

I TE RŌPU WHAKAMANA
I TE TIRITI O WAITANGI

WAI 2700
WAI 682
WAI 1464/1546

KEI RARO I TE MANA o te ture o te Tiriti o Waitangi 1975

I TE TAKE O te pakirehua, Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry
(Wai 2700)

Ā

I TE TAKE O he kerēme nā Rewiti Paraone rātou ko Erima
Henare, ko Pita Tipene, ko Waihoroi Shortland
mō Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Hine mō ngā uri o
Torongare and Hauhau (Wai 682)

Ā

I TE TAKE O he kerēme nā Te Riwhi Whao Reti rātou ko Hau
Hereora, ko Romana Tarau, ko Karen Herbert,
ko Edward Cook, ko Pearl Reti mō Te Kapotai
(Wai 1464/1546)

HE KŌRERO TAUNAKI A TUAKOI WHANGANUI ALICE OHIA

I tēnei rā i te 12 o Pēpuere 2026



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Waitangi Tribunal

12 Feb 26

Ministry of Justice
WELLINGTON

TĒNĀ, E TE RŌPŪ WHAKAMANA I TE TIRITI O WAITANGI:

Introduction

1. My name is Tuakoi Ohia. Nō Ngāti Hine me Te Kapotai ahau.
2. I am an actress, script writer and storyteller, and have been heavily involved in New Zealand film, music and theatre for seven years.
3. My experiences are shaped by who I am as a Ngāti Hine and Te Kapotai wahine. I share them here as a wahine Māori in the world of performing arts, with specific reference to 'Kōpū' — a theatre play that I created and perform alongside five other wāhine Māori to showcase our experiences of wāhinetanga.

The road to Kōpū

4. The majority of my upbringing was spent in Waikato, where I was schooled through Māori mediums. I went through Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa and Wharekura. As a teenager, I also spent three years at a mainstream school in Tauranga.
5. I consider myself to be quite a confident person now, but I was not always that way. As a child, I was quite shy and did not always feel comfortable expressing myself. My parents would encourage me to use my voice and explore my freedom, but I found it difficult because I attended a school where my Aunt and Uncle, my second parents, were teacher and principal. They were extremely loving but their strict religious beliefs were very challenging for me at the time. That actually helped me in my adulthood though, as it taught me discipline and diligence for future challenges.
6. It was not until I attended Otago University that I began to truly express myself. I developed a passion for acting, script writing and storytelling and the deeper that passion grew, the more my confidence brewed inside of me. I felt like it was my calling. That is where I found my sense of self as a wahine and I have followed that path since.

Kōpū

7. Kōpū is a bilingual show filled with waiata, dance, live music, poetry, poi and comedy that provides a portrayal of Māori femininity and womanhood. In my most simple description, Kōpū is a celebration of te ira wahine and our wāhinetanga.
8. Kōpū came about in 2021 when a friend and I were performing in an indigenous Australian play called *Black Ties*. The director of that play raised the concept of a female-specific theatre piece, so my friend and I started putting feelers out and within an hour we had our team.
9. As we started to conceptualise Kōpū, it became clear to us that we wanted to capture and express all the beauty that is unique to us as wāhine Māori, and we wanted to do it in a theatrical way with elements of reo Māori, music, haka, poi and comedy. We wanted our audience to share in the joy, dreams, love, heartbreak, power, humility and fun that comes with being a wahine Māori — the parts of us that are not always celebrated.
10. We needed funding to help get Kōpū off the ground, so we applied for an Emerging Artist Grant from Creative New Zealand which we were successful in. We then presented Kōpū to the Auckland Arts Festival and received some additional funding to further develop the show and take it on tour. We started touring Aotearoa in May 2023, following the Covid-19 lockdown. Our first show was at Te Pou Theatre.
11. Kōpū has continued to evolve since then. That is the beauty of it. It is always twisting and turning with the different waves of wāhinetanga. And our skits are often inspired by our own experiences, whether it is a discussion around ikura, sex or the aunty we all know, we try to embody it all in Kōpū.
12. For example, there is the musical skit, based on the many aunties that exist within whānau Māori. There is the practical Aunty Glenda, the rich Aunty Bougie, the life-of-the-party Aunty Cray-Cray, the wairua whisperer Aunty Woo-Woo, and the always straight-up Aunty Meany.

It is an exaggerated performance of the aunties we all know, and in knowing them it is also a depiction of ourselves.

13. We also have a conversational skit called 'Teke Talk' where we answer intimate questions about sex. Before the show we put a mix of both funny and serious questions in a box and one of our cast members reads them out, while the rest of us give genuine answers. I love this skit because it is the part of the show where we get to express who we are sexually and the audience gets to see us for who we are. They see the raw and often secret parts of ourselves that we are told to hide because it is unladylike. To me, normalising that kind of kōrero removes the sexual stigma that does not belong to Māori.
14. It is important to us in Kōpū to express ourselves in our own way, particularly in terms of our sexuality. We are quite honest and explicit in the way that we present ourselves; our clothes are tight-fitting and our bodies are exposed. And that is intentional. In developing Kōpū, we spoke about older generations of wāhine Māori being raised to be modest and conservative, resulting in a curtailing of their self-expression and we decided to make quite a purposeful statement against that.
15. One of my favourite things about Kōpū is its authenticity and seeing how audiences connect to that. They engage with topics that society tells us we should keep to ourselves because it is improper, when that is not our perspective in te ao Māori. We see sex as natural. It can be serious, but it can also be funny, passionate or sad. Kōpū reminds us that we do not have to take ourselves so seriously; it teaches us to normalise those taboo conversations and sticky experiences. It moves those sensitive topics from a place of darkness to a place of light, where they can exist without shame. That is how I believe our tūpuna saw things, before Western societal norms were imposed upon them.
16. In most plays, you watch quietly and politely whereas we involve the audience in the performance of Kōpū. I truly feel like Kōpū is an experience in decolonisation. It is looking at ourselves with kind, open eyes and embracing it all.

A cultural disconnect in the entertainment industry

17. I sit in quite a fortunate space in the entertainment industry because I have mostly been involved in kaupapa Māori projects.
18. I transitioned from television to Te Pou Theatre; a Māori-owned, Māori-run theatre company in West Auckland. Through Te Pou Theatre I have had complete cultural, artistic and feminine freedom, which has allowed me to thrive in the entertainment space as a wahine Māori. However, that is not the experience for many, and certainly not for the majority.
19. The entertainment industry can be a very hard, cut-throat and disempowering space. Even in Māori productions, many of our people are unsupported or disconnected from their culture. I have seen the disadvantage for wāhine Māori, both in terms of opportunity and treatment.
20. I believe the cultural disconnection that exists for Māori in the entertainment industry is rooted in colonisation and religion. Religion goes hand in hand with colonisation because it was a key tool used in that process. It has been used to shape how we treat and value Māori culture and that perspective has slowly, but quite strongly, positioned us in a place of vulnerability. That vulnerability then creates insecurities that disconnect us even further from who we are and because of that, the way that many of us see our culture, our tikanga or even ourselves is distorted. There is so much that we do not know about ourselves as wāhine Māori, including in terms of the mana that we hold and why.
21. When that kind of vulnerability lives in a Pākehā dominated institution, like the entertainment industry, the disconnection for wāhine Māori is made worse. It is an industry with little compassion for Māori, and it is rife with gender biases; and wāhine Māori tick both of those boxes.

Expressions of mana wāhine

22. For me, being true to myself is a core expression of mana wāhine. It is about being able to choose how to express my femininity; it is experiencing my culture in this space in time; and it is having the ability to carry forward the whakapapa and mana of our tūpuna wāhine.
23. When I think of mana wāhine, I see my mum and my many Ngāti Hine aunties and nannies. I see them so strongly because the mana of our wāhine lives so strongly in us as uri of Hineamaru.
24. Despite living outside of Ngāti Hine, I have always felt and maintained a strong connection to my Ngāti Hine whakapapa. My grandfather was born and bred in Ngāti Hine (Waiomio) and he passed his Ngāti Hine values on to my mum who then instilled them in me. They are taonga tuku iho. Those values shaped who I was as a kōtiro and they continue to shape me now as a woman.
25. Ngāti Hine wāhine are different; our whakapapa makes us so. Our men are often gentle and quite soft-spoken, and our women are the loud and boisterous ones. We are unapologetically ourselves because we know the mana we hold to make our own decisions and accomplish things in our own right.
26. I have been told many stories about my great-grandfather always being in the kitchen, butchering or cooking, while my nan was out in the ātea completing all the amorangi mahi. My grandfather did all of the midwifery mahi for our whānau while my nan was out working on various kaupapa. He was the homemaker while she took on the leadership role. That is not abnormal in Ngāti Hine, despite the societal changes and pressures.
27. It has been normal for me that as wāhine we have our roles in society amongst the collective, especially as leaders. I was always taught that there is a balance. Te ira wāhine and te ira tāne exist within all of us, regardless of gender. You need both to function. It was not until I left my safe little world and experienced men in different ways that I

realised that way of thinking is not true for everyone. It was a real culture shock.

Feminism as an assimilatory concept

28. I have thought a lot about feminism and where that sits for us as wāhine Māori. We discussed it a lot at the time we were developing Kōpū and had some really interesting wānanga around what we go through together as women versus what we go through as wāhine Māori, and how Western influences have shaped the definition and meaning of feminism today.
29. I have come to the conclusion that feminism does not sit with us as wāhine Māori because it is not ours. We exist and have our own experiences, and they do not sit in the same place as feminism. We did not have a need to fight for fairness prior to colonisation and the imposition of Western gender perspectives, particularly in Ngāti Hine where many of our leaders have been wāhine. So, the need to define or prove ourselves as wāhine Māori is not part of who we are. That is a colonial whakaaro.
30. I think of feminism through an experience of one of our whānau friends, LaDonna Harris, a Native American kuia from the United States who I have always known as my Nanny. She is the wife of a senator in New Mexico, and she attended a political lunch at the time of the Barack Obama election. She told us that they were pushing everyone at the lunch to vote for the opposing white politician because if Obama won, he would exclude the white female community, but she said no, she was going to vote for Obama because he would include her people culturally. That is an example of where feminism and mana wāhine are distinct, because feminism does not consider or understand our cultural experience.
31. I think a key reason we do not align with the concept of feminism is because our perspectives of mana and power are different. For example, wāhine not speaking on some a marae is seen by feminists to be a form of suppression or disempowerment. That could not be

further from the truth. As wāhine Māori, we allow tāne that role in the same way they allow us ours. We are the first point of call; the ones managing and leading the entire affair. We also know that there is power in sitting behind our tāne and taking on the listening role, knowing that we can shut the whole pōwhiri down if we do not like what is being said.

32. In the Western world, females have to constantly speak up and take space to show their power when that is not the case for us. We do not see that as an embodiment of mana. I know that there is so much value in sitting quietly and listening, that I do not need to speak to be seen and valued, and can instead contribute in my own way and in my own time.

Concluding remarks

33. In te ao Māori, we have our distinct roles as wāhine and tāne, but that does not mean we as wāhine Māori are considered less than. We both have mana in our roles; they are of equal importance and of equal value, not to be viewed in a Pākehā paradigm where our role is considered inferior.
34. We simply express rangatiratanga in a way that makes sense in our cultural landscape, particularly in Ngāti Hine where our wāhine are leaders.

I TĒNEI RĀ, te rā 12 o Pēpuere 2026



Tuakoi Whanganui Alice Ohia