the mauka. It’s already part of who you are, but knowing its story is what makes that come alive. We are intrinsically connected to the whenua. This is who we are, this is who we always have been, and this is who we will always be. It helps our kids understand their absolute connection to their whenua, learn about their stories, and make sense of the environment around them.”

Less than two years on, Te Pōhā is working with almost half the

Above: Te Pōhā tīma – l-r: Raiha Johnson, Keri Milne-Ihimaera, Antonia Notoa and Wiki Burdon at Te Rau Aroha Marae. PHOTOGRAPH: SUPPLIED

Opposite: Zoe de’Vries (Kāi Tahu) and Lilly Bragg (Kāi Tahu) at Taurakitewaru Kāhere in Waihōpai. PHOTOGRAPH: JAIME SMITH



schools in Murihiku, making up 61 percent of the region's ākoka. Of the schools registered with the kaupapa, a staggering 85 percent of Te Pōhā kura have a student body where at least 40 percent of Māori tamariki identify as Kāi Tahu.

Waverley Park School in Invercargill is one kura that has eagerly embraced the kaupapa.

Principal Kerry Hawkins says Māori ākoka make up the single largest proportion of tamariki within its school community, with about 50 percent of its learners identifying as Māori and one in five having Kāi Tahu whakapapa.

"We've had a significant Māori population on the school roll ever since I got here – and that's going all the way back to last century. But at the time, that just wasn't reflected in our general environment or the way we did things," he says.

"We've worked hard throughout the last decade or so to ensure we started going down a more Māori-centric, tikanga path. As we've recruited staff over the years, we've really looked for people who can contribute to the kaupapa, and we've had a Board of Trustees right behind it."

For Waverley Park, Te Pōhā landed at the right moment to build on this momentum. "What Te Pōhā has done is come along and provided some absolutely smashing icing to put on an already existing cake," says Kerry. "The whole idea behind it is for our Kāi Tahu iwi to share their knowledge and resources pertaining to here, even things like the dialect in the south. It's been absolutely golden getting hold of iwi-specific resources. Giving the kids that knowledge and connection, and knowing it's accurate, is really powerful and it contributes massively to connecting our tamariki to this whenua."

"Even for the non-Kāi Tahu kids, there's a real sense of pride because they're learning about local whenua, local histories, local traditions. It all fosters a stronger connection to the place they call home now, and that extends beyond them. For our staff, it's helping to give them confidence that they know the stories and traditions of this area, too – that's surprisingly powerful."

According to Kerry, the results speak for themselves. "By valuing things Māori, we've seen kids – and by extension their whānau – grow into their culture, have pride in their culture, and pride in themselves," he says. "It shows up in the academic data as well. Our Māori learners

do at least as well as, if not better, than our non-Māori cohort. That's not subjective opinion, it's verified by standardised testing and all of those other benchmarks. Te Pōhā is the Rolls Royce of resources, as far as I'm concerned."

The programme gives kura the capabilities they need to incorporate the kōrero of mana whenua into their planning and curriculum – and as Raiha Johnson explains, the contribution of Papatipu Rūnaka is central to its success.

"From that kōrero with rūnaka, and the aspirations of the pōua and taua, for us it's leading – and it's definitely echoed from our kura involved – around that transformational change. It was great for our rūnaka to collectively lead that," Raiha says. "Gary Davis was a massive driver of

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KERRY HAWKINS Principal
Waverley Park School
Invercargill

“THE LOVE OUR RŪNAKA WHĀNAU FELT, AFTER HEARING THESE BEAUTIFUL STORIES FROM EACH KURA AND BEING ABLE TO SPEAK TO THE KAIAKO DOING THE MAHI, FILLED THEIR KETE ALSO. IT REALLY SHOWED THAT TE PŌHĀ IS BEING USED IN A WAY THAT’S HAVING AN IMPACT ON EVERYBODY, WHICH IS WHAT OUR PŌUA AND TAUHA HAD HOPED FOR.”

WIKI BURDON Te Pōhā kaihāpai mātauraka



Above: Rūnaka representatives, tumuaki, kaiako and Te Pōhā team at the end of Year 1 kā rūnaka and kura evaluation hui, November 2025, Murihiku Marae.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANTONIA NOTOA

Left: Te Pōhā team's pōhā with mauri stones from each of the rūnaka involved in the kaupapa. PHOTOGRAPH: JAIME SMITH

that, not only from a rūnaka perspective but as principal of Te Wharekura o Arowhenua. He'd seen the mahi that had been done, in little pockets of individual spaces, but recognised this was a way for the rūnaka to pull together."

The commitment from schools, she says, is a huge part of driving Te Pōhā forward. "These schools are so committed – they're sending two, five, eight teachers to attend each of our Te Pōhā personal learning development opportunities – in year one, that's about being at the marae, year two is about going out to the whenua – and then their job is to pass on to their colleagues so that we are building the internal capacity within a school to make a long-term change. They've got to really commit to making the change within their own ranks – that's probably the biggest difference," she says.

Wiki Burdon says the kōrero shared by kura reiterates that the longed-for change is slowly, but surely, making its way through the heart of each school's community.

"In Term Four last year, all of the schools on the journey had to come to an evaluation hui on the marae, and share back their kōrero to the rūnaka. Every single school shared a snippet of kōrero that really reinforced the difference it was making. It was really beautiful," she says.

"The rūnaka whānau loved it, and it was so reciprocal. The love our rūnaka whānau felt, after hearing these beautiful stories from each kura and being able to speak to the kaiako doing the mahi, filled their kete

also. It really showed that Te Pōhā is being used in a way that's having an impact on everybody, which is what our pōua and tauha had hoped for."

Keri believes that meaningful, lasting change will ricochet years down the line.

"I have seen what happens when children who, before, didn't see who they inherently are reflected back at themselves, see a beacon of hope. I've seen real lightbulb moments in tamariki, and it's beautiful to watch – this reclamation of identity," she says.

"What we are doing now with Te Pōhā is about restoring the balance. We've been absent from the conversation about what works for Māori children for far too long. There is a lot of research, from New Zealand and from around the world, that shows once children are given a space to feel valued and important, then their academic results progress, their sense of leadership will progress, and their knowledge of things Māori will progress – which they'll then pass on to their own whānau. The flow-on effects are so important, not only in today's perspective but for generations to come. It just can't be left anymore." That sense of urgency shapes how Keri and the team behind Te Pōhā think about what comes next.

"Think of 20 years from now, when we've got children who are culturally confident, who come into their local school expecting this. The lightbulbs are no longer going off. They're already on, and the world is their oyster." 

A LANDMARK VERDICT FOR POUNAMU



On 1 April this year, whānau from throughout Te Waipounamu gathered in the **Manukau District Court** to hear what many believed would become a landmark verdict in the protection of pounamu. Kaituhi **NIKKI-LEIGH WILSON-BEAZLEY** reports.

Above: Poutini Ngāi Tahu whānau gather outside the Manukau District Court. PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED



Above: 14 pounamu stones returned by Customs on 1 November 2024 (separate incidents).

FOR FIVE DAYS THEY SAT THROUGH PROCEEDINGS AS A MOTHER AND son faced charges relating to the illegal export of nearly 18 kilograms of pounamu after being stopped at Auckland Airport in 2024.

When the judge delivered the verdict, guilty on all charges, the reaction from those gathered was instant – tears, embraces and karakia outside the courtroom as the realisation of what had just been witnessed sank in – the first successful prosecution under the Customs Export Prohibition (Pounamu) Order 2021.

“It was emotional,” says Te Amo Tāmainu, who attended the proceedings representing Poutini Ngāi Tahu. “Not just because of the outcome, but because protection’s been there for generations, and this was the first prosecution.”

Boyuan Zhang and his mother Xin Li were intercepted by New Zealand Customs officers at Auckland International Airport in July 2024 while preparing to board a flight to China, after 17.9 kilograms of pounamu was discovered concealed across multiple suitcases within the pair’s luggage.

Under current legislation, raw and partly processed pounamu cannot legally be exported without ministerial consent, which in turn would need to be based on advice from Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. This restriction doesn’t apply to jewellery or finished pieces, and individual exporters can carry less than five kilograms without approval.

During the hearing, the court heard arguments around how the five-kilogram threshold should be interpreted. Zhang argued that he believed the weight of the pounamu could be spread across members of the travelling group, even when those individuals were not physically carrying the stone themselves. Judge Richard McIlraith later ruled that misunderstanding the law did not remove criminal liability.

The guilty verdict established a significant legal precedent in the protection of pounamu. For many involved in the case, however, the proceedings also reflected a much wider issue that has been growing across Te Tai o Poutini for years.

“This is a significant moment as it sets a precedent for the protection of our taonga,” says Chantal Tumahai of Ngāi Tahu Pounamu. “It shows that Ngāi Tahu and New Zealand Customs take the illegal export of pounamu seriously.”

The export restrictions sit alongside the Ngāi Tahu (Pounamu Vesting) Act 1997, which vested ownership of all naturally occurring pounamu in Ngāi Tahu.

Together, the legislation established the framework through which Ngāi Tahu manages and protects pounamu throughout the takiwā, including restrictions around the export of raw and partially processed stone.

Within Te Tai o Poutini, the responsibility of protecting and managing pounamu has long rested with the hapū of Kāti Māhaki and Kāti Waewae, who remain the kaitiaki of pounamu in the takiwā.

“Protection of pounamu is vital to Poutini Ngāi Tahu,” Chantal says. “It is much more than a resource to us, it is a living taonga with spiritual, historical and cultural significance that we need to safeguard for future generations.”

The case also arrives amid growing concern around the illegal trade of pounamu throughout the West Coast and beyond. Recent investigations have highlighted increasing issues relating to unlawful extraction, online trading and international export, with significant quantities of pounamu now being recovered through Police and Customs operations.



Above left: One piece of the pounamu that the defendants' father and husband had attempted to export in May 2024.

Right: The Arahura Awa on Te Tai o Poutini.



“IT AFFIRMS THAT OUR ROLE AS KAITIAKI IS NOT SYMBOLIC, BUT IT IS SUPPORTED AND ENFORCED UNDER THE LAW THAT ANYONE WHO EXPORTS POUNAMU WITHOUT WRITTEN APPROVAL FROM NGĀI TAHU WILL BE AT RISK OF LEGAL ACTION.”

CHANTAL TUMAHAI Ngāi Tahu Pounamu

In April this year, police seized around one tonne of allegedly illegally sourced pounamu during a major operation targeting commercial theft on the West Coast. Earlier this month, Customs also revealed that almost 300 kilograms of pounamu had been intercepted at the border over the past decade. Most involve passengers travelling through airports, although there have been cases of seizures through international mail and freight channels.

Kāi Tahu has also raised concerns around the scale of online trading through platforms such as TradeMe, Facebook Marketplace and Etsy, where buyers are often unable to determine whether pounamu has been sourced legally or ethically.

For Chantal, the guilty verdict reinforced the role of Kāi Tahu as kaitiaki in a practical and enforceable way.

“Yes, it affirms that our role as kaitiaki is not symbolic, but it is supported and enforced under the law that anyone who exports pounamu without written approval from Ngāi Tahu will be at risk of legal action.”

Key to the successful prosecution is the long-standing relationship between Ngāi Tahu Pounamu and New Zealand Customs. Chantal says the relationship has been built over many years through the sharing of cultural knowledge and expertise relating to pounamu, allowing for the protection of pounamu within the Kāi Tahu takiwā and beyond.

“For the past 11 years that I have been in my role, Ngāi Tahu Pounamu has had a strong working relationship with Customs,” she says. “We share our cultural knowledge and insight about pounamu from within the Te Taihū takiwā.”

Chantal says Ngāi Tahu Pounamu has previously assisted Customs in connecting with Ngāti Kuia after pounamu uplifted at the border was identified as being from within their rohe, allowing it to be returned appropriately.

“What made that relationship work? Trust, respect and a lot of whakawhānauanga,” she says. “Having people working within Customs who understand tikanga and kawa when it comes to pounamu makes it that much easier.”

Te Amo says collaboration between iwi and government agencies was central to the outcome of the case. “We wouldn’t have achieved that

if we didn’t have the relationships with Customs,” she says. “We worked together as a collective, and that was really significant.”

Despite the significance of the prosecution, many Kāi Tahu believe the current system still has significant gaps. The iwi has long sought stronger compliance and enforcement powers relating to unlawful fossicking and extraction, however, there remains a heavy reliance on agencies such as Customs, Police, local councils and the Department of Conservation to intervene where required.

Concerns have also been raised around whether the current five-kilogram export threshold remains fit for purpose, particularly as international demand for pounamu continues to grow. Critics argue the law was developed in a very different environment to the current one, where online marketplaces and international trading networks make the movement and sale of pounamu significantly easier.

Those involved in the case believe the verdict will likely influence how pounamu protection is approached moving forward, particularly around enforcement, education and public awareness.

“This case is setting a precedent for protecting pounamu, inspiring stronger enforcement, sharing awareness of what is right from wrong and how to go about obtaining pounamu legally,” Chantal says. “There is still a need for continued collaboration between Ngāi Tahu, government agencies and wider New Zealand for stronger education and legal reforms, to ensure ongoing protection is in place and to further prevent illegal activity.”

Kāi Tahu has authentication systems in place for licensed carvers and retailers, including traceability codes and iwi trademarks intended to help consumers identify legally sourced pounamu.

For those who travelled to Manukau District Court, the verdict was more than a successful prosecution; it reinforced through the courts a responsibility that Kāti Māhaki and Kāti Waewae have carried for generations.

For Chantal, the significance of the case extends well beyond the courtroom itself: “This is a historic moment for our whānau, hapū and iwi.” 

2026 General Election

Māori *roll* or General *roll*?

Your *roll* choice decides:

- which electorate you vote in.
- the candidates you can choose from.
- Your roll choice can also influence the number of Māori and general seats in Parliament.

Your roll choice does not affect your party vote. You vote for the same list of political parties whichever roll you're on.

What you need to do:

If you're happy with the roll you're on, you don't need to do anything. If you want to change the roll you're on, you can make the change online, by email, or by mail.

If you're already enrolled to vote, check your roll type and update it at vote.nz or call **0800 36 76 56**.

If you're not currently enrolled, you can enrol now and choose your roll at the same time by:

- Enrolling online at **vote.nz** using your NZ driver licence, NZ passport, or RealMe verified identity
- Calling **0800 36 76 56** and asking for an enrolment form to be emailed or posted to you.

"You cannot change rolls in the 3 months before the election."

Don't miss the cut-off date!

If you would like to change the roll you are on before the election, you need to do it by **midnight, Thursday 6 August 2026**.

The 2026 General Election will be held on Saturday 7 November.

You cannot change rolls in the 3 months before the election.

If you miss the deadline, you'll stay on your current roll until after the election.



Te Rūnanga o **NGĀI TAHU**

SALT OF THE EARTH



Three recipients of New Year Honours from Murihiku – two of them also finalists for New Zealander of the Year's Local Hero category – share a postcode, the customary practice of muttonbirding, and a reluctance to make a fuss about their success. Nā **ANNA BRANKIN**.

THE TĪTĪ SEASON IS WELL UNDERWAY WHEN TE KARAKA CATCHES UP with Russel and Teresa Trow and Gail Thompson, and it's thanks to the recent addition of Starlink that they're able to sit down and reflect on decades spent protecting the environment. As always, Russel and Teresa are spending the April–May season on Kundy Island, just off the southern tip of Rakiura, while Gail is on Kaihuka, off the east coast, with her children and mokopuna.

Russel and Teresa, married for nearly 58 years, received the King's Service Order in the 2026 New Year Honours for services to wildlife conservation. They were also finalists for the Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year – Tower Local Hero category, recognised for more than four decades of voluntary work pulling taoka species back from the brink of extinction. Meanwhile Gail was appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for her services to Māori and conservation, acknowledging a lifetime of work spanning customary fisheries, mahika kai restoration, marine protection and wetland advocacy across the deep south.

Russel was four or five years old the first time he travelled to the Tītī Islands. His grandfather, John Morrison, was already monitoring

the bird population back in the 1930s and 40s, sending samples and keeping records that are now held in Te Papa. "It's just something we do, it's part of being from this place," Russel says simply of the conservation work he has continued across eight decades. "You know what I mean? It's just cool to be part of it."

Growing up in Bluff, his wife Teresa had heard plenty about the islands but had never been until she and Russel were married. "It was certainly a different way of living," she says. "We had to come across on boats back then. It took us about seven and a half hours to get here, and we'd come down for the whole season – two months." What began as a new world has become, across nearly six decades of her marriage to Russel, the place she feels most at home.

A sense of duty to the islands and the bird species living there always came naturally to the couple, but they say that the work that led to their award was originally ignited by others – notably Margaret Bragg and Jane Davis, who began protecting the tieke (saddlebacks) after rats invaded Big South Cape Island in the 1960s and caused catastrophic losses. When Margaret and Jane stepped back, the Trows stepped up. From a founding population of around 30 birds, the couple has



Above: Teresa and Russel Trow shifting tīeke in their transfer boxes from Kundy Island to Te Wharepuitaha Island; left: Teresa and Russel releasing tutukiwi from Tini Heke (Snares Island) on Kundy Island.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED

Opposite: Gail overlooking Bluff Harbour.

PHOTOGRAPH: ROBYN EDIE / SOUTHLAND TIMES

been instrumental in transferring more than 400 tīeke across 10 island locations. Meanwhile their beloved Kundy Island, once struggling under the pressure of invasive weka that wiped out species including tutukiwi (Snares Island snipe), mioweka (banded rail), and mātātā (fernbird), is now a thriving sanctuary and a source population for other islands and mainland sanctuaries like Ōrokonui.

Last year alone, 50 tīeke were taken to Ōrokonui, an ecosanctuary just outside Ōtepoti. Four breeding pairs have since raised 17 chicks – an update that the couple says brings them immense satisfaction. “It’s just so good to know that they’re up there, and to know that we help to save the species,” Russel says. “It’s really cool, eh?” Teresa agrees, saying that she has something of a soft spot for the tīeke after all the work they’ve put into saving the species.

The work is meticulous and seasonal, governed by breeding seasons, weather and the logistics of setting up mist nets and portable aviaries on the remote islands with the support of DOC staff and helicopter crews who, the couple say, are “the best”. And it is entirely voluntary – the Trows and other Kāi Tahu whānau are not paid for their time.

Their work has also led to a pioneering genetic exchange programme, transferring birds between isolated islands in the hopes of building genetic diversity. If successful, this could inform conservation practice across other species. “We haven’t been back to see the results yet,” Russel explains, “because we want to have about three breeding seasons. But if it works, it’ll be a good thing for other species.”

The Trows insist that they are only a small part of a wider team, notably DOC staff Ros Cole, Joe Hitchcock and Sharon Tate, ecologist Peter McClelland and iwi member Tane Davis, as well as a growing roster of their nieces and nephews who are now learning the skills themselves. “We’ve been training them up,” Russel says with evident satisfaction. “They’re even bigger greenies than we are, I think. It’s good to see that the young ones want to look after the islands and their birds.”

When news of the honour arrived, Russel’s first instinct was suspicion. “I thought somebody was scamming us or having me on,” he says. Teresa found it overwhelming. “I felt proud,” she says. “But it did feel a bit funny. We don’t feel that this award belongs to just the two of us. We feel it belongs to all the muttonbirders who look after these islands.”



[GAIL] REMEMBERS THE EARLY DAYS OF ADVOCACY FOR WAITUNA LAGOON, WHEN THE COMMUNITY WAS OPENLY HOSTILE.

"I JUST KEPT SHOWING UP, ABSORBING THE JABS, AND FOCUSED ON MAKING CONNECTIONS WHEREVER I COULD, ONE PERSON AT A TIME. IT'S QUITE REMARKABLE REALLY, WORKING THROUGH ALL THESE DIFFERENCES AND REALISING THAT MOST OF THE TIME, WE ALL HAVE THE SAME GOAL WHEN IT COMES TO PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT."

GAIL THOMPSON

Before Gail Thompson gets around to discussing her own achievement, she wanted to make sure that the Trows were properly acknowledged. "They are a couple who are creating new mātauranga based on today's environment. People don't actually realise that in the future their knowledge will be gold. And they don't realise it themselves."

Another lifelong muttonbird, Gail Thompson has spent much of her adult life stewarding customary fisheries and mahika kai restoration along the Murihiku coastline. She was a founding member of the Guardians of Fiordland Fisheries in 1997, sat on the Southland Conservation Board for more than 20 years, and was a founding member and co-chair of what is now Whakamana Te Waituna, the collaborative body credited with protecting the Waituna Lagoon and its surrounding wetlands. Her MNZM cites outstanding services to Māori and conservation, but like the Trows, she is quick to deflect the praise.

"I've never really thought about everything I've done until I read it all summarised like that. At the time, I was just doing what needed to be done," she says. "And everything on that list was a team effort by a lot of people, not just me."

Gail's path into environmental advocacy came through the strong fishing community in Awarua, where "everyone's got an opinion about the sea and how it should be managed", and through a formative period learning from kaumātua like George Ryan and Tiny Metzger, driving them to meetings and sitting in listening and learning. "I was privileged by the fact that in those days, women didn't have to work," she reflects.

"I could do those sorts of things as long as I was home in time to pick the kids up from school."

Gail describes those years as a kind of osmosis. "I didn't realise how much I was learning until someone would say something and straight away I'd say, 'no, that's not right. George told me it was actually...' " she laughs.

Eventually, it was Gail who held the representative roles and sat on boards and committees across Murihiku. Over the years, she says she's developed thick skin and an appreciation of the importance of building relationships. She remembers the early days of advocacy for Waituna Lagoon, when the community was openly hostile. "I just kept showing up, absorbing the jabs, and focused on making connections wherever I could, one person at a time," she says. "It's quite remarkable really, working through all these differences and realising that most of the time, we all have the same goal when it comes to protecting the environment."

Among Gail's proudest achievements is the mātaihai reserve she helped to establish around Kaihuka – a protection mechanism that means no commercial or recreational fishing is permitted around the island from June through to late March each year: in effect, the only time anyone can fish there is when the muttonbirders are in residence. "We got that across the line 15 years ago, in a different political climate," she says. "There's no way we'd be able to achieve that now." The payoff has been obvious, with fish and shellfish populations around the island noticeably recovered.



Gail says that receiving her MNZM was bittersweet, having lost her beloved husband Bubba several years ago. He was, she says without hesitation, ahead of her. "If he was alive, he would've got it before me." She describes a man who knew their island better than anyone, who was involved in tuna restoration and who had a way of getting in the door with Crown agencies that defied logic. "He was stubborn and all that sort of stuff, but he liked to have all the facts." Despite this, she knows that Bubba would be proud of her, and that their children and mokopuna are continuing their legacy.

Ask Russel, Teresa and Gail what motivates them, and you get some version of the same answer: it's just what you do. Gail talks about the Titi Islands as a place that teaches you to value what you have, and to look after it: "if you don't look after your environment down here," she says, "the birds aren't going to come back. And once they've gone, you know, they're gone." 

Above: Teresa Trow sits amongst the Snares Crested Penguin on Tini Heke (Snares Island).

Opposite: Gail Thompson at her investiture earlier this year.

Left: from left, Dean Whaanga, Louise Fowler, the late Bubba Thompson and Gail Thompson.

WHĀIA TE ARA O TE KAREAO

TAOKA FROM THE NGĀI TAHU ARCHIVE



Kareao is the official website of the Ngāi Tahu Archive. Named after the ubiquitous supplejack, *Kareao* is an apt metaphor for the website which leads from one point to another, linking, connecting, and ultimately taking explorers in myriad directions of discovery. *Whāia te ara o te Kareao* is a regular *TE KARAKA* feature sharing important and interesting stories from the Ngāi Tahu Archive with our readers, which they can explore further on *Kareao*.

Te Paipera Tapu o Te Koro Mautai

Nā **HELEN BROWN**

The Ngāi Tahu Archive recently received into its care an 1868 edition of *Te Paipera Tapu* (The Holy Bible) that was formerly owned by Te Koro Ihumatanui Mautai (c.1804–1884). Te Koro was a respected lay preacher who worked alongside Christian missionaries in the second half of the 19th century to prepare Māori candidates for confirmation. He was widely acknowledged for his effectiveness and dedication. His treasured bible was returned home to his hapū of Ngāi Tūāhuriri late last year by Richelle Gott via the television show *My Family Mystery*. Her late father John Morris Gott was gifted the bible in the mid 1960s when he was a police constable at the central police station in Christchurch. He was learning te reo Māori at the time and it is believed to have been given to him by a family friend or his kaiako to assist him in his studies. No connections between the Gott family and Ngāi Tūāhuriri (or Te Koro) have yet been established. So, while *Te Paipera Tapu* has returned home and is now safely housed in our tribal archive, an element of mystery around its provenance prevails.



Ūpoko o Ngāi Tūāhuriri Te Maire Tau receiving *Te Paipera Tapu* o Te Koro Mautai from Richelle Gott during filming for *My Family Mystery* at the Ngāi Tahu Archive, 6 October 2025. Photograph courtesy of *My Family Mystery*.



He advocated and fundraised in the 1860s for a replacement church at Koukourarata and for the construction of St Stephen's Church at Tuahiwi. His efforts for the latter required long journeys on foot between Tuahiwi and Christchurch where he doggedly but successfully canvassed for donations. Te Koro and fellow church warden Pita Te Hori officiated alongside Governor Grey at the laying of the foundation stone for St Stephen's in February 1867, and the church was formally opened in September that year. In addition to spiritual leadership, Te Koro also played a key role in rūnaka affairs at Tuahiwi, monitoring the behaviour of his own community and dealing with disputes.⁶

Despite his advancing age, in the early 1870s, Te Koro moved to Te Tai Poutini for a brief period to serve as a lay reader, and to prepare Kāi Tahu candidates at Arahura and Māwhera for confirmation. On his return to Tuahiwi, he maintained a close relationship with Stack and his family, even after they moved to Christchurch following the destruction of the Tuahiwi mission house and school by fire in 1870.⁷ In 1877 Te Koro conducted his last major mission, supporting the people of Koukourarata to renounce their adoption of the teachings of the prophet Te Maiharoa and return to the Anglican faith.

Te Koro lived out his final years at Tuahiwi, lamenting that the rakatahi of his community were not adhering to Christian teachings. He died in 1884 and has no living descendants. A silver chalice and a painting in the sanctuary of St Stephen's Church are dedicated to his memory.

Te Paipera Tapu

Te Paipera Tapu o Te Koro Mautai is a first edition copy of the first complete bible in te reo Māori. Printed in 1868, its publication was the culmination of 40 years of translation work. Several translations of the New Testament and extracts from the Old Testament had preceded it, beginning with the earliest scriptures in te reo Māori that were printed in Sydney in 1827.⁸ Most of these early publications were the work of North Island-based missionaries. An exception was *He Puka ako i te Korero Maori*, a small booklet that included scriptures and prayers in the Kāi Tahu dialect, published by Waikouaiti-based Methodist missionary Reverend James Watkin in 1841.⁹

The 1868 edition of *Te Paipera Tapu* combined earlier translations of the New Testament by William Williams (progenitor of the first comprehensive Māori language dictionary) and of the Old Testament by Robert Maunsell into a single volume. These translations were further revised in England by Elizabeth Colenso, Reverend George Maunsell, and Bishop George Selwyn.¹⁰ Maunsell proofed the Old Testament and Selwyn approved the final proofs of the New Testament before it was sent to press for the British and Foreign Bible Society at William Watts printing house in London.¹¹

An initial 500 copies of *Te Paipera Tapu* were produced in three different bindings: 'red sheep', 'speckled calf' and 'Morocco leather boards with blind and gold tooling' (Te Koro's version).¹² The newly minted bibles arrived in New Zealand in 1869. The Bible Society determined that they would be offered for sale rather than as free gifts.¹³ We do not know when or from whom Te Koro obtained his copy, however given their close relationship it seems likely that Stack was involved in providing *Te Paipera Tapu* to his loyal friend whom he described as "a kind-hearted servant of Jesus Christ, who, wherever he went, tried to do good to his fellow men."¹⁴ 

¹ James West Stack, *Koro*, Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., Christchurch, Wellington and Dunedin, 1909, p.11.

² Stack, *Koro*, p.20.

³ Ibid, p.48.

⁴ 'The diocesan Maori mission', *Lyttelton Times*, 16 November 1869, p.2.

⁵ Stack, *Koro*, p.77.

⁶ Ibid, p.44.

⁷ *Lyttelton Times*, 9 May 1870, p.3.

⁸ "The Bible's early journey in New Zealand" in *New Zealand Bible Society* 10, 2018, p.4.

⁹ Ray Harlow, *Otago's first book: the distinctive dialect of Southern Maori*, Otago Heritage Books, Dunedin, 1994.

¹⁰ Phil Parkinson & Penny Griffith (eds), *Books in Maori*, Reed, 2004, p.345.

¹¹ "British and foreign bible society", *New Zealand Herald*, 29 April 1869, p.5.

¹² Ibid; Parkinson & Griffith, *Books in Maori*, p.345.

¹³ "British and foreign bible society", *New Zealand Herald*, 29 April 1869, p.5.

¹⁴ Stack, *Koro*, p.90.



The interior of Te Whare Tipene St Stephen's Church, Tuahiwi, c.1898. As an Anglican Lay Reader and Church Warden, Te Koro would almost certainly have used his copy of *Te Paipera Tapu* when leading worship at St Stephen's and when preaching, teaching, and conducting pastoral care amongst his community elsewhere. The church was built by Herbertson and Byres from Saltwater Creek with Kāi Tahu supplying the timber and helping with construction. The timber board-and-batten church was designed by Reverend A.G. Purchase and was the first church with a spire in Canterbury. Officially opened in 1867, St Stephen's is the oldest extant Māori church in Te Waipounamu. PA1-q-1130, Joseph Lowthian Wilson Album 3, Alexander Turnbull Library (Copy held in Ngāi Tahu Archive).

Below: This photograph of members of the Tuahiwi community in front of St Stephen's Church was taken by Dr Alfred Charles Barker on 17 December 1867, just three months after the church was completed and formally opened. Te Koro was an active member of the community at that time, however it is not known whether he is pictured. Those identified include: Arapata Koti (standing fifth from left in the back row with a white beard), and Aperahama Te Aika (wearing a top hat in the centre of the back row). CCPAL42312, Christ's College Canterbury Collection (Copy held in Ngāi Tahu Archive).



Te Paipera Tapu
o Te Koro
Mautai features
on *My Family*
Mystery
(Season 2
Episode 1),
which is
available to
view on TVNZ+.

TIKAKA HOU, ORAKA HOU — CHANGING HABITS, CHANGING LIVES

When it was founded two decades ago, Whai Rawa was making a promise that went well beyond financial returns. Twenty years on, with over 38,500 members and funds under management sitting at over \$210 million, that promise is being kept – one small, steady contribution at a time. **Nā ANNA BRANKIN.**



WHAI RAWA WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2006 AS A MANAGED INVESTMENT scheme for Kāi Tahu whānau, designed to provide support at three key life stages: tertiary education, first home purchase and retirement from age 55. And with accounts able to be opened from birth, it is, as general manager Sam Kellar (Kāi Tahu – Moeraki, Taumutu) describes it, an investment scheme quite unlike any other.

"I've worked in the industry for a while, more traditional investment schemes which generally cater for a certain target market – financially well-off people with a lot of money to invest, often older," he says. "For Whai Rawa, it is very much about trying to get participation from a young age, which I think is really cool. The average age of our members is 30, and about half are aged 25 and under," he says. "It's very different to other investment schemes which are often targeted at older people." This is very much by design, with a newborn distribution incentivising parents to enrol tamariki before they turn one, and a 4:1 matched savings rate for members under 16.

Whai Rawa chair Anthony Bow spent seven years as a director before taking on the role as chair just over a year ago, and has seen the scheme grow from roughly \$55 million to over \$200 million – and he says that growth is a sign of the scheme's success. "It's what we call the 'hockey stick effect' – growth started off slow over the first 10 years, then we hit \$100 million, and then doubled again due to the compounding effect of investment," he says. "It always takes longer than you think to start with, but once it gets going, it starts to grow pretty fast."

This trajectory encapsulates exactly what Whai Rawa is intended to do: plant seeds early and let time do the work. Anthony refers to the Whai Rawa whakatauki – *tikaka hou, oraka hou, changing habits, changing lives* – as well as the iwi whakatauki – *mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei, for us and our children after us*. "It can take a generation to change people's mindsets," he says, "but that intergenerational thinking is exactly what Whai Rawa is built on."

Deputy chair Juliet Tainui-Hernandez (Kāi Tahu – Ōnuku) echoes this



Above, left: Whai Rawa chair Anthony Bow; right: Whai Rawa general manager Sam Kellar. PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED

sense of legacy as she reflects on the scheme's origins. "Tahu Pōtiki's vision for Whai Rawa was not just as an investment fund, but as a direct intergenerational prosperity initiative for Kāi Tahu whānau," she says. "It continues to deliver that, as well as growing our collective financial literacy and confidence. Every contribution, no matter how small, is an investment in the future opportunities, resilience and wellbeing of our whānau."

Both Anthony and Sam note one of the scheme's more radical features in relation to others: the fact that withdrawals are not a failure – they are the point. "It's the only investment scheme I've worked at where we celebrate money going out the door, because it means our members are achieving their life goals," says Sam. Anthony agrees, saying: "If we didn't allow withdrawals, we might be closer to \$300 million, and some other schemes would consider that a failure. But we look at the more than \$50 million that has been withdrawn and know that it has been for really important purposes."

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the scheme is the fact that members are encouraged to contribute not only to their own accounts, but to those of their whānau – and the data shows they do. The savings rate for tamariki members sits at around 65 percent, higher than the adult rate, because whānau are actively prioritising the next generation over themselves. "We're seeing parents, aunties, uncles, grandparents prioritising saving into tamariki accounts over their own," Sam says. One member, he notes, contributes to around 20 of her grandchildren's accounts. It is, he reflects, "quite selfless" – and it is also distinctly Māori – and exactly what the scheme was designed to do.

Whai Rawa is in the midst of a strategic reset aligned with *Mō Kā Uri*, the iwi's broader vision, and is looking at how to optimise returns, and provide a broader suite of financial services for whānau. Sam says the team is considering how to make the criteria for first home withdrawals more flexible to better reflect the realities of Māori land tenure and papakāika. "We want to make sure that we're still relevant, and that the definition of 'home' reflects our cultural nuances."

When TE KARAKA celebrated 10 years of Whai Rawa in 2016, we shared the stories of Toya Woodgate and Riana Tamati. A decade later, we revisited them to hear how Whai Rawa has continued to shape their financial habits and create opportunities.

Toya Woodgate was just 22 when she and her partner Callum used her Whai Rawa account as part of the deposit on their first home in Leeston in 2015 – a moment she described at the time as still feeling



"TAHU PŌTIKI'S VISION FOR WHAI RAWA WAS NOT JUST AS AN INVESTMENT FUND, BUT AS A DIRECT INTERGENERATIONAL PROSPERITY INITIATIVE FOR KĀI TAHU WHĀNAU. IT CONTINUES TO DELIVER THAT, AS WELL AS GROWING OUR COLLECTIVE FINANCIAL LITERACY AND CONFIDENCE. EVERY CONTRIBUTION, NO MATTER HOW SMALL, IS AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES, RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING OF OUR WHĀNAU."

JULIET TAINUI-HERNANDEZ Whai Rawa deputy chair

like a dream. Today she is a mother of three (Lillian, Adeline and Finley), living in Fairlie. That first house, renovated steadily over seven years, was sold at the peak of the housing market – netting a decent profit. "What we did with our first home has definitely set us up for our second home," Toya reflects. "Being able to buy when we did, which wouldn't have been possible without Whai Rawa, meant we were in a really good position to capitalise on it when we were ready to upsize."

When Toya considers what her children might be able to accrue – having had their accounts open since birth – she is blown away. "My mum contributes a couple of dollars to each of their accounts every week, and their great-grandmother gives \$20 every birthday," she says. "It'll build up to something quite meaningful by the time they're old enough to withdraw."

Beyond the pūtea in their accounts, Whai Rawa has also shaped the way the whānau think about money. "I was so lucky that Mum was working at Ngāi Tahu when it opened and got me involved, because it's

RIANA TAMATI HAS A CLEAR VIEW ON WHY A WĀHINE-SPECIFIC SPACE MATTERS: “WE’RE SO OFTEN THE ONES GIVING UP CAREER OPPORTUNITIES TO RAISE FAMILIES, YET WE’RE ALSO THE ONES DEALING WITH A LOT OF FINANCIAL DECISION-MAKING FOR THE HOUSEHOLD.

“WE ARE NAVIGATING MULTIPLE LEVELS OF STUFF, ALL WITH FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS. OUR MONETARY RELATIONSHIPS COME FROM A PERSONAL, BUSINESS AND EMOTIONAL SENSE, AND THAT’S NOT OFTEN SHARED OUT LOUD. IT’S REALLY IMPORTANT THAT WHAI RAWA HAS CREATED THAT SPACE.”



taught me more about finances than anything else,” she says. “It pushed me to get more knowledgeable about other investments, and setting up multiple funds as well as just being more mindful with our money.”

Toya says she regularly talks to her kids about ways to do this – buying second hand, selling one thing before buying another, considering budgets. “I want them to understand that they are already very rich in life, and that money is about security, not stuff.”

Ten years ago, Riana Tamati (Kāi Tahu – Makaawhio) was a mother of two with a firm belief in what the scheme could do for her kids. Since then, she has navigated a divorce, started her own business, and blended a new family – and Whai Rawa has been with her through all of it.

The period of separation, she says, was helped by an unexpected reassurance from Whai Rawa. Although she didn’t end up needing to access it, she knew that her savings were there, able to be withdrawn in the case of true financial hardship. “It gave me peace of mind. I had access to it for myself and our tamariki. I was grateful for my stubbornness and determination over the years. I was grateful I stayed true to what the whole purpose of it is for.”

Riana’s blended whānau of five tamariki reflects a complexity the scheme cannot fully reach. Her children Ryan, Maia and Taiāwhio all have Whai Rawa accounts opened from birth, but her two step-children, who do not whakapapa to Kāi Tahu, are not eligible. Rather than a source of division, Riana has found a way to make the scheme’s resources a shared resource for the whole household. The Ngā Kaitiaki Moni pānui – Whai Rawa’s financial literacy programme for tamariki aged 5 to 12 – arrive for her eligible children and end up on the table for everyone. “It may be such a small activity,” she says, “but it’s quite meaningful because it’s around pūtea – about what it is, what it does and how it grows.”

Riana is also a business owner who has become actively engaged in Whai Rawa’s community initiatives – including sitting on a panel for He Matapaki Māreikura, a financial education programme for wāhine. “I shared my whakaaro around savings in a business sense and in a whānau sense,” she says. “Those panels were great because there was a true sense of transparency. Everyone’s experience is different and then some experiences are so aligned.” She has a clear view on why a wāhine-specific space matters: “We’re so often the ones giving up career opportunities to raise families, yet we’re also the ones dealing with a lot of financial decision-making for the household,” she says.



“I WAS SO LUCKY THAT MUM WAS WORKING AT NGĀI TAHU WHEN IT OPENED AND GOT ME INVOLVED, BECAUSE IT’S TAUGHT ME MORE ABOUT FINANCES THAN ANYTHING ELSE. IT PUSHED ME TO GET MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT OTHER INVESTMENTS, AND SETTING UP MULTIPLE FUNDS AS WELL AS JUST BEING MORE MINDFUL WITH OUR MONEY.”

TOYA WOODGATE



BY HER LATE FIFTIES, MORTGAGE-FREE AND IN HER NEW HOME, JUDITH THORPE IS STILL WORKING PART-TIME – NOT BECAUSE SHE HAS TO, BUT BECAUSE SHE WANTS TO. “MOSTLY SO I CAN KEEP CONTRIBUTING TO MY GRANDCHILDREN’S WHAI RAWA ACCOUNTS.”

“We are navigating multiple levels of stuff, all with financial implications. Our monetary relationships come from a personal, business and emotional sense, and that’s not often shared out loud. It’s really important that Whai Rawa has created that space.”

The third whānau story in this anniversary piece is a new one. Judith Thorpe has been a member since Whai Rawa’s early days, contributing the same way most long-term members do – a small automatic payment each pay period. “Enough to make sure I received my matched savings every year, plus a little bit more whenever I could manage it,” she says. By her late fifties, Judith was ready to downsize into a retirement unit in Hokitika. She was determined to be mortgage free, and needed about \$30,000 to bridge the gap between the proceeds from the sale of her house and the cost of the unit. “I said to myself, I’m just going to have to look under all the couch cushions,” she laughs. “In the end, my Whai Rawa savings made a huge difference. I did it at the right time, and I am very lucky.”

The retirement age of 55 was, Judith says, the game-changer.

“Sometimes you just need to be able to access money earlier than 65.” By her late fifties, mortgage-free and in her new home, she is still working part-time – not because she has to, but because she wants to. “Mostly so I can keep contributing to my grandchildren’s Whai Rawa accounts.”

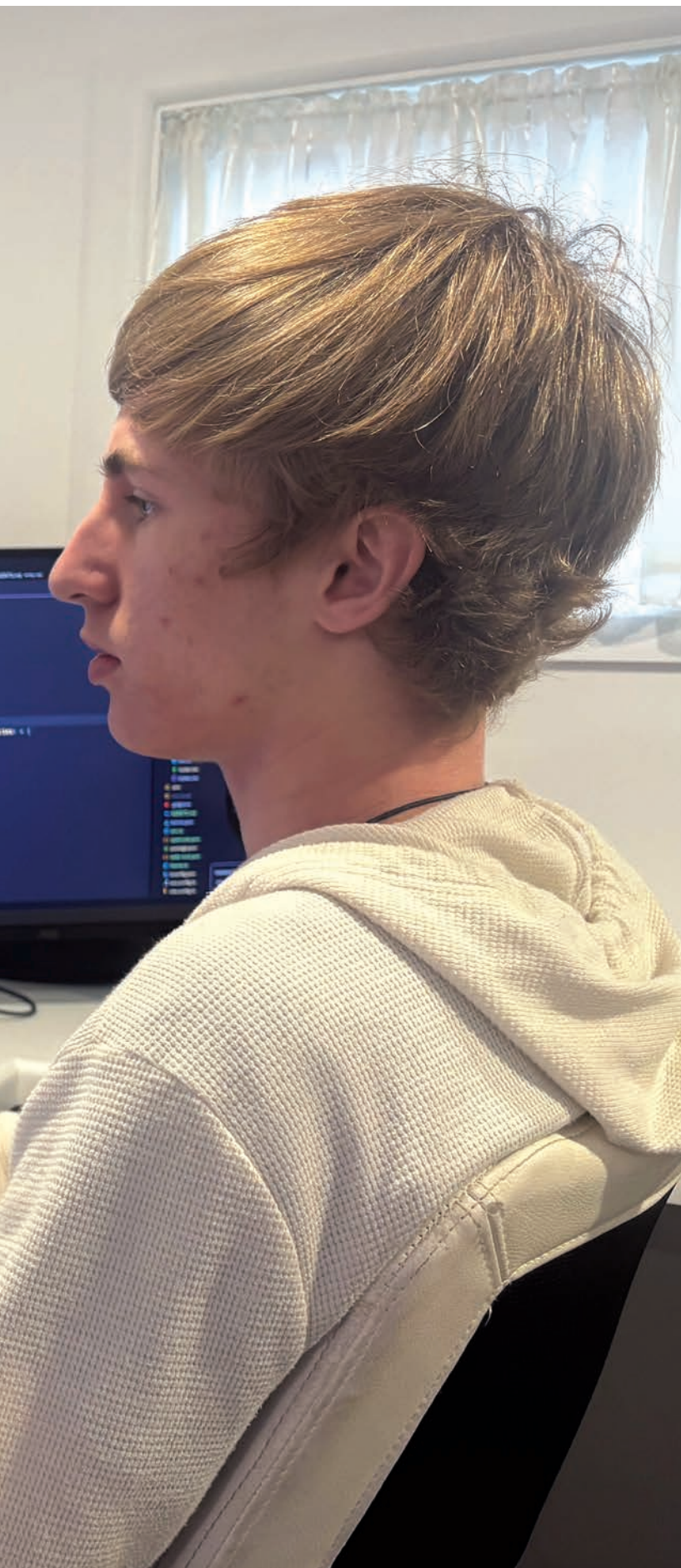
Judith’s advice to anyone not yet enrolled is clear: “I’m a big advocate. I tell everybody, everybody. It’s a way to help your kids and your grandkids. Just take every advantage that’s given to you.”

Twenty years in, Whai Rawa has become something more than an investment scheme. It is often the most tangible connection a whānau member has with Kāi Tahu – especially those living far from Te Waipounamu. The next 20 years will see that connection deepen, as tamariki who have been enrolled since birth begin to reach those first key milestones – attending university, buying their first homes – with nest eggs their parents could only have dreamed of. *Tikaka hou, oraka hou.* 

A WORLD OF HIS OWN DESIGN

Nā NIKKI-LEIGH WILSON BEAZLEY





Nico Cook (Kāti Māhaki) first fell in love with programming when he was about seven and logged into Minecraft for the first time. In a world of blocks, creatures, quests and challenges, he realised programming could be a tool for creation, expression and for forging a world completely of his own design.

WHAT BEGAN AS CURIOSITY QUICKLY BECAME SOMETHING MORE.

While most children his age were simply playing the game, Nico found himself fascinated by what was happening beneath the surface.

"I started playing and realised everything in the game was customisable. That was the beginning of the journey for me."

Hidden among Minecraft's endless landscapes was an in-game tool known as a command block, allowing players to manipulate the game itself through code.

For Nico, discovering that was the moment he realised just how much of the game could be customised. To him, it felt less like playing a game and more like discovering a new language.

Not long afterwards, he enrolled in a series of free programming classes at the New Brighton Library. The sessions lasted only a few months, but they gave him something far more valuable than technical skills. They showed him a pathway.

"I went along for about six months, and it really ignited the flame. From that point on I knew I wanted to keep learning."

The years following were largely self-directed. While other teenagers were spending their free time on social media or sport, Nico was teaching himself new programming languages, experimenting with software development and steadily building his understanding of technology.

At age 14, he entered the New Zealand Informatics Competition (NZIC), a programming competition typically contested by senior secondary school students from across the country. While many competitors entered as part of a school team, Nico entered alone, and while many of the members of those teams were several years older than him, he managed to place sixth in Canterbury and 12th in New Zealand.

"I remember coming away from that thinking maybe this wasn't just something I enjoyed doing. Maybe it was something I could actually build a future around."

THE OPPORTUNITIES CONTINUED THROUGHOUT HIGH SCHOOL. TEACHERS BEGAN APPROACHING HIM WITH PROJECTS OF THEIR OWN, INCLUDING A CANTERBURY TEACHING COLLECTIVE LOOKING TO DEVELOP A WEBSITE FOR EDUCATORS. WHAT BEGAN AS A REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE EVENTUALLY BECAME NICO'S RESPONSIBILITY TO DESIGN AND BUILD FROM THE GROUND UP. THAT WEBSITE WENT ON TO BE USED BY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS THROUGHOUT THE REGION.

The result earned him a place in New Zealand's Olympiad training programme and led to training camps through the University of Canterbury. It also exposed him to a wider community of young programmers who shared the same passion for technology and problem solving.

Like many self-taught programmers, much of Nico's learning came through open-source software – programmes and applications whose code is freely shared online for others to study, improve and build upon.

While most people would see pages of symbols, commands and functions, Nico saw the thinking behind them. He could recognise patterns in the way a problem had been approached, the decisions that had been made and, in some cases, even the individual behind the work.

"Programming is a language. After a while you start to recognise how different people think. There are developers whose work I can look at and immediately know who wrote it."

Programming, despite its reputation as a solitary pursuit, is often deeply collaborative. Developers learn from one another, build on each other's ideas and contribute to projects from across the globe.



Above: Nico receiving the CV Gallagher Scholarship.

Right: Nico performing with the Jazz Combo group. PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED

"You'll see somebody solve a problem in a way you never would have considered. Then you learn from it, add your own ideas and build on top of that. It's almost like a conversation."

The opportunities continued throughout high school. Teachers began approaching him with projects of their own, including a Canterbury teaching collective looking to develop a website for educators. What began as a request for assistance eventually became Nico's responsibility to design and build from the ground up. That website went on to be used by teachers and principals throughout the region.



Above: Whānau Christmas 2022. From left: Daryl Coutts, Zoe Coutts, Jacob Elliott, Nico Cook, Pam Coutts, the late Eric Coutts, Katrina Coutts (Nico's mum), Fiona Elliott, and Jason Cook (Nico's dad).

"MUSIC SORT OF SOLVES THE MISSING PLACES THAT PROGRAMMING MAYBE DOESN'T. PROGRAMMING CAN BE QUITE AN ISOLATED THING SOMETIMES, WHEREAS MUSIC BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER. A LOT OF MY CLOSEST FRIENDSHIPS HAVE COME THROUGH MUSIC."

NICO COOK



"The special part about it was seeing what I'd made in action. It wasn't really about building the website itself, it was seeing people use it and knowing it was helping them."

At Shirley Boys' High School's annual athletics day, teachers were relying on spreadsheets and manual processes to record results throughout the event. Seeing an opportunity to improve the system, Nico developed a custom platform that allowed scores, records and student results to be managed in one place.

As the event unfolded, teachers began offering suggestions and ideas for improvements. Sitting on the sidelines with his laptop, Nico made changes as they were requested, refining the software while it was actively being used.

"It was really cool because people would come over and ask if it could do something different and I'd make the changes while they were using it. Being able to adapt it on the spot and see it working straight away was a really rewarding experience."

Last year, at just 16 years old, he established NebulaDev, a freelance web design and software development business that sees him taking calls from clients in the evening while still attending school the following morning.

"Every day is different. One day I'm talking to a coffee machine manufacturer about building an app and the next I'm developing software for another project."

The business has evolved alongside a growing list of projects and achievements including completing his first year of Computer Science studies at university and receiving A and A+ grades across his papers, while still attending school. The results placed him among the top 10 percent of students taking the courses nationwide and earned him the Webb-Holmes Scholarship for highest academic achievement in the programme. He was also elected as student representative on his school's Board of Trustees. However, when asked what he is most proud of, Nico's focus remains firmly on the work itself.

"The biggest sense of achievement comes from creating something that people genuinely use. Whether it's a website, a piece of software or a tool that saves someone time, it's a great feeling knowing you've made somebody's day a little easier."

Alongside software development, music has become one of Nico's other great passions. He began learning guitar at around the same time he started programming and has continued to pursue both ever since.

Equally as dedicated to music as he is to programming, Nico has earned a place in the Shirley Boys' Jazz Big Band, one of New Zealand's leading secondary school jazz bands, spending much of his time rehearsing, performing and competing alongside some of the country's most talented young musicians.

"To me, programming and music are both art forms. A lot of people see programming as something purely technical, but I've never really looked at it that way. Whether it's a piece of software or a piece of music, you're creating something that didn't exist before."

Along the way, Nico has performed at festivals and competitions throughout the South Island, helping his Jazz Big Band secure multiple gold awards and Best Big Band honours at Southern Jam. He was also selected for the All Stars Band at the Christchurch Big Band Festival and occasionally fills in on guitar for the Sideline Swing Big Band.

Throughout much of that journey, he has been supported by Judith Bell, his jazz conductor, and Professor Tim Bell, a computer scientist whose encouragement helped nurture his interest in programming. Mentors in both music and technology, the pair have played an important role in shaping the two passions that continue to define much of Nico's life.

"Being on stage and having a conversation through music feels a lot like programming. You're creating something, sharing it with other people and seeing how they respond to it. That's what I enjoy about both."

While programming introduced him to communities of developers around the world, music provides a different kind of connection.

"Music sort of solves the missing places that programming maybe doesn't. Programming can be quite an isolated thing sometimes, whereas music brings people together. A lot of my closest friendships have come through music."

Looking to the future, Nico hopes to bring together the skills he has spent years developing through programming, music, design and storytelling.

"I'd love to create a video game, and a music album. A game especially ties together everything I've learned. You've got the programming, the art, the story writing, the music and then the sharing of it."

At just 17 years old, he has plenty of time to do so.

"The biggest thing for me is making a difference. Whether it's a piece of software, a website, a game or a piece of music, if something I've created helps somebody, stays with them or gives them a positive experience, that's what matters most." 

Photographs and words **nā PHIL TUMATAROA**

Te Ao o te Māori

A WINDOW INTO THE RICH LIFESTYLES OF CONTEMPORARY MĀORI



Kitty Brown can recall when she made the conscious decision to work for her people.

“I was working at Otago University doing events, and I was reconnecting with my whakapapa and my hapū when I realised there’s a community and a collective that resonates much more deeply with me here. And since I made that commitment to work on behalf of Kāi Tahu and my iwi, I have been lucky enough to actually do that.”

It started in 2015 with helping te whānau o Te Tai o Ārai te Uru host Hui-ā-Iwi and then in 2019 that commitment turned into a role with rūnaka-owned organisation Aukaha working with the Mana Ahurea team, tasked with embedding mana whenua stories and values in development projects across the Otago region.

Her love of working with people also led to opportunities to work alongside Paemanu Kāi Tahu Contemporary Arts Trust. “I always wanted to work with Paemanu. I always held that in my heart, and in the last couple of years, they’ve needed

someone like me to come in and facilitate wānaka, hīkoi and exhibitions. And that’s magic – I love working with them.”

Born and raised in Kaiapoi, Kitty’s Kāi Tahu and Ngāti Kahungunu whakapapa is through her mother Aroha Ivy. Her grandmother is Ivy Aroha Karaitiana from Tuahiwi and her great grandmother, Olive Oriwia Karaitiana (Fowler) from Ōtākou/Awarua.

“Culturally I feel connected to this place, to the south and to my whānau here. That connection is based in the whenua and the landscapes, so the ability to work within our cultural settings is a massive bonus for me.”

Working behind the scenes Kitty has been instrumental in helping mana whenua embed cultural designs in the Dunedin built landscape through projects like Ōtepoti – the ACC building which incorporates a narrative written by Dr. Megan Pōtiki and designs by Kirsten Parkinson, drawing inspiration from the woven pattern of a traditional poti basket, and also serving to renew the placename of Ōtepoti in the city.





There's the Tohu Whenua Series, 10 heritage and cultural markers along the Otago Harbour foreshore, recent large-scale installations by Xoe Hall and Steve Solomon at the city's airport, and cultural narratives woven into Otago Boys' High School Performing Arts Centre, Ōtākou Whakaihuwaka - Otago University, and the new Dunedin hospital to name just a few.

Kitty admits she likes to have a few pots on the boil at any one time and has co-published a series of books for tamariki called Reo Pēpi and is co-director of the Dunedin Writers and Readers Festival, that's when she's not busy at home cooking, crafting or making time for her kids.

"Keeping it all cooking is the constant mahi," says Kitty who lives with her partner Dan, on a Portobello hillside property with their two children Tama and Kuini amongst sprawling māra kai and fruit trees. 





Emerging from her shell

Nā ANNA BRANKIN

When her children left for two months on the titi islands this season, Ōtepoti designer Amber Bridgman didn't tell anyone what she planned to do with the rare stretch of free time. "I thought, 'right, time to see if this old girl has still got it,'" Amber says. "I started working on a new collection, with no idea how it was going to turn out or if I'd even want to show it to anyone." A few months later in early June, she was on the runway at Fiji Fashion Week in Suva, in front of international media including Harper's Bazaar.

The collection – *Te Ara a Kewa*, named for her youngest son Kewa – was first dreamed up when Amber was staying in a friend's house in Matavera in the Cook Islands, and the pieces were produced everywhere from Papamoa, the far north Moerewa, Rakiura, Ōraka, Wānaka and Ōtepoti. "I don't know life without my children," Amber says. "The only thing I know how to do is design, weave and sew, and make cool things. So that's what I did."

Amber describes the past year as one of the hardest of her life, the kind that had her questioning everything – her relationships, her purpose, the career she's dedicated 30 years of her life to. "Some people go to the gym or out for a run to process their emotions," she says. "I have to be creative, every day. That's how I heal, that's how I express my thoughts."

The collection draws on the colour palette of a pāua, a decision that Amber says had multiple layers. "The pāua aesthetic has become quite exploited in our tourism industry, and I wanted to reclaim that and elevate it onto an international runway," she says. "On top of that, my friends would describe me as the pāua, and with this collection, I've finally removed myself from the shell to reveal the beauty inside." Having warned the organisers of Fiji Fashion Week to expect a collection in dark colours – "I told them, 'I'm from Dunedin, we're notorious for wearing black'" – what came down the runway instead was a wash of ocean blues, teals, fuchsia pinks and purples, with pops of kōwhai.

Right: Amber (far right) making the final touches to her designs at Fiji Fashion Week.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JACQUI TURNER RUNNING UNDER THE SPRINKLER







Amber's signature style is reflected throughout the collection, a blend of toi Māori and haute couture; tāniko, korowai and hei-tiki pairing with chiffon pleating and bespoke tailoring to create something truly one of a kind. Stand out looks from the collection include a long, hand-printed pāua hooded jacket worn with black trousers and a purple neck piece that represents the chains placed on indigenous peoples by colonisation. "My work always has a story," Amber says. "I don't want to scare people off by getting too political but there is always a hidden message. I do see fashion as a medium to explore my thoughts and my journey."

A floor-length teal dress in chiffon pleats features the distinctive whakanihoniho, a pattern that Amber says she is always drawn to, and several other looks include handwoven tāniko. "So much of my work is influenced by the weaving principles that I learned many years ago," she says. "My great-grandmother was a master weaver, and I was lucky enough to have my own practice refined by Nanny Roka Ngarimu-Cameron."

This is reflected in the korowai that feature throughout the collection, from dresses paired with traditional short feathered cloaks, to a cropped yellow version that Amber created as something more contemporary. The finale piece was the most traditional: a full-length black korowai with a white stripe, sweeping the runway as the closing look. "I use a lot of traditional feathers - toroa, tītī, weka - which all connect to my whakapapa on the islands and at Ōtākou," Amber says.

As well as painstakingly sewing and printing every piece herself, Amber also creates the adornments that accompany each look. This collection included the pewter hei-tiki she has been making limited runs of for several years now, as well as a new, much larger piece in bronze that is due for online release soon. Handcrafted pāua necklaces and colourful, oversized piupiu necklaces that are as much garment as jewellery feature throughout. "When I was rushing to tie those on backstage I realised I had defaulted back to using the good old hui knot that I learned tying off muttonbirds on the islands back in the day."





AMBER'S SIGNATURE STYLE IS REFLECTED THROUGHOUT THE COLLECTION, A BLEND OF TOI MĀORI AND HAUTE COUTURE; TĀNIKO, KOROWAI AND HEI-TIKI PAIRING WITH CHIFFON PLEATING AND BESPOKE TAILORING TO CREATE SOMETHING TRULY ONE OF A KIND.

"MY WORK ALWAYS HAS A STORY. I DON'T WANT TO SCARE PEOPLE OFF BY GETTING TOO POLITICAL BUT THERE IS ALWAYS A HIDDEN MESSAGE. I DO SEE FASHION AS A MEDIUM TO EXPLORE MY THOUGHTS AND MY JOURNEY."



Amber is loud and proud about her commitment to sustainability, saying that around 95 percent of *Te Ara a Kewa* is upcycled, and that she bought only five metres of new fabric for the whole show. The rest came from decades of fabric hoarding, and what she describes as the "op shop gods" smiling upon her when hunting for the right colours and fabrics. "I don't think you need money to make magic," she says. "You can't buy style with money, and I'd rather use fabric that's otherwise going to waste than buy something new."

Backstage in Suva, working largely alone in 42-degree heat with no air conditioning, Amber ended up dressing far more models than she'd planned for. She'd brought around 40 looks, expecting to only use 20, but more models kept arriving wanting to wear her work. It was only when she saw the models dressed that she remembers thinking, "wow, it's working, I can actually still do this. These stunning Fijian models are bringing the garments to life."

Fiji Fashion Week opened doors for Amber that she says previous international shows never quite did, and invitations to Sydney, Tahiti and New Zealand Fashion Week have already followed. In August, a selection of Amber's pieces will feature at a pop-up at New Zealand Fashion week – a rare chance, she says, to finally let go of some of the one-off garments she's been making and holding onto for years.

Amber Bridgeman (Kāi Tahu) is an Ōtepoti-based designer, traditional weaver and the founder of Kahuwai – a label she's built over three decades around handmade, sustainable kākahu and the idea that what you wear should make you feel good. Alongside her runway work, she lectures at Otago Polytechnic's fashion school and is a mahi toi kaiako at Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Ōtepoti, where she teaches raranga, korowai and piupiu. You can see more of her work, including her Wonder Wahine range, at kahuwai.co.nz.

REVIEWS

WAHINE MĀTĀTOA: THE (MOSTLY) TRUE STORY OF ERIHĀPETI PĀTAHI – WE SEE OURSELVES, PROPERLY

THE COURT THEATRE, CHRISTCHURCH
Saturday 18 April 2026

REVIEW nā JUANITA HEPI

Juanita Hepi reflects on *Wahine Mātātoa: The (Mostly) True Story of Erihāpeti Pātahi*, written by Cindy Diver, directed by Kim Garrett, with musical direction by Ariana Tikao.

Six weeks ago, my sister, Jeni Leigh Walker passed away. She was 48. Three weeks later, the writer of this play lost her husband. Grief is present, in all of the places, spaces and bodies. This introduction then, is both a poetic beginning and an end, I guess.

In the grief filled days after my sister's passing, my son Manu was meant to begin rehearsals for *Wahine Mātātoa*. Jeni Leigh was excited, really excited. In our whānau, our tamariki are everything and so I keep going back to the week she died, and how she was talking about seeing his debut. She didn't make it. There's an emptiness in that, and a space beside me in the theatre tonight, but I'm also reminded of something familiar. My ancestors (of whom Jeni Leigh is now one) have always fought for things we don't always get to see through like the Ngāi Tahu Claim – Te Kerēme, or the return of Pūrāu Reserve 4622 to Ngāti Wheke or te reo Māori becoming an official language. The people who started those movements passed away before they could see the real fruits of their labour. Baby nikau palms are like that too, we nurture them knowing they will flourish long after we have passed.

Similarly, my sister and I spent most of our lives pushing for Kāi Tahu stories to be heard and valued across the arts. We became the artists, the producers, the directors, the writers. Sometimes it felt like shouting into the void, but we did it anyway, some called us stubborn and we called ourselves whatever we wanted. So tonight I write with grief and celebration sitting side by side. In te ao Māori, they always do.

With that long beginning, I can't pretend to be neutral. My son is in this play. I directed its development season and premiere in 2023, travelling back



and forth to Dunedin because this was a play about Kāi Tahu women, employing Kāi Tahu artists, on Kāi Tahu whenua. It always felt like it needed to land here at The Court Theatre. In the final week of rehearsals, I had to leave for other work, so Hilary Halba and Cindy Diver took over. When I came back to see it, the bones were the same. A little bit more meat and including Marty Robert's lighting and Ruby Solly's taonga pūoro, *Wahine Mātātoa* was deepening.

Something I've always loved about this script is the use of projection to show tīpuna/ancestor images. It is also a little risky from an ao Māori perspective. While we adore the memories that photography stirs, some of our ancestors were not keen to have their photos taken. Like my grandfather David Stone of Ngāti Kahungunu. Once, at a WORD event, his image was the only slide that refused to show. I'm not overly mystical, but it still makes me wonder. Not everything needs explanation to be understood and of course the most important things are impossible to define, like love, longing and grief.

The night opens with a whakataui. I arrived just in time to see my cousins from Ngāi Tūāhūriri gathering at the top of

the stairs. I love that moment. Quiet, and disruptive. Whakataui might be normalised in arts spaces now, but Māori things still seem to unsettle people. My cousin, who is one of our go-to for tikaka, spots me, she gives a sharp nod and calls me up. I walk swiftly up the stairs to join them. We finish the whakataui, sing *Manu Tiria*, loudly, with feeling. I am proud to be Kāi Tahu. More than that, I'm proud that our stories are centre stage tonight, and that we, as whānau, are the ones opening the door. Then it's speeches, gin, schmoozing, rewena bread. By 7pm I'm in the Ravenscar Room, surrounded by sponsors, donors, an open bar, and expensive perfume. I have a brief moment where I think my anti-classist instincts might ruin future funding, before realising the perfume is mine. Later, I'm talking to Māori about the show. None of them were in the Ravenscar room. That tells you what you need to know about who the theatre still centres, is funded by, and is accessible to.

Manu is 20. Nearly 21. This is his Court Theatre debut, but he's grown up in it. His dad's a circus artist. I'm a multidisciplinary storyteller. He was meant to study sociology at Otago, but Otago is far from his whānau. He's a pā kid. A marae baby. He wasn't

settled. I told him to come home. He did. He's happier and so am I. He's also on *What Now*, and kids love him. So yes, this is a long preamble, but I repeat, I can't be unbiased when speaking about this work and I also believe that neutrality is a fiction. In the arts, it's a skin-coloured leotard.

Wahine Mātātoa doesn't sit still. It's the Erin Brockovich of theatre. The Woman King of Kāi Tahu. "Mostly true" storytelling that doesn't behave but provides all the human things, romance, sex, trade, warfare, whakapapa, courtrooms, ocean, bush. Time folding in on itself. It lives in that uncomfortable space between Māori storytelling that has been shaped by Euro-American forms, or colonial forms that have been pierced by a Māori lens and yes, both can be and probably are true. I want to shout out to my whanauka Helen Brown and Cindy Diver whose research pushes beyond standard playwriting into something closer to historical literature, nuanced, multilayered and gently held. Kāi Tahu are centred. Our ancestors are named again and again. Hine Kakai, Tūhawaiki. Erihāpeti Pātahi. Alongside Wakefield. Governor Grey. We see ourselves, properly. Aotearoa history is as rich, as dark, as funny and as complex as anywhere else. Maybe it will make it into the history curriculum after all.

The women actors and characters carry this work. Grace, Tōmairangi, Ariana and Emma move across time, place and character with precision and force. Manu, the only tāne, holds mana, comedy, clowning, and I sense a 'koro' accent (that is my dad by the way). I'm proud of him, not just the performance but the way he carries himself, before, during, and after the performance. He honours our whenua, whakapapa, and whānau, and if he's going to tell our stories I'm so glad they're ours. Grace playing her own ancestor, Erihāpeti, provides a deeper meaning to the work. Emma Katene is effortless, her Kāi Tahu mita/dialect = another honouring. She steadies the room and we see why she has been in so many of the Court productions. Please Ōtautahi keep funding and finding



Above: Emma Katene (wāhine characters), Manu Hepi (tāne characters), Grace Turipa (Elizabeth), Tōmairangi Paterson-Waaka.

Above left: Tōmairangi Paterson-Waaka (Erihāpeti/Pātahi), Grace Turipa (Elizabeth). PHOTOGRAPHS: TED EASON



Juanita Hepi (Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Wai, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Mutunga, Moriori, Ngāi Te Rangī) is a Kāi Tahu storyteller, storyweaver and storymaker. She has three tamariki and they are all Tahu storymakers too.

Opinions expressed in REVIEWS are those of the writers and are not necessarily endorsed by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.



Above: Grace Turipa, Emma Katene, Ariana Tikao (Musical Director, Performer and Kaitiaki), Manu Hepi, Tōmairangi Paterson-Waaka. PHOTOGRAPH: TED EASON

ways to keep our artists here. Tōmairangi too, brings that same talented force. There's something about this whenua that produces women like this, not only wāhine Māori, but all women who walk this swamp. You can feel and see it all around here. Ariana Tikao is the show's conscience, grounding us, reminding us to breathe. Ariana is another whanauka from my marae at Rāpaki. She holds space not through volume but in the places she chooses silence, the in between and liminal spaces from one taoka puoro note to the next.

We're nearing the end of this chaotic banter and so shout out to Rosie's set which holds everything together. A pool below, a mirror above, reflections folding back in on themselves like time and genealogy and nature. It allows us to slip between worlds, which is important because some characters are present for only a fraction of a moment. We need this set to help us make

sense of what we're seeing. The actors move carefully around the pool, it makes for tense viewing, they have mastered its watery edges and from my past life as an actor, I love the times when you are in no doubt that this takes practice. Actors make it look easy right...!?!

There is a moment early on where I clock three kids in the second balcony. They become my barometer. No phones, no fidgeting, just elbows balanced on the railings, eyes and bodies towards the stage. When they laugh, it cuts through the room. Our tamariki are an excellent test of our storytelling prowess. I'm transported back to the stage when Tōmairangi recites her pre-interval monologue and I'm gasping, it's beautiful, powerful, and in a play with so many 'favourite parts', I'm so looking forward to seeing this part again.

Thank you Cindy for this work. Māori theatre has often leaned hard into grief,

into heaviness. My sister and I used to joke/complain about "sex and the savage," the flattening of our stories into trauma. This isn't that. Those elements are there, but they don't dominate. They sit inside a fuller, more complicated humanity and Kim Garrett as the director has kneaded and shaped it into existence. Like the making of a rēwena bread, it takes more than just ingredients and baking to fully comprehend.

When we leave, people are buzzing. I find those same kids again. They are excited, they are also Kāi Tahu. I speak to their parents who tell me that these three girls attend different schools – Te Whānau Tahi, and Queenspark School. They brought their children along tonight because they just wanted their daughters to see strong wāhine Māori on stage. My sister should have been here for this, that will weigh heavy for a while, but mostly I know she will be proud proud proud.

IMAGINING DECOLONISATION

Nā BIANCA ELKINGTON, MOANA JACKSON, REBECCA KIDDLE, OCEAN RIPEKA MERCIER, MIKE ROSS, JENNIE SMEATON, AMANDA THOMAS
PUBLISHER: BWB TEXTS
RRP \$20.00

REVIEW nā IRIHAPETI WELLS

Imagining Decolonisation is a must-read for every person in Aotearoa. It does not matter which part of the decolonisation haereka you're on, whether you're fully on the waka or fear what it means for you. Despite being pocket-sized, Bianca Elkington, Moana Jackson, et al., have produced a book that is thought-provoking, educational, and tackles deeply complex kaupapa.

Through a series of interconnected chapters (each by a different author), this pukapuka explores the ongoing presence of colonisation in Aotearoa. It challenges common misunderstandings regarding decolonisation and discusses our deeply rooted systemic issues, from our health statistics to our current capitalist state. It also highlights the complexity of the term 'decolonisation' as a term that is difficult to define. The authors embrace this, focussing an entire chapter on demystifying what it means, but specifically what it could mean for the future of Aotearoa.

The authors' ability to discuss these complex issues in a digestible manner, all without feeling overwhelming, needs to be acknowledged. I really appreciated their use of personal whakapapa and experiences to reinforce what was being discussed. This brought a strong te ao Māori lens to the way the discussion was considered and written.

As someone who has read several pukapuka regarding colonisation in Aotearoa, *Imagining Decolonisation* was a breath of fresh air. Although previous works surrounding colonisation hold mana in their own right, I am generally left with a feeling of anxiety and disappointment

Imagining Decolonisation

BIANCA ELKINGTON
MOANA JACKSON
REBECCA KIDDLE
OCEAN RIPEKA MERCIER
MIKE ROSS
JENNIE SMEATON
AMANDA THOMAS

BWB Texts

with the question of "so what's next?" and "what can I do?" This book responded to those questions and left me feeling hopeful. It provides actionable steps that each of us can take in our everyday lives to inform better outcomes in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The authors understand that the term 'decolonisation' can seem scary, especially by those deemed as the colonisers. They approach the topic with this context seeking to open the minds of readers to the benefits of decolonisation for all who call this country home. As the title of Chapter 3 states, "Colonisation sucks for everyone."

Decolonisation starts in the mind. It is a shared responsibility and involves critical self-reflection. As this book teaches us, reading, discussing, and thinking about these topics are forms of decolonisation themselves. Whether you need to refocus on what decolonisation can look like, or if you want an educational pukapuka with an incredible haereka highlighting bravery, struggle, and hope, *Imagining Decolonisation* will leave you with a



refreshed perspective on how we move forward together.

MĀRAMA (2025)

Nā TARATOA STAPPARD (Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa me Ngāti Tūwharetoa)
SWEETSHOP & GREEN, VENDETTA FILMS, MPI MEDIA GROUP

REVIEW nā SIAN SMITH

Typical horror films are intended to thrill, scare, and mostly, entertain. Masked killers, like Ghostface from *Scream*, sneak into the homes of their victims, who are unaware of the terror that is about to be unleashed upon them.

Mārama is not one of these films. It does however have its own 'masked' killers, whose pervasive acts of violence know no bounds. Behind a smile of paternalism, they weaponise taoka, both tangible and intangible, against Māori. They claim appropriation as appreciation, while



Irihapeti Wells (Ngāti Huikāi) was born and bred in Te Waipounamu. She is the first of her whānau members in four generations to connect with their taha Māori. Last year, Elizabeth completed her studies at Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha (The University of Canterbury), majoring in History and te reo Māori. Elizabeth is currently working as a communications advisor for Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.



Sian Smith (Kāti Huirapa) (she/her) is a Kaitiaki Rakahau | Researcher/Writer for Whakapapa Ngāi Tahu. In 2020, Sian graduated with a Master of Arts and has since worked in research, writing and audio-visual archiving. As well as kaupapa Māori research, Sian is interested in film as a collective medium of storytelling and expression. She lives in Te Whanganui-a-Tara with her tāne, their two tama, and her Pāpā.



reminding the audience that taoka Māori remain in collections around the world. From behind this mask, *Mārama* unveils traumatic and gut-wrenching truths that make this film extremely hard to watch. Yet this is exactly why it is such an urgent and groundbreaking film.

Released at the 2025 Toronto International Film Festival, *Mārama* deals with the depth of violence toward wāhine Māori entrenched in colonisation. Writer and director Taratoa Stappard was partly inspired by the films of Jordan Peele, such as *Get Out* (2017), describing his debut film as a Māori Gothic Horror. Although rife with violence and theft on the most intimate level, *Mārama* is a profound statement about whakapapa. Its depth and layers convey the immense mana of wāhine Māori as whare tāngata.

Mārama shows this in its critical perspective on our relationships with whales. Its antagonists regard whales as animals to be profited from, correlating the brutality of their killing with sexualising wāhine Māori. The emotive response from the film's protagonist played by Ariana Osborne, utterly pulls the audience into her perspective.

As a Kāi Tahu wahine, I cannot help but feel caught in the tension between our whakapapa connections with whales and their place in our colonial history. We are



Above: Mārama (Ariana Osborne) stands face to face with Hinemoana (Te Rauhi Daniels) who tells her to use her gift.

Left: Nathaniel (Toby Stephens) asks Mārama to dance.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY THE PUBLIC GOOD

descendants of Paikea. At the same time, many of us are also descendants of whaling communities. *Mārama* challenged me to think about the compromise of worldview that our tipuna likely experienced, as people who consider whales both kaitiaki and kin. How did they find ways to protect our connection with whales in these spaces that exploited taoka species for financial gain? How did they create space for upholding their mana?

Mārama ultimately tells us that whakapapa empowers us to heal. Atua and ancestors communicate through taoka puoro, the exchange of hau, and in the

mauri of taoka and people. In a scene by the ocean, Hinemoana calls Mārama there with tumumtumu kōhatu, taoka puoro that evoke our connection to Papatūānuku. She says to Mārama, "Kei kōnei koe. Ka mua ka muri."

The film opens with a scene, showing a woman standing by the same ocean. Her image is mirrored above the film's title, as if hanging from the sky. These two figures appear as Hinētītama and Hinenuitēpō, embodying their duality. From its beginning to its end, *Mārama* shows us that our atua wāhine who shape the realms around us – our ancestors – are here with us. And our mana comes from them. 

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HE TAKATA

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RĪPEKA PŌTIKI

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Ko Rīpeka-Umurau Corinne Pōtiki tōku ikoa, ko Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe, me Te Ātiawa ōku iwi. I whānau mai au ki Ōtautahi, ekari, I tipu ake au ki Ōtākou. Ko Tahu Pōtiki tōku pāpā, ko Megan Ellison tōku māmā, tokorua ōku tukāne. Ko Timoti rāua ko Tūkitaharaki ōku tukāne. Kei Te Wānaka o Raukawa a Timoti e ako ana i tēnei tau. Kātahi anō a Tūkitaharaki ka haere ki Hato Pāora. Kei te ako au ki Ōtākou Whakaihū Waka. Ka whai tohu au i te reo Māori, me te reo waiata.

Ko Edward Ellison tōku pōua, ko Alison Ellison tōku taua. Kei te noho au ki tō rāua taha i tēnei tau.

Above: Rīpeka (centre) with brothers Timoti (left) and Tūkitaharaki (right).

WHAT CONSTITUTES A GOOD DAY?

Probably sleeping in and going out to lunch or dinner with whānau.

ONE THING YOU COULD NOT LIVE WITHOUT?

Definitely could not live without my mother... and Auntie Mere, which is my car.

WHO OR WHAT INSPIRES YOU AND WHY?

I have too many people to list them but they all inspire me because of their determination and dedication they put in to everything and everyone.

HIGHLIGHT IN THE LAST YEAR AND WHY?

My highlights would definitely be finishing my first year of university and travelling to Waitangi with my hapū, Ōtākou, it was incredible!

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST EXTRAVAGANCE?

Taco Bell...

FAVOURITE WAY TO CHILL OUT? FAVOURITE PLACE?

Being with my best friend, and my favourite place would definitely be Ōtākou, or Nanna's whare.

DANCE OR WALLFLOWER?

Wallflower.

WHAT FOOD COULD YOU NOT LIVE WITHOUT?

Māmā's cooking definitely.

WHAT MEAL DO YOU COOK THE MOST?

A pretty good butter chicken.

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT?

Honestly getting all my licences on the first go ;)

DO YOU HAVE AN ASPIRATION FOR KĀI TAHU TO ACHIEVE BY 2050?

My aspirations for Kāi Tahu would be for all hapū to come together more and continue making strategies together regarding reo, tikaka and whakapapa. 



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- Wahi Tapu / Orupa
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- Pōi
- Cove
- Spring / Waterfall

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ITE REO MĀORI



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