
**KEI MUA I TE AROARO O TE RÖPŪ WHAKAMANA I WAI 3500
TE TIRITI O WAITANGI WAI 2441
BEFORE THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL**

IN THE MATTER OF The Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975

AND

IN THE MATTER OF The Identity and Culture Kaupapa Inquiry (Wai 3500)

AND

IN THE MATTER OF a claim filed by Mr Tāne Cook for himself and the New Zealand Māori Council (Wai 2441)

SUBMISSION ON NAMING PRACTICES

11 July 2025

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Waitangi Tribunal

11 Jul 25

Ministry of Justice
WELLINGTON

E TE KAIWHAKAWĀ, TĒNĀ KOE

1. This submission is made for Tāne Cook for himself and the New Zealand Māori Council, a corporate entity established under the Māori Community Development Act 1962. It responds to the Tribunal's invitation of 30 May, repeated on 7 July 2025, to file documents related to the Kaupapa.¹ This paper is intended to amplify one aspect of Mr Cook's korero of 18 June.

Introduction

2. **The tono in this paper is that the Crown polices and practices for the naming of people and places stand part of the Identity and Culture Kaupapa Inquiry for the purposes of considering the impact of the same on Māori systems of personal identification and their customary relationships with their ancestral land.**
3. The inclusion of this item within the scope of the inquiry is sought on the grounds that the naming systems are or are likely to be prejudicial to individual Māori in the case of personal names, and to customary Māori groups in the case of place names.
4. The possible relief may include amendments to the laws for the registration of personal and place names.
5. The documentary evidence required would be the relevant statute law and policy papers sourced from government records.
6. We seek the commissioning of research on the existing literature relevant to customary naming practices.
7. The evidence proposed to be called for the New Zealand Māori Council would be briefs on personal experience.

¹ Wai 3500, #2.5.7 *Memorandum-Directions of the Presiding Officer Regarding Post-Hui Whakatuwhera Matters*, dated 7 July 2025 at [13]; [14] (a).

8. The following is an indicative, individual perspective.

Our Perspective

9. The Crown's interventions and colonial imposition have decisively undermined Māori naming practices. Renaming served both as an immediate tactic of land appropriation and a gradual mechanism to recast identities – overwriting ancestral place names and imposing Pākehā names on Māori.

10. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples guarantees that Indigenous people have the right to retain their own names for communities, places and persons.² The disrespect by the Crown shown for this retention should be acknowledged within the scope of the Identity and Culture Kaupapa Inquiry.

Personal Naming

11. Prior to colonial contact, naming was done in a way where tipuna were honoured, important events were recalled and whakapapa was strengthened. Care and thought were employed to ensure that names held their own mana.

12. Since the arrival of colonial settlers, Māori have had little choice but to adapt to Western naming norms. Through influences such as the introduction of Christianity and the suppression of te reo in schools, there has been an erosion in Māori name-taking practices.

13. The introduction of Christianity caused a significant change in naming practices, as well as subverting tohi and tautanga ceremonies. In practicing baptism, missionaries would not name their candidates within a Māori perception of naming.³

² *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* A/Res/61/2925, (2007), art 13(1).

³ Geraldine Irirangi Steeds "Maori Naming in Transition: How Maori have named from earliest times, through colonisation and missionisation, to the present day." (MA Thesis, Massey University, 1999) at 83.

14. The impact of Christianity and the colonial worldview has extended further. Alongside the use of biblical names, the requirement arose to adopt surnames. By 1913, this requirement was codified as a condition in order to register births.⁴ This requirement for surnames detracted from the latent importance placed on given names in te ao Māori. In the colonial worldview, it is your last name which carries the meaning and signifies your familial standing to the wider world. Whereas in traditional Māori practice, it is your name which has been chosen for you which conveys your history.
15. Suppression of te reo in schools had a large impact on naming. In order to aid pronunciation for Pākehā teachers, Māori names were either anglicised or replaced with Pākehā names similar in sound. By doing so, the link was severed between the name and the meaning bestowed on it.
16. In colonising New Zealand, the Crown believed that its own worldviews and religious beliefs were absolute and therefore afforded little importance to Māori worldviews and spiritual beliefs.⁵
17. This effect has resulted in significant harm for Māori. Mana that is inherited through intentional naming practices has been undermined and contributed to the disconnection of whakapapa. In response to the disregard shown, names have been mispronounced, changed to accommodate Pākehā pronunciation and bastardised to the point where whakapapa links have been broken down.⁶ Any references to whenua within a name are eroded or are no longer there at all. This is harmful for both recognition of personal and cultural identity.

⁴ At 64.

⁵ Lesley Rameka, Mere Berryman and Diana Cruse “Whenua Ki Te Whenua: Indigenous naming of the land and its people by reconnecting the past to the present and the future” (2023) MAI Journal 244 at 248.

⁶ At 248.

18. The erosion of whakapapa links through colonial naming is compounded for wāhine Māori. With the implementation of the colonial worldview came the inheritance of a patriarchal society. Upon marriage, women traditionally take the surnames of their husbands, dispensing with the ties to whakapapa which may be endowed in a surname.
19. The name you are given is inextricably linked to your own culture and identity. The continued dismantling of Māori names and replacement with those which are more palatable to the Pākehā tongue and worldview has contributed to the sustained siege on Māori identity and culture.

Geographical Naming

20. Geographical names carry cultural norms and values. They both encode into and derive meaning from the places they describe.
21. Prior to colonial settlement, tangata whenua had names for every natural feature of the environment.⁷ During early colonial settlement, mountains, rivers, place names, and other significant sites were renamed after British people and places to “proclaim membership of the British Empire”.⁸
22. The naming of natural features was recognised as an important vehicle for importing British culture and signposting to other colonial powers. Māori identity and culture was deliberately subverted through the ignorance of authority and connection to land.
23. The Pākehā namesakes for places were tributary. Important scientists, explorers, and even ships carrying settlers were honoured through the

⁷ K J Belshaw “Decolonising the land – naming and reclaiming places” (2005) 159 Planning Quarterly 7 at 7.

⁸ Bronwyn Carlson, Jeff Berglund, Michelle Harris and Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith “Four Scholars Speak to Navigating the Complexities of Naming in Indigenous Studies” (2014) 43(1) The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education 58 at 61.

bestowal of name. However, these names marked individual parcels of history and had no particular connection to each other.⁹

24. Māori names are descriptors of the history intertwined with a place. The names are “like survey pegs of memory, marking the events that happened in a particular place, recording some aspect or features of the traditions and history of a tribe”.¹⁰ It is this purpose of Māori naming, describing history, that makes it an indispensable tool for preserving identity and culture.
25. In recent times, there has been an increase in implementing dual naming of a place in an attempt to recognise Māori authority that existed before colonial settlement. Examples of this include Aoraki/Mount Cook and Taranaki/Mount Egmont.
26. However well intentioned this policy of dual naming may be, it is still flawed. The authority for designating place names still rests with the jurisdiction of the geographical naming entities, “thereby consolidating and reaffirming the power of the settler-colonial state.”¹¹
27. Centuries of ignoring Māori place names has had significant consequences on both the retention of culture and te reo. Even where Māori names remain in use, inconsistent spelling and pronunciation continue to undermine original meaning.
28. Māori name-giving practices, for both people and places, was important for imbuing meaning and prescribing significance. Before the first colonial settlers arrived, the practice was well established and an important part of retaining an oral history.

⁹ The New Zealand Geographic Board *He Kōrero Pūrākau Mō Ngā Taunahanahatanga A Ngā Tūpuna* (The New Zealand Geographic Board, Wellington, 1990) at xiii.

¹⁰ At xiii.

¹¹ Reuben Rose-Redwood “Reclaim, Rename, Reoccupy”: Decolonizing Place and the Reclaiming of PKOLS” (2016) 15(1) ACME 187 at 193.

29. In imposing colonial naming practices when colonising Aotearoa, the Crown's actions have, and continue to, diminish mana. Through the erosion of names, whakapapa connections have been disrupted and Māori authority undermined.

Dated at **Wellington** this Friday, 11 July 2025.



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