

**In the Waitangi Tribunal**

**Wai 2700, Wai 3102**

**In the Matter**

**of Te Tiriti of Waitangi Act 1975**

**And in the Matter**

**of the Kaupapa Mana Wahine Inquiry**

**And in the Matter**

**a claim by Merepeka Raukawa-Tait on behalf of her whānau, hapū, iwi, whānau whānui and whāngai**

---

**BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF MEREPEKA RAUKAWA-TAIT**

**DATED AT TOKOROA THIS 27<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2022**

---

**RECEIVED**

Waitangi Tribunal

**8 Jun 2022**

Ministry of Justice  
WELLINGTON



**Counsel Acting: Ārama Ngāpō and Kelsi Reynolds**

**NL Lawyers-Barristers & Solicitors**

Tokoroa Office

58 Bonaly Street

PO Box 518,

Tokoroa, 3444

P 07 8867540

E [arama@nll.co.nz](mailto:arama@nll.co.nz)

E [waitangi@nll.co.nz](mailto:waitangi@nll.co.nz)

---

## BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF MEREPEKA RAUKAWA-TAIT

---

### MAY IT PLEASE THE TRIBUNAL

I, **Merepeka Raukawa-Tait**, Rotorua Lakes District Councillor,

1. I present this Brief of Evidence (“BoE”) on behalf of Wai 3102 a claim on behalf of my whānau, hapū, iwi, whānau whānui and my whāngai whanau as well.
2. I currently reside in Rotorua. I have held many roles as a Wāhine Māori leader within my community. As many Wāhine Māori do or have done, I faced tremendous challenges to access equal opportunities which my male counterparts were able to access. Today, Wāhine Māori are still rare gems in positions of power due to the social and societal barriers for Wāhine Māori to access these roles.

### **Wahine Pre 1840**

3. In Te Ao Māori, pre-1840 women had value or mana. This was in direct contrast to a western and colonial view. The idea which Te Ao Māori encourages is that the role of a woman in society is paramount to the role of society as a whole. In Te Ao Pākeha, the role of a woman is to take care of a house. In Te Ao Māori, the role of a woman is to make a home. Wāhine are sacred because they have the facilities to create life in their very own ‘whare tangata’. This whare tangata holds a baby and nourishes it during its most fundamental and influential times of life.

4. Another key characteristic of the role of a Wāhine in Te Ao Māori, pre 1840 is that women play distinctive roles within their own communities. The best example of this is when Wāhine hold the role of calling which is better known as 'karanga'. Karanga are done by women and these have been known to weave the living and spiritual worlds, together.
5. Prior to 1840 and the first missionary's arrival to Aotearoa, Wāhine held predominate roles within society. They were not thought of as less in comparison to their male counterparts. Both Wāhine and tāne held vital roles within society. Unlike western society Wāhine did not lose their last name upon marriage and were not considered property of their male counterpart.<sup>1</sup> Wāhine were respected by Tane and crimes such as sexual assault were forbidden and punished. In western society sexual assault was not even consider a thing in 1840 as women were the property of males and the ideology was men could do what they wanted. Wāhine were allowed to do everything men could do. They held positions of power, and some were chiefs among their iwi.
6. One of the biggest reasons I believe that pre 1840 Wāhine were considered equal to men, in comparison to Te Ao Pākeha (where they are not) is through Te Reo Māori. Personal pronouns and personal possessive pronouns are both gender neutral (ia/ tona/ tana). This means that you can refer to a group of people with the same word regardless of gender. What this illustrates is that men and women are seen as equals.
7. When Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed many assumed, this was only signed by males and that Māori wāhine did not have positions of power. To date there have been 13 wāhine who were identified as signing Te Tiriti o Waitangi, there may be more given Māori wāhine names have often been mistaken as males post colonisation. The idea

---

<sup>1</sup> MAORI WOMEN: CAUGHT IN THE CONTRADICTIONS OF A COLONISED REALITY page 126.

that wāhine did not hold positions of power largely came for the western ideology that was forced upon us. Pre these time wāhine had very active roles within the community and were well respected. As stated by Monique Gemmell “Their mana came from birth rights and tupuna wāhine, who were charged with the role of instilling mana through knowledge and whakapapa”.<sup>2</sup>

8. Wāhine were a tohunga and participated in politics, war conversations and were chiefs. Gender was not a deciding factor in the matter, women could participate in the same roles and were often the peacekeepers in war time. Hine-i-paketia of Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngati Te Whatu-i-apiti and Te Rohu of Ngati Tuwharetoa are examples of wāhine who held predominate roles in their whakapapa.<sup>3</sup>
9. Another example is Rangi Topeora who was given Rangatira status from her mother. She had the power to even overrule her uncle. She was a leader in her iwi just as her mother was and is one of the 13 women who signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Rangatira was a status given to Māori wāhine within the whakapapa. This would be a very political role, women at times also participated on the battlefield.<sup>4</sup>
10. Wāhine and Tane were thought of as important parts of the whakapapa, without one the other could not survive. In tikanga wāhine played an important role in helping link the past present and future.<sup>5</sup> Throughout time Māori history tell us wahine held important roles in society. Mātauranga Māori educates us that everything is descended from a balance of Papatuanuku and Ranginui.
11. Our history tell us about roles wāhine played. Hine-nui-te-po is a well know story of Hine-ti-tama’s transformation into Hine-nui-te-po who becomes the god of the underworld greeting humans upon their death.

---

<sup>2</sup> A History of Marginalisation: Maori Women 22

<sup>3</sup> A History of Marginalisation: Maori Women page 27

<sup>4</sup> A History of Marginalisation: Maori Women page 28

<sup>5</sup> MAORI WOMEN: CAUGHT IN THE CONTRADICTIONS OF A COLONISED REALITY 125

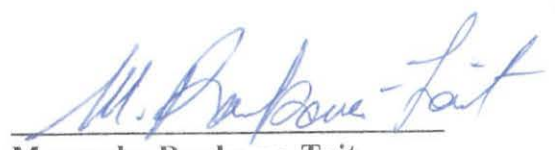
She transformed after realising that her father Tane had sex with her without knowing this was her dad. Stories like this and others of Papa the earth mother were passed down through generations until consolation twisted stories to only show cast the males demising the roles wāhine played in creation of society.

12. Wāhine played a big role in transmitting our knowledge and whakapapa through stories and waiata. These were often not written down and were protected. Colonisation had an impact on the ability of a wāhine to continue to pass down our heritage, culture and traditions. Many things became lost. Wāhine became subjected to western ways and were removed from their land and forced into the cities and western concept of the nuclear family.
13. The result of this has had a massive impact on wāhine. Today wāhine are at the forefront of any systematic issues. They struggle with domestic violence, have been cut off from their whakapapa and have endured decades of abuse and trauma. Trauma that would not be there today if we were not forced into western ways.
14. While some have managed to survive and achieve positions of power this is far and few in-between. Majority are still struggling day in and day out while the Crown sits back and continues to not acknowledge and take responsibility for the decades of trauma wāhine have been subjected to.
15. In my view before anything can change the Crown needs to acknowledge the negative impact of not honouring te Tiriti and subjugating wahine maori.
16. As a former chief executive of the Women's Refuge organisation of New Zealand, I have seen first-hand how the western society has plagued our wāhine and effected how we are today. Due to colonisation, fundamental foundations of our community have been transformed to prioritise men over women which is something that Te

Ao Māori does not believe in. There is an ongoing lack of funding to help Wāhine Māori out of violent situations which damage their wairua, hauora, whanau relationships and hinengaro. The fact that women in homes of violence is not prioritised enough for sufficient funding to be allocated further illustrates that the sense of Wāhinetanga is not valued like it is in Te Ao Māori. Wāhine are already suffering from the impacts of colonisation but being undervalued as a gender as well makes the issue more concentrated for not only Māori, but Wahine Māori in particular. Prior to 1840, the value of a Woman in Aotearoa was strong. Today, women are undervalued and the rates of family violence attacks against women are evidence of this. Wāhine are suffering with no real actionable help to see.

17. Currently I am an elected board member, on the Rotorua Energy Trust Board. I assist with funding a wide range of community organisations, we fund local projects to create a thriving, vibrant city. My whakaaro and approach surround the idea that Māori must be able to live, act, and associate as Māori, in order to succeed, flourish, and thrive as Māori as well. It is in this role where I choose to exercise my world view as a Wāhine Māori in creating a safe environment for my community. I also speak on many issues such as these outlined in this brief on Radio Waatea, and in my weekly column in The Rotorua Daily Post.
18. Today I am presenting this brief to the tribunal to give the tribunal some insight in what wāhine roles were like pre 1840 compared to today. I hope I can show the harm colonisation has had on wahine and hindered our ability to grow and live as Māori.
19. It saddens me that almost 200 years later the effects colonisation had on wāhine is still vast. There are so many wāhine who still struggle and thought of as less than their male counterparts due to being a

wāhine and Māori. This needs to stop and the Crown needs to realise the implications that not honouring te Tiriti has had on wahine Maori.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Raukawa-Tait', written over a horizontal line.

**Merepeka Raukawa-Tait**  
**Claimant**