

BEFORE THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL

WAI 2700

WAI 2933

IN THE MATTER OF

the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975

AND

IN THE MATTER OF

the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry

AND

IN THE MATTER OF

A claim by **Hinerangi Cooper-Puru** on behalf of the whanau, hapū and iwi of Te Taitokerau (Wai 2933).

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**BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF LEE HARRIS**

Dated this 21<sup>st</sup> day of January 2021

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**Annette Sykes & Co**  
Barristers & Solicitors  
8 – Unit 1 Marguerita Street  
Rotorua, 3010  
Phone: 07-460-0433  
Fax: 07-460-0434

**Counsel Acting:** Annette Sykes / Camille Houia / Tumanako Silveira  
**Email:** [asykes@annettesykes.com](mailto:asykes@annettesykes.com) / [camille@annettesykes.com](mailto:camille@annettesykes.com) / [tumanako@annettesykes.com](mailto:tumanako@annettesykes.com)

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Waitangi Tribunal

**21 Jan 2021**Ministry of Justice  
WELLINGTON

## INTRODUCTION

1. Ko Lee Harris tōku ingoa. I was born and bred in Tāmaki Makaurau however, my whānau originate from the Hokianga, Te Tai Tokerau. My grandmother's whānau are from Raetihi, Te Tai Hauāuru.

## NGĀ ATUA WHAEA

2. Our traditional creation stories are filled with examples of wāhine toa. Papatūānuku, Hine-Titama and Hine Nui Te Pō – just these few atua whaea who tell the story from the beginning of time, birth and creation through to the afterlife and thereafter. These stories are all closely associated and entwined with childbirth, fertility, manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga – such is the role of wāhine.
3. If we look further, I refer to the Maui stories now. We have Taranga – his mother whose magical topknot kept him alive. Murirangawhenua, whose jawbone Maui used to both snare the sun and fish up Te Ika a Maui (the great fish of Maui). Last but not least, Mahuika, who as the goddess/kaitiaki of fire. Maui tricked her into giving him all but one of her magical fire nails, the last of which she threw into the trees so that the gift of fire could live on in the world.
4. The Maui stories all tell the stories of magic – a topknot, a jawbone and the gift of fire – all possessed by women. In these stories the woman characters are magical kaitiaki who assist Maui in his desired escapades. Maui uses trickery in order pursue his intended goals. However, it is in his pursuit of eternal life that would prove to be his undoing - as he was crushed to death by Hine Nui Te Pō as he set out to destroy her in his pursuit for eternal life.
5. The ladies in these stories are all powerful and magical beings, all of which provide us with inspirational tales that empower women. While the stories predominately stay the same over the years – the way the stories are interpreted seem to change with time. A recent and

contemporary example of this is the stories of Maui which have reframed him as an entrepreneur, due to his outgoing and experimental behaviour.

6. As mentioned earlier, in the majority of stories, Māori women are mostly perceived in the role of a kaitiaki of some sort. Their roles mostly seem to be the less dominant role and they play the supporting or side role in most stories. Also, upon reflection there are strong emotions surrounding our wāhine – often feelings of shame, mamae and heartache.

#### **TE IRA WĀHINE AND TE IRA TĀNE**

7. Tapu and noa, tāne and wāhine, yin and yang – in life there is balance where one cannot exist without the other. These properties are not in competition with each other but rather complementing each other and each having their own role to play in the world.
8. Traditionally, men would be responsible for more labour-intensive chores such as hunting. While, Māori women would be responsible for activities such as collecting berries and preparing the food. As always, there are exceptions to rules, and of course women who were born of high rank would be exempt from such menial jobs. It was mātauranga and tikanga that ensured the roles of both remain in their respective domains.

#### **TE MANA O TE WĀHINE IN MĀORI SOCIETY**

9. ‘Mana wāhine’ is loosely translated to mean ‘women of strength’ or examples of a strong woman expressing her ‘wāhinetanga’ or ‘feminism’. Our traditional Māori stories provide us with many examples of mana wāhine. This includes through many waiata which have been composed to ensure that these historical tales live on for generations to come. Waiata that come to mind are ‘Kotiro Māori e –

Rongomaiwahine’, ‘Hineamaru’ and the many songs composed over the years relating to the story of Hinemoa and Tūtanekai.

10. These traditional compositions or stories acknowledge women of high rank, or those who have accomplished some feat worthy of retelling. From our ancient stories of ngā atua wāhine, to our tupuna whaea who signed Te Tiriti and even those who continued to strive for Māori rights post-treaty.
11. Also of significance is te whare tangata, which is loosely translated as the house of humanity. From a Māori worldview, this is the womb of a wāhine and the first home and birthplace of mankind. There are numerous references about women and the links to land. Papatūānuku herself being the mother of us all and provider of life. The placenta is referred to as ‘whenua’, and buried at home in order to bond the tangata (person) to the whenua (land). Māori refer to themselves as tangata whenua – people (born) of this land. It is this birth right that gives whānau the authority over their ancestral territories.
12. When a woman is with child, she is hapū (pregnant). Women have been chosen to be the carriers of the next generation, te whare tangata. It is strictly a woman’s domain and while she cannot conceive without the help of a male, equally so – a male’s body is not designed to carry a child. Again, another example of how te ira wāhine and te ira tāne are complementary rather than adversary to each other. One cannot work without the other. Mana wāhine and mana tāne come together to create mana tangata.

#### **MY TUPUNA WHAEA AND TE TIRITI**

13. My own tupuna whaea, Ngahuia from Ngai Tupoto, Hokianga has our whare tupuna in Motukaraka and it is named after her in her honour. Her parents Hua and Ruu were both signatories of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Ngahuia was the third wife of my ancestor Christopher Harris and had

approximately 14 children together. These children would go on to further populate the region which provides the Harris whānau with a huge legacy of whakapapa today. Of course, this legacy continues to increase with every new marriage and the further additions of descendants from those said unions.

14. As mentioned, Ruu (Ngahuaia's mother) signed Te Tiriti. Other local wāhine signatories include, Ereonora Panekareao (The wife of Nopera Panekareao) and Marama who signed at Kaitaia. It is interesting to note here that while researching for this kōrero, it is commonly recorded that there were 13 Māori women who have been identified as signatories to Te Tiriti. However, my tupuna whaea Ruu also signed at Kaitaia, and is not recorded on other websites with female signatories. I am assuming that this could be because her name doesn't signal her gender such as Marama or Ereonora does. Also, I note that Ruu had signed later in April 1840 at Kaitaia when her husband Hua had signed earlier in February at Mangungu, Hokianga.
15. Obviously for wāhine to be signatories to Te Tiriti, their mana as wāhine was recognised and acknowledged by their male counterparts at the time. However, while Henry Williams has been recorded as accepting of female signatories (and thereby acknowledging their status accordingly), not all other signature gatherers shared the same respect. One story recorded about the daughter of Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Te Pehi is that she was not permitted to sign and her husband took offense and refused to sign also as this was taken as an insult to both the mana of his wife and himself. Misunderstandings and culture clashes were no doubt very common at that time, especially when one race imposes their beliefs over the top of another race.

#### **THE SEVERANCE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY**

16. Today, many urban Māori struggle with their cultural identities as we have been removed from our tūrangawaewae and papakāinga for many

generations. It has been challenging as an urban Māori wahine to reconnect home to my ancestral kāinga in order to understand how interconnected we all are. For people like myself who were rarely taken home (if ever), it is even more of a challenge. Being brought up away from my ancestral rohe and natural hapū grouping and living in a pan tribal setting, it is even more difficult to learn both te reo me ona tikanga. A lot of traditional knowledge has not been passed on as numbers decline at home and our traditions continue to erode due to a number of factors, with colonisation having a huge impact.

17. Traditional knowledge may be maintained in the regions, however being disconnected from your ancestral base for so long does not contribute to personal cultural identity especially when simultaneously being bombarded by outside cultural influence and contemporary living conditions. Today, Māori are lucky to recognise succession rights to any (little) lands left in whānau ownership – even then with the huge numbers of multiple owners to various blocks, it is little wonder that people get frustrated and give up realising a papakāinga on ancestral lands.
18. However, I will continue in my journey to fill my baskets of knowledge on this journey we call life. Hopefully, my children will benefit from our shared experiences so that they do not need to feel so lost in this contemporary world that we live in today. I hope they are better anchored to their whakapapa than I have felt at times over my lifetime.

#### **GENERATIONS OF FIGHT**

19. Looking back through the generations, it was imperative that Māori women participated in decisions which affected them, their lands and their rohe. Meri Te Tai Mangakahia (from Waihou, Panguru, Hokianga) and others were key figures who helped to lead the struggle for women to not only have the right to vote, but to be able to sit in the Māori Parliament as members. It is largely due to these Mana Wāhine

that New Zealand women are able to participate in voting since 1893. However, such as the Maui stories mentioned previously – the role of Māori women in this achievement has been largely overlooked and it is Kate Sheppard who is publicly recognised for this achievement today.

20. Later in 1975 another great Hokianga matriarch Dame Whina Cooper, at the age of 87 years old stood up and led what turned out to be tens of thousands of people from Te Hapua (although only a small group started, the march continued to grow as they continued south) to Wellington in protest against the Public Works Act which allowed the Government of the day to continue to take Māori land for public purposes. With only 5% of Māori land still in Māori ownership in 1975, Nanny Whina had decided enough was enough and her catchphrase would later become famous and is still in use today – ‘Not One Acre More’. Nanny Whina would later be called ‘Te Whaea o te Motu’ (the Mother of the Land) acknowledging her fight for Māori land rights.
21. These are just two 19<sup>th</sup> century examples of Mana Wāhine and the fight that has endured for Māori women who set out to exert their right to be heard and included. These fights have not been for individual gain or interest but for everyone to be included, as a collective and as Māori. These examples of Mana Wāhine have also contributed to the development of Te Ao Māori today. Names also worth mentioning here are Dame Mira Szazzy, Katarina Mataira, Whaea McClutichie and Hana Jackson – the list goes on just as the fight goes on.

**DATED** this 20<sup>th</sup> day of January 2021



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