

**IN THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL**

**Wai 3325**

**Wai 3410**

**IN THE MATTER OF** the Treaty of Waitangi Act  
1975

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER OF** the Climate Change Priority  
Inquiry

**BY** Evelyn Ratima, on behalf of  
herself, her whānau, hapū,  
and iwi, and the Māori  
communities in her  
district which she represents  
(Wai 3325)

---

**BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF EVELYN RATIMA**

**Dated 14 May 2025**

---

**Phoenix Law Limited**

Barristers and Solicitors

200 Willis Street

PO Box 27400

Marion Square

Wellington 6141

**Phone:** (04) 384

**Email:** [mason@phoenix.expert](mailto:mason@phoenix.expert);

[evison@phoenixlaw.expert](mailto:evison@phoenixlaw.expert);

[paul@phoenixlaw.expert](mailto:paul@phoenixlaw.expert)

**Counsel Acting:** Janet Mason

**Counsel Assisting:** Katie Paul and Luke Evison

**RECEIVED**

Waitangi Tribunal

**14 May 25**

Ministry of Justice

WELLINGTON

I, **Evelyn Ratima**, Kuia, of Whakatu, state that:

1. My name is Evelyn Ratima.
2. I am actively involved in bringing our Rohe together. I have been Deputy Chair of the Takitimu District Māori Council (“DMC”) since 2022, and I represent Whakatu on it. Previously, my late husband, Des Ratima, was Chair of the DMC. I also was secretary for the Tangoio Marae from 2014 to 2024.
3. The DMCs have a broad role to advocate for the “social and economic advancement” of Māori under s 18(1) of the Maori Community Development Act 1962. We are intended to be a partner of the Crown in this endeavour.
4. The Takitimu DMC covers a large area, with our boundaries extending from the Mohaka River in the north to the southern Wairarapa coast, and with our western boundaries extending from Te Haroto to the Ruahine and Tararua Ranges. We therefore cover the Hawke’s Bay and Wairarapa regions, representing the interests of the Māori population.
5. I live in Whakatu, which is a small town in between Napier and Hastings. We once called Whakatu “The Centre of the Universe”, as freezing works brought people from across Aotearoa to live and work here, and it means that we are a mix of many diverse iwi and hapū.
6. Over the generations, these people made Whakatu their home. We are all homeowners here, and we are a tight-knit community. As the rest of the land is industrial, we do not have a large capacity for further growth, so we now have 1,200 people living in Whakatu and 800 homes.
7. I, along with my wider community, are deeply concerned by the impacts of climate change. Climate Change is a very serious threat to our livelihoods, but also to our cultural identity and way of life as Māori.

## **A: Regional Impacts**

8. The Hawkes Bay Regional Council have recently released the first climate change assessment report for the region, revealing an increased risk of ex-tropical cyclones, droughts and flooding. Ex-tropical cyclones are likely to become more intense, packing stronger winds and heavier rainfall. Fire seasons will get longer and more dangerous, with increased risks of wildfires. Droughts will become more common, putting additional stress on primary industries and water resources. The region will see more hot days and fewer overnight frosts. This means warmer temperatures overall, which will affect everything from farming to local wildlife.
9. Māori whānau who live in areas of higher socio-economic deprivation, face disproportionate risks from flooding and isolation. Access to essential services are likely to be compromised during these hazard events, with isolation risks particularly high in rural areas.
10. Our rohe is far too familiar with the effects of climate change, having suffered a severe drought in 2020 and 2021, followed by the "wettest year on record" in 2022, and then the devastating Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023. Our connection with our rangi and with our whenua is deep, both spiritually and culturally, and through this we are very aware of the threat that climate change poses to us.

## **B: Cultural Impacts**

11. Māori in the rohe face unique health risks and sensitivities with regards to climate change. The harms associated with climate change are exacerbated by the existing health and socioeconomic inequities experienced by whānau Māori. Climate change can undermine our cultural wellbeing through the degradation of and/or loss of connection to the natural environment and damage and/or loss of cultural sites and associated practice.

12. For example, we are a unique community in that we have an urupā in Whakatu, and not a marae. When extreme weather events like Cyclone Gabrielle come along, this puts our urupā at risk. These extreme weather events are undoubtedly brought on by Climate Change and the human activity which accelerates it.
13. When we were hit by Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023, key hazards were identified in this assessment are river, rainfall, and coastal flooding.
14. Such hazards can undermine Māori cultural wellbeing through the degradation of, and/or, loss of connection to the natural environment and damage, and/or, loss of cultural sites and associated practices.
15. During Gabrielle, our urupā was damaged, and some graves sunk. Nearby in Tangoio, the urupā was completely covered in silt and had to be dug out. At Petane Pa, kōiwi were washed away and some of the kōiwi later reappeared on the beach at Pirinaki. I can estimate that a dozen bodies were lost.
16. This experience of land displacement and dispossession is not new to us. During Cyclone Bola in 1988, the old urupā was actually destroyed and the hill it was on was washed away. Our whānau and community have had to be resilient in the face of adversity.

### **C: Economic Impacts**

17. We experienced severe damage to the infrastructure that we depend on during Cyclone Gabrielle. I would say that our rohe was the hardest hit area in the entire country, and I do not say this lightly, as I know the damage was severe in Gisborne, Wairoa, Auckland, and other parts of the country too.
18. As an example of damage to infrastructure, during Gabrielle, the bridge to Napier was destroyed. Whānau were temporarily cut off from the rest of the world, isolated, and left to fend for themselves.
19. Whakatu is on a flood plain, and we were lucky that the stop banks did not break. Otherwise, we could have lost much more, as those in neighbouring towns which were completely flooded-such as Pākōwhai, did.

20. Even so, we suffered severe damage. Tragically, people lost their lives, and that is an ever-present risk from extreme weather events. Many more people did lose their homes and their businesses. Some of these losses were irrecoverable, for example, a new boutique winery was completely destroyed, and the business owners simply had to demolish it and start over.
21. Even before Gabrielle, many homes in our Rohe were uninsured and uninsurable, due to their location in a flood plain. We were given this vulnerable land, and we created a community and made the most of it. Our whānau continue to be disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of Climate Change.

#### **D: Health Impacts**

22. Climate Change also poses a risk to the health of our whānau and hapū. This can once again be seen in the impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle. In our Rohe we suffered from respiratory problems in the aftermath, particularly our children. The huge amount of silt that was washed through left fine dust in the air, and this got into the lungs of our people while they were already overworked trying to rebuild and recover.
23. Furthermore, there are severe psychological impacts from a disaster like Cyclone Gabrielle. Our children were very affected, and when the rain would come again, they would go quiet and be afraid of another disaster. The adults too were very stressed by losing so much and the great effort involved in rebuilding our Rohe.
24. To their credit, our whānau were working very hard and working very long days as we tried to rebuild. Through it all, they were always worried about others rather than themselves. However that definitely added to the stress on them, and it was a combination of the breathing issues, psychological stress and sheer exhaustion that wore people down.

## **E: Responses**

- 25.** Through this crisis, we are continuing to exercise our role as Kaitiaki and doing what we can to preserve our natural environment and way of life. We seek to work in partnership with the Crown, so that we can continue this mahi with greater capabilities and resourcing.
- 26.** We do what we can at the local level to protect our natural environment. We are very active in looking after our waterways and local wildlife such as the birds within that ecosystem. Through this work though, we see the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. We are also actively working to reduce our emissions through planting more trees, in particular native trees.
- 27.** However, I do not believe that the Crown has properly engaged with us. Nor has the Crown taken our particular vulnerabilities to climate impacts into account in their policies.
- 28.** The Crown say that they have consulted us, but we do not feel we have had a real say or influence. We consider we are a box-ticking exercise while the Crown develops plans in Wellington. So it does not feel like a real partnership.
- 29.** Proper and equitable engagement from the Crown on future climate change policies must occur at multiple levels to ensure Māori voices are heard and incorporated. Engagement must take place directly with hapū, whānau, marae, and community groups to capture localised knowledge and lived experiences.
- 30.** Furthermore, we do need better communications during natural disasters. There are a lot of lessons to be learned about how to prepare for events like Gabrielle. Unfortunately, the usual methods of communication just did not work and the lessons learned include the need to involve Maori whānau in emergency preparedness plans.
- 31.** I do feel that local government has been better at engaging with us, and that the Napier and Hastings District Councils make a genuine effort to engage. There are good teams within the Councils that want to work with Maori.

32. There are also some initiatives with central government that have been effective, such as the DMCs which I have my own experience with. I see this as an effective way to build relationships and advocate for our communities. However, there is much more work to do to reach genuine Partnership.

#### **F: Conclusion**

33. The Crown's current climate change policies violate the Principles of Partnership and Active Protection embodied in te Tiriti o Waitangi. By excluding Māori from full participation in the solutions, the Crown puts at risk not only our environment and economy, but also our te Tiriti rights and the legacy we must pass on to future generations.

**Dated 14 May 2025**



---

**Evelyn Ratima**