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IN THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL

Wai 2700
Wai 3220

IN THE MATTER OF	the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975
AND	
IN THE MATTER OF	the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry
BY	Denise Messiter, on behalf of herself, her whānau, hapū, iwi, whānau whānui, and whāngai

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SUMMARY OF BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF DENISE MESSITER

13 February 2026

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Waitangi Tribunal
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Ministry of Justice
WELLINGTON

Ko Moehau ki Tai

Ko Aroha ki Uta

Ko Tikapakapa te moana

Ko Manaia tōku wā kāinga kei waenganui

Ko Toroa te Ariki o te waka Mātaatua

Ko Wairaka te Māreikura

Ko Tane-Moe-Ahi te Tangata

Ko Ngāti Pūkenga ki Waiau te Iwi

Ko Hauturu te maunga tapu hei kāwhena mō Te Kou-o-Rehua

Ko Te Kou-o-Rehua te Whare Tupuna

Ko Ngairihanga te whare kai

Ko Rena Pūnehu te tupuna kuia

Ko Whitiwhiti te tupuna koroua

Ko Isabelle Paraone, ētahi mokopuna a Rena Pūnehu rāua ko Whitiwhiti, tōku whaea.

Ko Leslie Messiter tōku matua. Ko au tō rāua mātāmua. Tokorua āku tamariki, ā, tokorima āku mokopuna.

I**, Denise Messiter,** Director**,** of Hauraki, state as follows:

1. I am Manukura (CEO) of Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki, an Incorporated Society supporting women and whānau to heal from violence.

2. I whakapapa to Ngāti Pukenga, Ngāti Tama te Rā, Ngāti Paoa, Ngāti Maru, Ngāti Raukatauri, and Te Arawa, and I speak particularly from my Te Arawa and Ngāti Huarere connections within the Moehau–Coromandel rohe.

3. I state expressly that my evidence speaks to Issue 1 of the Tribunal Statement of Issues, concerning the Crown's duties and obligations under te Tiriti/the Treaty in relation to the exercise of rangatiratanga and tikanga by wāhine Māori in relation to their status, roles, responsibilities,

practices, values, and beliefs, including the prejudice caused and relief required.

4. My evidence addresses the rangatiratanga pou, which concerns the exclusion of wāhine Māori from decision-making since the signing of te Tiriti.

5. In my introduction and Section B, I explain my understanding of mana wāhine and tino rangatiratanga, grounded in whakapapa, lived experience, and over 30 years of kaupapa Māori leadership across health, social services, housing, governance, research, and policy advocacy.

6. I draw on the lived authority of my tūpuna, Wikitoria Rangipiki and Wikitoria Nohohau, to illustrate how wāhine leadership was exercised in practice and how such leadership was later constrained by Crown systems.

7. I explain that my tūpuna exercised authority that was practical and relational, grounded in whakapapa, occupation, and responsibility for whānau and whenua. I describe how their whānau relationships were also governance relationships, and how mana was shared, exercised, and sustained within tikanga frameworks. This part of my evidence directly addresses Issue 1 of the Statement of Issues by setting out the nature of wāhine rangatira authority under tikanga as it existed prior to, and independent of, Crown systems.

8. I then explain how Crown land laws and the Native Land Court displaced wāhine rangatira authority. I state that these systems did not treat wāhine authority as determinative, but privileged formal court processes and Crown-defined categories of ownership over tikanga-based governance.

9. Even where wāhine names appeared on titles, authority was constrained because the Crown determined who held power and how it could be exercised.

10. I describe the Matamataharakeke Block case involving my tupuna, where the need to seek recognition through colonial mechanisms illustrates how

wāhine rangatira were forced to translate mana into Crown terms or risk exclusion. I explain that silencing also operated through succession, partition, and alienation processes that failed to preserve wāhine governance roles across generations.

11. I state that under Te Tiriti, the Crown received limited kāwanatanga while Māori retained tino rangatiratanga over lands, resources, taonga, and authority structures.

12. By displacing tikanga-based decision-making and failing to recognise wāhine rangatira authority, I state that the Crown breached its obligations of partnership, good faith, active protection, equity, and redress. This evidence directly addresses Issue 1(b) of the Statement of Issues concerning breach.

13. I explain that the resulting prejudice is material and intergenerational. Fragmentation and alienation of whenua diminished our capacity to care for whānau, protect wāhi tapu, and enact tikanga-based governance. This speaks directly to Issue 1(c) regarding prejudice and relief.

14. In Section D, I address contemporary Crown systems and their impact on wāhine Māori authority over kāinga, safety, and wellbeing. I state that the Crown has consistently failed to actively protect the tino rangatiratanga of Hauraki wāhine Māori, particularly in relation to housing, safety, welfare, justice, policing, and child protection systems.

15. I describe how over-representation in housing insecurity, exposure to mahi tūkino, and state intervention reflect systemic failures that deny wāhine meaningful control over where and how they live and whether they can remain connected to whenua, whakapapa, and support networks. I rely on *He Whare, He Taonga* (2024), which I attach as Annex A, as kaupapa Māori evidence of these systemic failures.

16. The report finds a clear connection between wāhine experiences of mahi tūkino and housing poverty, identifying housing insecurity as a primary contributor to harm. It uses kaupapa Māori methodology centred on

manaakitanga, whakamana, informed consent, confidentiality, and minimising harm, and explicitly centres wāhine voices through methods such as pūrākau narratives and mana wāhine research approaches.

17. I state that Crown frameworks individualise responsibility, fragment authority across agencies, and prioritise institutional processes over collective Māori decision-making. I am particularly concerned by evidence that some agencies use threats of child removal to pressure wāhine to relocate, which directly undermines tino rangatiratanga and severs connections to whenua and whakapapa.

18. This section addresses Issue 1 (duties, breach, prejudice), and also engages Issue 2 of the Statement of Issues concerning wāhine participation in governance and decision-making at local, regional, and central government levels, particularly in housing, welfare, justice, and Crown-established systems. It further informs Issue 3, which concerns the Crown's role in creating conditions for wāhine Māori leadership within the wider community and non-governmental sector, particularly in relation to the establishment and effectiveness of wāhine Māori-led organisations such as Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki.

19. Through Annex B (*Femicide and mana-wāhine*, June 2025), I situate contemporary violence within a broader analysis of colonisation and gendered structural harm. I explain that colonisation imposed foreign legal, political, and social systems that dismantled Māori governance, disrupted child-rearing practices, and undermined body sovereignty and cultural identity. Framing femicide as a human rights violation highlights the State's responsibility and shifts focus from individual blame to systemic failure.

20. This analysis reinforces my position that current inequities are not incidental but flow directly from Crown systems that displaced tikanga-based authority and failed to protect wāhine rangatira.

21. Overall, my evidence provides:

- **a.** a whakapapa-grounded account of wāhine rangatira authority under tikanga, illustrated through my tūpuna (Sections A–C);
- **b.** a legal-historical analysis of Crown displacement through land law and court processes (Crown Displacement section);
- **c.** an assessment of breach under Te Tiriti and the failure of active protection;
- **d.** evidence of intergenerational and contemporary prejudice, particularly in housing, safety, and state systems (Section D; Annex A and B); and
- **e.** a kaupapa Māori research base centring wāhine voices and proposing structural solutions.

22. My Brief most directly addresses Issue 1 of the Tribunal Statement of Issues by articulating the nature of wāhine rangatiratanga, identifying Crown breach, and describing prejudice. It also engages Issue 2 by examining how Crown-established systems constrain wāhine authority in governance, housing, justice, and child protection contexts, and informs Issue 3 by demonstrating how wāhine Māori-led organisations operate within, and are constrained by, Crown-created structural conditions.

23. Through whakapapa, lived leadership, research evidence, and structural analysis, I demonstrate that the Crown has failed to actively protect wāhine rangatira authority as it existed under tikanga, and that this failure continues to produce systemic and intergenerational harm.

Dated: 13 February 2026

Denise Messiter