OFFICIAL

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, and hapū and iwi of Ngāti Whakaue mai Maketū

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF VERONICA EDWARDS

12 February 2026

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I, **Veronica Edwards (nee Kerr),** Kaiako, of Maketū, state:

1. In order for the land to be healthy, the awa needs to be healthy.

2. I am uri of Ngāti Whakaue mai Māketū. This affidavit is provided in support of the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry and the Wai 3012 claim, filed by Moerangi Potiki.

3. I am a Kaiako for Te Kohanga Reo o Whareroa.

A: INTRODUCTION

4. This Brief of Evidence outlines evidence of the Crown's failure to actively recognise, uphold, and protect the rangatiratanga and Tikanga of wāhine Māori, as guaranteed under te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi ("te Tiriti/the Treaty").

5. My kōrero centres on the lived experiences and teachings handed down to me by my mother, Piatirihi Maria Kerr ("Pia"), and on the leadership of wāhine within our hapū and wider Ngāti Whakaue mai Māketū community.

6. The experiences described in this Brief demonstrate the exercise of wāhine Māori rangatiratanga in the absence of meaningful Crown protection, and in many cases, in direct opposition to Crown decision-making.

B: MANA WĀHINE AND TINO RANGATIRATANGA

7. Mana Wāhine, as I was taught, is not something that is bestowed or measured. It is embedded. It exists within whakapapa, within Tikanga, and within the way wāhine act for the collective.

8. My understanding of Mana Wāhine comes from observation: watching, listening, and following the example set by the wāhine around me. This was the way knowledge was transmitted to me, particularly through my mother.

9. Mana Wāhine is expressed through balance. Wāhine open pathways, clear space, and hold emotional and spiritual dimensions so that healing, decision-making,

and collective wellbeing can occur. The balance between wāhine and tāne is foundational to Tikanga Māori and was never intended to be hierarchical.

10. The Crown's systems, laws, and economic frameworks have consistently failed to recognise this balance, instead imposing individualised, monetary, and gendered models that distort Tikanga and undermine wāhine Māori roles.

Piatirihi Maria Kerr (nee Rolleston)

11. My mother, Pia, was born in 1927. She was a strong Ngāti Whakaue wāhine who raised twelve children after my father passed away when I was about two years old. She was our provider, guide, disciplinarian, and emotional anchor. I attach a photo of my mother below.

12. She was a kaikaranga, with an obligation to ensure that the whole community was okay.

13. In her early adult life, my mother moved from Māketū to Tauranga, where she raised her twelve tamariki.

14. My mother later returned to Māketū in the 1980s in her fifties, as she was called back to Māketū to fulfil the role of kaikaranga, reflecting the trust placed in her deep understanding of Tikanga. From this time forward, her leadership and the exercise of her mana became increasingly visible within the wider community.

15. My mother understood karanga as a form of leadership that carried cultural, spiritual, and emotional responsibility. Mum would attend a pōwhiri for a group coming onto the marae, then the next day there would be a tangihanga (usually lasting at least three days). She would then guide the bereaved whānau in attending at least another three tangihanga within the following month or so, before returning again to her own marae, Maketū.

16. My mother would call all the children of Maketū her mokopuna, and if we look at that statement through a Māori whakapapa lens, she was right. Mum taught me that the role of the kaikaranga is so much more than "issuing the call". It is upholding the mana and values of the marae, of the people, and of the whenua. It is to support, guide, and nurture the people in their times of need, hardship, and grief, to draw on one's own experiences to allow others to feel and to heal.

17. If you had ever been lucky enough to witness Mum's karanga, you would have felt the hairs on your arms rise, the chill down the back of your neck, the welling of emotion in your gut, and the sting of tears in your eyes. This feeling is ihi, it is wehi, and it is mana.

18. My mother taught me that it was the role of the kaikaranga to draw forth the emotions of the people, to shift the āhua of the space, and to prepare both hosts and visitors for engagement through pōwhiri.

19. I recall attending many tangihanga with my mother, where we would gather at the tomokanga awaiting the pōwhiri to begin. Before the proceedings commenced, the Kuia at the front would be talking quietly together, sometimes laughing and reconnecting with whānau who had just arrived. However, once the karanga was called from the tangata whenua side, the āhua of the space shifted immediately. The wairua changed, the Kuia were moved to tears, and the wider whānau followed. Witnessing this transformation, I later asked my mother whether this response was an act, as I could not understand how the space could

change so profoundly in such a short moment. She explained to me that karanga is the means through which wāhine establish the spiritual and emotional grounding of the space, preparing everyone present for the kaupapa that follows.

20. On another occasion, I observed my mother's karanga at a tangihanga where its primary purpose was to support the whānau to grieve openly. Through this experience, she taught me that the role of the kaikaranga is to draw forth tears, pain, and emotion so that healing can begin. She emphasised that karanga is not a performance, but a lived responsibility carried by wāhine for the wellbeing of the people. She actively passed this knowledge on to others, mentoring wāhine in Maketū and supporting the continuation of karanga through teaching and participation in wānanga.

21. I personally did not attend any of the many wānanga held on karanga where my mother taught others. My mother's teachings to me were mostly, "Don't ask questions, just watch and listen." If I ever did venture to ask, she would provide clarification.

22. Proof of her influence and teachings can be seen in the current kaikaranga of Maketū, Maria Baker, and in other kaikaranga of Te Arawa whānui.

23. My mother was a staunch Catholic and attended Mass at St Peter's Church, Maketū. The various priests who led the services all looked to my mother for guidance and advice on tikanga and kawa. If my mother did not attend Mass, the priests would always call at her home to visit her.

24. Mum was also heavily involved in the fight for the return of the Kaituna River to the Maketū estuary. She, along with others from Maketū (Aroha and Barry Wilkinson come to mind), attended many hui for this purpose and believed that "if the river is well, the people are well."

25. Between her roles as kaikaranga on the marae, a kaikatakiha (catechism teacher) for the Catholic Church, and a member of the Return of the Kaituna River group, Mum was often called upon to attend hui and events. She was presented as "the face of Maketū" in many of these situations, so many, in fact, that my siblings

and I would often complain to each other that our mum was never at home when we called to visit.

26. Together, these roles demonstrate my mother's exercise of mana wāhine through spiritual leadership, environmental guardianship, and the transmission of Tikanga across generations.

27. My mother's understanding of the role and responsibilities carried by wāhine aligns with ancestral examples of mana wāhine within Te Arawa history. Figures such as Hineitūrama and Te Ao Kapuarangi exemplify wāhine leadership through courage, sacrifice, and authority exercised in times of profound challenge. Their actions ensured the survival, protection, and continuity of their people and continue to inform contemporary expressions of mana wāhine and rangatiratanga.

28. **Hineitūrama** was a wāhine of great mana whose life reflects the burdens placed on wāhine for the protection of their people. As a young teenager, she was betrothed to Hans Home Jense Faulk, a Danish Trader, as part of a strategic alliance that secured access to muskets for Te Arawa. Despite the significant imbalance of age and power, Hineitūrama fulfilled her responsibilities, raising children and supporting his husband until his later years.

29. Once that role was complete, she returned to stand with her whānau in resistance at Ōrākau, where she was killed while mourning a relative. Her life demonstrates mana wāhine expressed through sacrifice, loyalty, an ultimate commitment to her people.

30. **Te Ao Kapuarangi** is remembered as a decisive and courageous rangatira wāhine whose leadership was grounded in foresight, Tikanga, and an unwavering commitment to the survival of her people.

31. When Ngā Puhi attacked Mokoia, she ensured the safety and survival of her people by negotiating a deal that, although did not stop the attack, allowed for many to be spared. This was done by Te Ao kapurangi putting aside her own 'modesty', her own emotional and physical safety during the heat of battle, and climbing to the top of the whare, straddling the ridgepole allowing her people to pass between her thighs, thus escaping the massacre.

32. This deal was negotiated by Te Aokapurangi because of the mana that she held and because of her whakapapa connections to both Ngapuhi (through marriage) and TeArawa. To me, her actions embody "Mana Wahine".

33. Through her authority and mana, she mobilised her people and guided them to safety, implementing measures that avoided direct confrontation and the loss of life. Her actions demonstrated not only tactical intelligence but also the core Māori leadership principle of kaitiakitanga over her people.

34. By prioritising preservation over warfare, she exemplified rangatiratanga, exercised through wisdom, restraint, and care, ensuring the continuation of her people in the face of significant threat.

35. She is remembered through the whakataukī *"Anō ko te whare whawhao a Te Ao Kapuarangi"*, describing a place of refuge filled with people, and her legacy reflects mana wāhine through resilience, protection of others, and the capacity of wāhine to hold communities together in times of crisis.

36. I grew up learning about our wāhine tupuna, Te Ao Kapuarangi who demonstrated Mana Wāhine rangatiratanga through decisive action to save her iwi, exercising authority over her own body and destiny for the collective good.

37. I grew up learning that Hineitūrama exemplified Mana Wāhine through courage and sacrifice. Raised within chiefly lines, she chose to stand with her people at Ōrākau, protecting her wounded cousin with her own body and ultimately giving her life.

38. These wāhine were not passive figures. Their authority was recognised within Tikanga Māori, yet their stories have often been marginalised or distorted within Crown narratives.

39. My mother's leadership mirrors these tūpuna wāhine. Her choices, advocacy, and resistance were grounded in the same principles of collective responsibility and whakapapa obligation.

Wāhine Leaders of My Mother's Time

40. My understanding of Mana Wāhine was further shaped by wāhine who led alongside and before my mother.

41. **Aunty Rosie Ngareta Mathews** worked closely alongside my mother, particularly within marae and community spaces, where their leadership functioned as a collective. Together, they upheld Tikanga, supported one another, and ensured that cultural responsibilities were carried with integrity and care. Aunty Rosie was a kaikaranga, and her presence on the marae was marked not by volume or dominance, but by a quiet authority and deep understanding of Tikanga.

42. I remember the way she carried herself, gentle, composed, and dignified, embodying a femininity that was both delicate and resolute. Her mana was evident in her authority within the space, an authority that did not need to be asserted, but was recognised and respected by all. Through her actions and guidance, she affirmed Tikanga for me and demonstrated the many ways in which Tikanga can be held and expressed.

43. Aunty Rosie also served as my mother's right-hand support on the karanga stand, observing carefully and stepping forward where Tikanga required her presence. In doing so, she modelled a form of mana wāhine grounded in service, attentiveness, and collective responsibility, leaving a lasting imprint on my understanding of leadership and cultural practice.

44. **Aunty Googie Te Weurangi Tapsell** expressed mana wāhine through her weaving, teaching, and lifelong service to her people. Although she was not fluent in te reo Māori, her mahi embodied the understanding that mana is not confined to a single, imposed measure of identity, but is lived and demonstrated through contribution, care, and commitment. Aunty Googie had long-standing whānau connections to us. She served as my mother's bridesmaid in the 1940s and was married to my mother's cousin, Uncle Junior Tapsell.

45. On one occasion, while attending a tangihanga, I entered the whare and found Aunty Googie sitting inside. She spoke through tears, expressing deep whakamā,

saying that she felt like a fraud for wearing her tā moko because she could not speak te reo Māori. In that moment, her vulnerability revealed the weight of externally imposed expectations that wāhine Māori continue to carry.

46. As we stood together, I looked toward the tūpāpaku, where two korowai lay, both woven by Aunty Googie herself. I reminded her that her reo was not absent. We hear her reo with our eyes and feel it in our puku. Her voice lives in every whenu of the korowai she created, in the beauty and protection they offer, and in the mana they continue to hold. Through her weaving, Aunty Googie spoke powerfully, leaving an enduring legacy of mana wāhine that transcends spoken language.

47. These wāhine leaders show that Mana Wāhine is diverse in expression but consistent in purpose: the wellbeing of whānau, hapū, and iwi.

B: CROWN BREACHES WITNESSED THROUGH MY MOTHER'S ADVOCACY

48. My mother was actively involved in the Maketū Action Group, advocating for the protection and restoration of the Kaituna awa (Te Awa kari o Ngaitoroirangi). She participated in many community led hui led by the Maketū Action Group in relation to our awa and the estuary.

49. She opposed Crown and local authority decisions that allowed waste, effluent, and industrial discharge into the awa, decisions made without meaningful Māori consent or recognition of Tikanga. She consistently spoke about the spiritual and physical impacts of these actions, explaining that when the awa was sick, the people were sick.

50. My mother also opposed road widening, seawalls, and infrastructure projects imposed by councils, which prioritised economic development and tourism over the safety, Tikanga, and wellbeing of the Māketū community.

51. She physically placed herself in front of bulldozers, by lying down in front of them to stop works that she believed would harm people, whenua, and wāhi tapu. The workers verbally abused her. Following this abuse, they held off for a short

period, but continued with their work shortly after, completely ignoring her right as a Kuia to make decisions over the land where she had ahi kaa. She was cut out of decision-making processes.

52. My mother did not record her attendance at community meetings because she found that when motions are made, voted upon and subsequently actioned, then your attendance at any particular meeting could be misconstrued to mean that you are in favour of the decisions made, unless you make a point of having your objection noted and recorded. Such was Mum's mana, she did not want to be aligned with any desecration of her whenua/awa.

53. Despite her standing, knowledge, and lived experience, her role as a wahine decision-maker was dismissed in favour of Crown-defined economic priorities.

C: ONGOING IMPACTS ON WĀHINE MĀORI RANGATIRATANGA

54. Crown laws which prevented wāhine from being named on land titles caused enduring disconnection from whenua for subsequent generations, including my own.

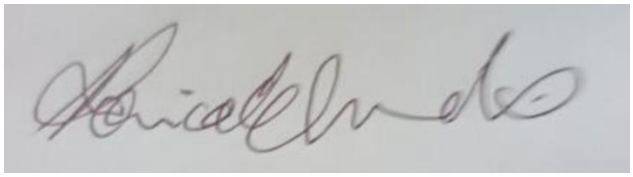
55. These laws undermine Tikanga Māori, distorted whakapapa-based authority, and continue to affect our ability to speak for and care for our land.

56. The Crown's failure to actively protect wāhine Māori rangatiratanga has resulted in cultural loss, environmental degradation, and intergenerational harm.

D: CONCLUSION

57. The leadership of my mother and other wāhine within Ngāti Whakaue mai Māketū demonstrates that wāhine Māori have continuously exercised rangatiratanga, and the Crown has failed to recognise or protect their rangatiratanga.

Dated: 12 February 2026



Veronica Edwards