IN THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL

Wai 2700
Wai 3012

IN THE MATTER OF the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975

AND

IN THE MATTER OF the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry

BY Moerangi Potiki, on behalf of herself and her whānau, hapū and iwi of Ngāti Whakaue mai Maketū.

JOINT BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF NGAHU POTAKA AND BILLIE JEAN POTAKA AYTON

12 February 2026

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"Ka ora te whenua, ka ora te tangata"
"When the land thrives, we thrive"

We, Ngahu Potaka, Kaiako, of Morrinsville, and **Billie Jean Potaka Ayton**, Kura Tumuaki, of Gisborne, state:

1. We are the mokopuna of the late Hinetara Potaka, a descendant of Te Arawa and Mataatua Waka, who served as the President of the Māori Women's Welfare League ("MWWL" or "League") and was recognised for her service through the award of the Order of the British Empire ("OBE"), the Women's Suffrage Medal, and as a Companion to the New Zealand Order of Merit ("CNZM").

2. The whakatauki above encapsulates the guiding principle of our whānau because of Hinetara Potaka, our Nanny Farm, who sadly left us in 2001. Her wairua continues to live on through the values, strength, and actions of not only us, but also our rangatahi. We are deeply honoured to have the ability to educate our Tamariki under the korowai she laid for us. Moe mai rā e te kuia, moe mai rā.

A: INTRODUCTION

3. We present this Brief of Evidence in support of the Wai 3012 claim filed by Moerangi Potiki. This has been done in loving memory of our kuia, whose wairua, we feel has made us the strong Māori advocates in the education sector that we are today.

4. Our evidence speaks to Issue 1 of the Inquiry's Statement of Issues[1] which states:

> What are the Crown's duties and obligations under te Tiriti/the Treaty concerning the exercise of rangatiratanga and tikanga by wāhine Māori in relation to their status, roles, responsibilities, practices, values, and beliefs?

5. The kōrero presented here draws on lived whānau experience across generations, grounded in whakapapa, tikanga, and the leadership of wāhine Māori within our hāpori, particularly through the example of our kuia, Hinetara Potaka.

[1] Wai 2700, #1.4.004.

6. This evidence affirms that mana wāhine and tino rangatiratanga are not abstract principles but lived realities that have been continually expressed through wāhine leadership, mātauranga transmission, care for our whenua, and collective responsibility for whānau wellbeing.

B: MANA WĀHINE AND TINO RANGATIRATANGA

7. Mana wāhine and tino rangatiratanga encompass authority, self-determination, leadership, identity, and whakapapa, and form the foundation upon which our whānau navigate contemporary circumstances with strength and integrity.

8. Mana wāhine is expressed through the ability of wāhine to lead, to make decisions for the collective, and to carry responsibility for the wellbeing of whānau. Central to this authority is access to knowledge and education, which enables wāhine to stand confidently, engage with both Māori and Crown systems, and exercise leadership in ways that uphold tikanga while responding to present day challenges.

9. We affirm that mana wāhine is inseparable from our relationship with the whenua, which is an extension of our whānau and a source of identity, responsibility, and authority. The obligation to protect, care for, and work with the whenua is a core expression of wāhine rangatiratanga.

10. These understandings are not newly formed, they have been shaped and transmitted through the lives and leadership of our tūpuna, including our kuia, Hinetara Potaka, and the wāhine of her generation.

11. We support and endorse the Joint Brief of Evidence of the past and present National Presidents of MWWL.[2] We particularly endorse the articulation of the League's kaupapa and purpose as an expression of rangatiratanga and Māori women's self-determination, and the League's enduring constitutional objectives of improving the position of wāhine and whānau Māori in health, education, and welfare.[3]

[2] Wai 2700, #C2.
[3] Ibid at [11]-[14].

12. We also support the evidence regarding the National Presidents' collective role, mandate, and accountability to the League and its members, including their shared commitment to advancing the League's kaupapa through national leadership.[4]

13. Furthermore, we affirm the League's clear commitment to a community centred model and accountability to whānau, hapū, and iwi, including recognition of the authority of local peka (branches), the distributed leadership structure, and the League's responsibility to act for and remain accountable to its communities.[5]

14. These principles resonate deeply with our whānau and personal understanding of mana wāhine, having been shaped by our kuia, Hinetara Potaka, a past National President of the League, whose leadership exemplified these values. Through her example, we affirm the enduring importance of Māori women's rangatiratanga, leadership, and service to whānau, hapū, and iwi, and the vital role of the League in advancing these ideals.[6]

Hinetara Potaka – Nanny Farm

15. Hinetara Pōtaka (nee Hiha) was born in 1924. She was one of seven children. Her parents, Ranapia and Harete Hiha (nee Devon) were dairy farmers on our ancestral land in Pukehina, Te Puke. Both of her parents were educated and both prioritised education in their children's upbringing. Ranapia Hiha attended Te Aute College, while her mother, Harete Hiha, went to Matata Catholic Convent. A photograph of Hinetara Potaka is set out below.

[4] Ibid at [6] – [10] and [22].
[5] Ibid at [21] – [25].
[6] Wai 2700, #C2 at [11]-[14].

16. She remembered being embedded in Māori traditional ways. She was primarily taught these ways along with her Reo, and Tikanga by her kuia, Turehu of Ngāti Pikiao, prior to heading away to boarding school in Auckland. She spoke about her techniques in planting kumara, white baiting with her kuia, and listening to the manu to align her directions with harvesting.

17. Hinetara Potaka attended Queen Victoria College on scholarship and completed her schooling at Dannevirke High School. She had high hopes to become a dentist like her older sister but had to return home due to her mum falling ill. It was the war time as well, so wāhine were also returning to keep the farms running while their tāne were away. During this time, her Māori values were reinforced by the Bishop of Aotearoa, Bishop Pānapa, and his staff.

18. While looking after her mother, and the farm, our koro, Wikiriwhi Potaka ("Wiki"), accompanied by his father, Riripotaka Ngahu, a prominent leader from Maketū, arrived at the Pukehina Farm, to tono for Hinetara's hand in marriage. This arranged union was more than a personal commitment. It served to weave together the lines of Ngāti Pikiao, and Ngāti Whakaue, strengthening connections between the families. This union was solidified in 1945 when our grandparents were married at St. Thomas Church in Maketū. They operated their own dairy farm in Maketū and raised two sons, our father, Pita Ngahu Potaka, and our uncle, Te Puru o te Whare Potaka. Below is a photograph of our koro Wiki and Nanny Hinetara around this time.

19. In 1976, they became aware that a dairy farm on their whenua would no longer be economical. After reviewing the status of the economy at the time, they decided to take a risk and plant a kiwifruit orchard in Maketū. They became the first Māori whānau to do so in the Bay of Plenty area.

Leadership

20. In the early 1960s, after her two sons left home to attend Wesley College in Auckland, Hinetara devoted herself extensively to community work and became the Founder and President of the MWWL Maketū Branch.

21. In 1963, while attending a MWWL National Conference, Hinetara learned of a preschool model that actively involved parents and grandparents.

22. It was an enduring relationship created with the Bennett whānau that later enabled Hinetara to step into leadership. When the Kōhanga Reo movement was emerging, Sir John Bennett visited Hinetara's farm and requested that our koro release our kuia from her dairy farm duties so she could serve her people. At a time when society and the education system constrained women to domestic roles and rarely recognised female authority, this support allowed Hinetara to further uphold her responsibilities as a wāhine Māori, prioritising whakapapa and the wellbeing of future generations.

23. The hononga between Rangitauninihi and the Bennett whānau was pivotal in shaping Hinetara's role as a wāhine Māori leader. Rangitauninihi, our koro Wiki's mother, served as the wet nurse for the Bennett whānau, accompanying them and her whānau to Hastings where they dairy-farmed. After the 1931 Napier earthquake, they returned first to Rotorua, then to Maketū, maintaining close ties with the Bennett family.

24. Without this foundation of trust and connection between Rangitauninihi and the Bennett whānau, our whānau's awareness of the mana of wāhine in leadership today might not have been possible. This tono in our view, was the catalyst to our kuia's mahi for her community. Our kuia would have seen this tono as a no brainer. The betterment of our community is a role instilled within our whakapapa. She

would have also seen this as an opportunity. She always taught us to never say no to opportunities that come our way and to make sure that we perform our tasks well.

25. Following attending a MWWL National Meeting in 1963, and hearing about the kaupapa there around involving parents and grandparents, she founded the Maketū Play Centre that same year. She later became President of Zone D of the Rotorua Playcentre Association, strengthening governance and regional coordination within the Playcentre movement.

26. From 1969 to 1975, Hinetara worked as a Field Officer for Aboriginal Family Education groups, followed by roles with the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and as a Rural Development Officer.[7]

27. In 1971, Hinetara became the sixth National President of the MWWL, a role which was later succeeded to Mira Szaszy in 1973.[8]

28. Between 1978 and 1988, she served as a Pre-School Officer for the Māori Education Foundation. During her first year, she undertook nationwide fact-finding that contributed to the early development of the Kōhanga Reo movement, before delivering workshops throughout Aotearoa for Kōhanga Reo, playcentres, and kindergartens.

29. Kohanga Reo was founded in the 1980s. Its purpose was to establish a tikanga led model grounded in whānau participation. The first Kōhanga Reo in Pukeatua in Wainuiomata, Wellington, opened on 13 April 1982, and since then, over 50,000 children have attended Kōhanga Reo.[9]

30. In 1990, at the age of 66, Hinetara started a private training establishment called Āwhina Whānau: Education Services Trust, based in Maketu which focused on providing education services within the Maketū area.

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[7] *Tū Tangata,* Issue 9 (1 December 1982) 27
https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/TUTANG19821201.2.24.1.
[8] Wai 2700, #C2 at [11] – [14].
[9] *Mō Mātau*, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust Board
(online at https://www.kohanga.ac.nz/kaupapa/moo-matau).

31. Hinetara Potaka herself received an honorary Āwhina Whānau Diploma, accredited by the New Zealand Qualification Authority ("NZQA"). Te Wānanga o Aotearoa purchased it from her for their collection. She also received three medals:

a. Medal of Merit Scouts;
b. Womens' Suffrage Medal; and
c. Meritorious Service Anglican OSM.

32. Hinetara's remarkable life has been explored further in a Biography by Pani Bird, which is attached as **Annex A** to our BoE. There is also an oral history of Hinetara Potaka herself, which is attached as **Annex B**.

C: CROWN PREJUDICE

Access to Education

33. During Hinetara's time, access to education was not a realistic or supported expectation, particularly for wāhine Māori. Many of our kuia were not encouraged to pursue tertiary education, as their primary responsibilities were understood to lie within the home and the whānau. Although some, including Hinetara, held professional aspirations, these ambitions were often relinquished due to obligations enforced on whānau in order to survive the prejudiced consequence of Crown actions.

34. An example of this is the outbreak of war which further disrupted educational pathways. Wāhine were required to return to farms to maintain whānau livelihoods while tāne were overseas, leaving no opportunity for formal education. These responsibilities were essential for survival yet came at the cost of personal advancement and access to learning.

35. Tāne Māori who served at war also experienced educational disruption and disadvantage. Upon their return, they were not afforded the same support, economic opportunities, rehabilitation, or educational assistance as Pākehā servicemen. The absence of equitable Crown support contributed to unresolved trauma, which

manifested in harmful coping mechanisms, including alcohol dependence and violence within vulnerable communities, and had lasting impacts on whānau wellbeing.

36. At the same time, many Māori boys were sent to boarding schools that operated within a colonised education system. These institutions imposed foreign values that undermined tikanga Māori and distorted understandings of gender roles and authority. When these values were brought back into whānau homes, they contributed to domestic harm and the erosion of tikanga-based relationships. As a result, mana wāhine bore the consequences of Crown policies that disrupted cultural transmission and reshaped whānau dynamics, with impacts that continue to be felt inter-generationally within private and domestic spaces.

37. The systemic racism was prevalent, and therefore our tupuna instilled the priority of education within the following generations to gain knowledge of the tools necessary to protect them from all the hara that comes with colonisation.

38. Knowing this information showed the resilience of our wāhine. Witnessing how our mums and aunties persevered through the impacts of colonisation affecting their tane, and still managing to fill our mokopuna with aroha, tikanga, matauranga, and katiakitanga, made me see the importance of our wāhine and how their roles as mana wāhine truly served the purposes engraved in them from our tupuna. How powerful they are to keep going, to put one foot in front of the other each day, giving their children unconditional love despite the challenges that colonisation caused domestically.

Access to Funding

39. Growing up on the marae, what we all saw were strong, kuia around us. When we were at the marae, and we knew our nannies had the mana on there. They told you what to do and where to go, and they told the men what to say and if the men got it wrong then they found out straight after the powhiri when they walked out the door. It was that authority that our kuia had at the time. I was respected by the men at the time too. They actually listened to our kuia and their whakaaro, like when the nanny

said we were going to build a Kohanga Reo, the men got out there and built the kohanga. It was the woman that pushed for that to happen.

40. Our kuia were required to operate with extremely limited resources, often working with little more than their own labour, commitment, and collective resolve. I recall our kuia, alongside several others from Rotorua, coming together to sustain the kaupapa through sheer determination. The strong reliance on the taiao was not by choice alone, but also a necessity, as there was no adequate Crown funding to support the operation of Kōhanga Reo.

41. At times, the Kōhanga Reo faced severe financial hardship, to the point where its continued operation was uncertain. We remember fundraising efforts being essential simply to keep the doors open and ensure our tamariki could continue to access te reo Māori, tikanga, and a culturally safe learning environment. Crown prejudice is most clearly illustrated through the design and operation of government funding systems, which only reflect the Crown's priorities and values, not ours.

42. In the education sector, private and mainstream public schools were consistently prioritised, with even kindergartens receiving greater levels of funding than Kōhanga Reo.[10] These funding decisions demonstrate that the Crown did not seek to actively remedy what had been taken from Māori, but instead adopted a minimal and incremental approach to cultural redress. By controlling the pace, scope, and resources available for Māori-led education, the Crown positioned itself as a gatekeeper to Māori identity, knowledge transmission, and rangatiratanga.

43. This inequity has remained largely unchanged over time, entrenching disadvantage and placing disproportionate pressure on Māori communities to sustain kaupapa Māori initiatives without adequate Crown support.

44. In response to this systemic underfunding, Hinetara Pōtaka established what effectively was known as a wānanga training base in her own shed, on her own

[10] Leigh-Marama McLachlan, "Kohanga reo 'still marginalised'," *RNZ* (Te Manu Korihi, 19 August 2015) https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/te-manu-korihi/281854/kohanga-reo-%27still-marginalised%27.

Farm, where kaiako from across the motu were supported to develop their teaching practice within a kaupapa Māori framework.

45. This kaupapa prioritised Te Reo Māori, tikanga, whānau-based pedagogy, and collective responsibility. Those who trained there were aware that their work would not be rewarded within the same pay structures as mainstream educators, as kindergarten funding was already limited and Crown resourcing for kōhanga reo was even more constrained. Nevertheless, wāhine and kaiako committed to this kaupapa were guided by aroha and responsibility for tamariki, stepping into roles that the Crown had failed to adequately recognise or resource.

46. Billie-Jean recalls a conversation with a colleague who was an NZQA advisor a few decades prior, and was sent out to the farm in his younger years to support my grandmother with her application for recognition and accreditation of The Awhina Whānau Diploma. He recalls arriving at a shed in a paddock on a farm, wondering whether he was in the wrong place. Upon entering, his concerns were allayed, as he was welcomed into a fully functioning tertiary learning space.

C: MANA WĀHINE OF TODAY AND THE RESTORATION OF RANGATIRATANGA

47. Growing up on the farm and seeing our nan's relationship with our koro and the respect they had for each other as partners, we have taken those learnings and implemented them within our own relationship because we saw how koro supported our nan, throughout every wānanga, every teaching, every kohanga driven event.

48. Our whānau spoke about the western view of a subservient wife being enforced on our whānau during the colonisation period. The idea that the role of a woman was to solely look after the children, look after the home, and to do the cooking and the sewing was foreign to Māori wāhine. In fact, being subservient from a western view was the opposite of what they knew. Our story we were told was about a time where our kuia on the marae were seen to have stood up on a marae and start a haka in protest against a person who had transgressed the tikanga of the marae. The woman

led the way in that action, and you felt the authority of wāhine on the marae in that moment.

49. In today's time, for our tāne, we rely on the example left by my kuia to navigate the support needed for them to achieve. Our nanny taught us that as a mana wāhine we learn different ways to distribute support, to make sure the job gets done. An example of this is in our kura. This understanding is evident in spaces such as our kura, where it is sometimes perceived that our tāne are over-supported. However, in practice, they often require different forms of support to reach the same outcomes as our kotiro.

50. This approach reflects an inter-generational leadership model in which direction and intent are often articulated by tāne, while wāhine provide strategic planning, organisation, and sustained mahi to create clear pathways for that direction to be realised. Crucially, this model is not hierarchical but interdependent, recognising that without the strategic leadership and labour of wāhine, collective outcomes could not be achieved, and without the authority and intent of tāne, direction would lack grounding.

51. We need to recognise that there are times when tāne energy is required, and times when wāhine energy is needed. It is not about always calling upon one or the other but understanding the appropriate energy for the kaupapa or context at hand. This is the essence of mana tāne and mana wāhine, knowing when male energy is necessary, but also recognising when female energy is needed, particularly the nurturing and supportive qualities we bring, for example, when caring for a tamaiti or managing a crisis at the kura for marae.

52. This whakaaro was built from knowing we would lead based on our own individual strengths. And the way that we get the job done is by choosing the best person with the strengths for that mahi. Delegating is important to making sure that everyone in our whanau is contributing so that the job gets done, not just leaving things for one person to do all the mahi all the time.

53. Our whānau don't want wāhine to be dominated by men. We want them to hold their own mana. They are strong mana wāhine, but you need to grow that in your whanau and have that as an expectation for your daughters. That is what they are going to be in their relationships, to hold their mana and not allow imposed colonial values to come into their relationships.

54. In recent decades, and particularly over the past twenty years, we have observed wāhine Māori increasingly assume leadership roles within whānau, hapū, and community contexts, often with the active support of their tāne and wider whānau. This reflects a reassertion of mana wāhine and a conscious shift away from the survival based decision-making that previously dominated whānau life as a consequence of colonisation. We are now raising our rangatahi with an expectation that wāhine exercise authority, responsibility, and leadership, and that decisions are made with a generational focus on long-term wellbeing, sustainability, and collective advancement.

55. Within our own whānau, this is demonstrated through inter-generational kaitiakitanga of whenua and resources. What our nan and koro established on the farm has been carried forward by our mokopuna through the orchard, and to extended whānau in the Maketū who have initiated kiwifruit orchards, to sustain whānau and support future prosperity. They were the first Māori whānau to develop a kiwifruit orchard. This approach reflects future-focused thinking grounded in tikanga, collective responsibility, and the exercise of rangatiratanga in practice.

56. As part of the hui process to provide evidence in support of Wai 3012, we asked our rangatahi, Maddox Potaka Ayton, Ngahu Potaka, Te Haeata Potaka, Manaia Potaka, Molly Milroy, Ngarangi Nikora, Ohinemataroa Nikora, Layla Nikora and Makore Maxwell, to assist us.

57. On the day, each rangatahi entered the hui carrying photographs of their tūpuna, physically and symbolically bringing their ancestral lines into the room. They stood and spoke their whakapapa with pride before describing and defining what mana wāhine means to them. While each rangatahi offered a distinct perspective, their

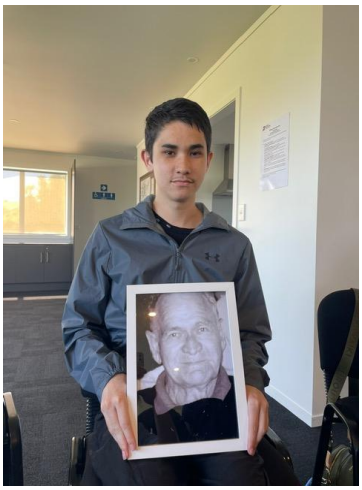
understandings were consistently anchored in the actions, values, and legacies of their tūpuna.

58. Rangatahi drew on the mana and leadership of wāhine such as Rangiuru and Hinemoa, whose stories reflect courage, devotion, and determination; Whakaotirangi, remembered for her foresight and role in sustaining people through mātauranga and cultivation, Te Kuraimonoa and Kearoa, whose legacies speak to mana, whānau responsibility, and the continuity of tikanga, and Hinetara Potaka, whose mana is understood through service, guidance, and unwavering commitment to whānau and hapū.

59. Through these kōrero, rangatahi demonstrated that mana wāhine is not an abstract or historical concept, but a lived and inherited reality, expressed through whakapapa, action, and responsibility in the present day.

60. In addition, our rangatahi generously shared their kōrero about the opportunities available to them today, acknowledging the significant mahi undertaken by their mothers to advance these kaupapa. We also heard from our niece Layla Nikora who spoke of pathways created through te ao haka and education, enabling cultural reclamation, leadership development, and engagement with the world through a te ao Māori lens. These experiences have fostered resilience, confidence, and a strong sense of identity as wāhine Māori and as uri of Ngāti Whakaue, while reinforcing the importance of whānau guidance and support.

61. By sharing their voices, these rangatahi continue the transmission of knowledge and exemplify the leadership that will shape our future. Below are photographs of rangatahi who attended the hui.



62. We also acknowledge wāhine within our whānau who give effect to mana wāhine through leadership in the education sector. This includes wāhine who have served

as Tumuaki and principals and have consistently chosen to apply their skills and expertise in communities of greatest need, including South Tamaki, Kaiti (a small town in Gisborne) and Gisborne, despite opportunities in higher-resourced settings. This demonstrates rangatiratanga in action and reflects a commitment to tamariki and community grounded in the values instilled in us by our kuia.

63. Our mokopuna further acknowledged the example of whanaunga such as Judge Milroy, whose role as a Māori Land Court Judge and Presiding Officer in the Waitangi Tribunal, exemplifies the breaking of barriers for Māori women and affirms the legitimacy of wāhine Māori leadership within national decision-making spaces. The presence of wāhine Māori in governance, judicial, and policy-making roles is essential to ensuring Māori worldviews, tikanga, and lived realities meaningfully inform outcomes for whānau, hapū, and iwi.

64. We also recognise the leadership of wāhine in the revitalisation of kapa haka and the transmission of mātauranga in Maketū. This includes whānau members who return annually to host kaupapa such as Whakaue Whakanuia, wāhine who have returned home to serve as kapa haka tutors, and those who contribute to the teaching of waiata, haka, and pūrākau relating to our Te Arawa tūpuna. Without the sustained commitment of wāhine, this inter-generational transmission would not be possible. Acting for the collective benefit of the community is a clear expression of mana wāhine.

65. We further acknowledge wāhine who are exercising rangatiratanga through environmental kaitiakitanga, including kaupapa focused on the restoration and protection of the estuary. These initiatives create opportunities for our mokopuna to act as kaitiaki of the whenua and provide pathways through scholarships, internships, and employment that support their return to Maketū and comprise an investment in themselves and their people. We say this is rangatiratanga in practice, making decisions for the collective good with the support and participation of the community.

66. Over recent years, we have facilitated wānanga to reconnect whānau to traditional ways, strengthen whakawhanaungatanga, and provide reasons to return home

beyond tangihanga. These wānanga are designed to change the lens of leadership for our next generation, from the lens of pakeha ideologies of leadership, to those of our tupuna, redesigning effective leadership for Māori and for Aotearoa.

67. The wānanga have addressed inter-generational trauma, with the intention of preventing its transmission to future generations. Bringing parents and tamariki together on the marae has supported the re-learning of fundamental roles as Māori and as leaders, and this approach has extended beyond our whānau to benefit the wider community.

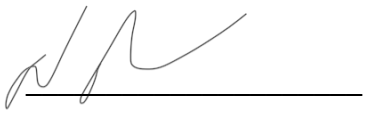
D: CONCLUSION

68. The restoration of rangatiratanga and mana wāhine requires wāhine to be supported to act in the best interests of our people. Within our community, this can be achieved if the Crown recognises and provides for alternative learning environments, including the marae, the whenua, and the estuary. Equipping whānau with the tools necessary to grow sustainable economic, cultural, and social prosperity. Such recognition would enable reconnection with whenua and iwi and affirm that our ways of learning, governing, and being are valid.

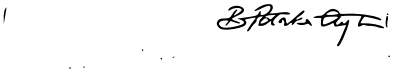
69. Rangatiratanga, for us, is grounded in the teachings of the whenua and the maintenance of whānau values, tikanga, and manaakitanga. Through ongoing wānanga held on our marae and whenua, engagement in the orchard, and the sharing of mātauranga, our mokopuna are supported to shape their futures with a strong sense of identity and belonging.

70. While access to external funding has enabled aspects of this mahi, the requirement to remain accountable to external agencies has constrained our ability to exercise full rangatiratanga over our kaupapa. In response, we now operate family trusts to support the sustainability of our initiatives and choose to live and work collectively, as our nannies and koro once did, and as our people in Maketū continue to do.

Dated: 12 February 2026



Ngāhu Potaka



Billie Jean Potaka Ayton