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Waitangi Tribunal
10 Sep 26
Ministry of Justice
WELLINGTON

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TUKAU
LAW AND CONSULTANCY

Wai 1750 – Wai 1884 – Hearing Week 10 speaking notes of Rota Carrington

Introduction

1. These notes bring together my personal background, my whakapapa connection to this claim, my experience in education, and what I have seen through Crown education policies, under-resourcing and repeated intervention at Ōpōtiki College.

2. What I want to do is speak to those points in a way that connects them back to Te Tiriti obligations, and to the need for a different kind of partnership with Whakatōhea, Ngāti Ngahere, whānau, hapū and iwi.

3. I want to start with Ōpōtiki College, because it shows the pattern I am concerned about. Since 2015, five Limited Statutory Managers, or LSMs, have been appointed to the College. These are government-directed interventions, but the cost has been paid by the school from its operational grant. That is money that should have been available for teaching, learning and support for students.

4. For me, the question is this: if five LSMs have been needed, what sustainable improvement did each intervention actually leave behind?

5. Those interventions have focused on repairing governance and management systems. They have not dealt with the deeper historical, cultural and systemic issues affecting Whakatōhea and Ngāti Ngahere tamariki. To me, that reflects a continuing colonial approach: an external solution is imposed, but the aspirations, knowledge and authority of our tamariki, whānau, hapū and iwi are not properly recognised.

6. After the 2015 LSM appointment, a new principal was appointed with a Principal Recruitment Allowance. That allowance adds $50,000 a year to the base salary of a principal appointed to an eligible school facing significant challenges. The use of repeated statutory intervention, together with that allowance, shows that the Ministry knew the challenges at Ōpōtiki College were serious and ongoing. These were not short-term problems. They point to a long-standing and systemic failure to provide education that meets the needs of Ngāti Ngahere and Whakatōhea tamariki.

7. This is now an opportunity to move beyond repeated intervention and deficit-based responses. It is a time to support the newly appointed principal and work alongside whānau, hapū and iwi to create a kura that reflects the aspirations of Whakatōhea, responds to the needs of our tamariki, and recognises the considerable cultural knowledge, identity and competencies they already possess.

Personal Background

8. I am grateful for the opportunity to have these stories recorded before the Tribunal. For me, this is not only about recording our history. It is also about finding a way

forward that restores mana, recognises Whakatōhea mātauranga, and supports our tamariki in real and practical ways.

9. Mō tōku reo koretake, I say that I am a product of my time and of the impact of colonisation on my generation. When I went to school, te reo Māori was not even offered as a language option. That absence shaped my own experience of education. It is also part of the wider story of how Māori language and mātauranga were pushed to the margins.

10. My whakapapa is central to why I give this evidence. Ko Tarati Carrington tōku mama. Ko Paku Edwards tōku koroua. Ko Mei Thompson tōku kuia. Each of them has had a significant role in this claim and in the narratives I carry.

11. These are not distant stories that have been passed down through many generations. They are close to me through my own whānau. My koroua, Paku Edwards, was about 15 years old at the time of the raupatu. He was walked onto the reservation and experienced the deprivations that followed military invasion and dispossession. That history is not abstract for me. It informs the way I understand the impact of raupatu on education, identity and mana.

Impact of Raupatu on Whakatōhea Education Systems

12. When I think about the impact of raupatu on education, I also think about the Native Schools system. Its purpose was successful in creating a perception that te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori were inferior, and that they did not need to be acknowledged in education. Even those of our people who were able to attend mainstream schools were not really treated as mainstream. They were still seen as the Māori children from the pā. Their identity and knowledge were not recognised as carrying mana.

Lack of Government Resourcing and Support

13. In terms of government resourcing, one example I would give is the condition of the buildings at Ōpōtiki College. In 2017, those buildings still reflected the 1960s. Discussions with Ministry of Education property staff were drawn out, and by the time funding was available for building projects, inflation and rising costs had already made that funding inadequate. The later discovery of black mould helped expedite the rebuild that is now underway, but that mould had been present for years. To describe it as a recent discovery is like saying Aotearoa was discovered by Captain Cook. The issue was already known by the people living with it.

14. That is why I say there has been a pattern of government intervention that brings Crown solutions to Whakatōhea and Ngāti Ngahere issues. In my view, the College has too often become an income stream for Crown-appointed representatives, while the deeper needs of our tamariki have remained unresolved.

Poor Cultural Representation and Recognition of Cultural Competency

15. On cultural representation, I think about things that may seem small, but they tell our tamariki whose identity is valued. For example, the house names at the College included Jellicoe, Rutherford and Freyberg. Those names may be familiar in a Western school context, but they did not reflect the mana, whakapapa or histories of Whakatōhea and Ngāti Ngahere tamariki. That is why I ask: where is the mana?

16. Cultural representation and cultural competency need to be visible across the whole school: in the curriculum, the buildings, the environment, governance, leadership, staffing and relationships with whānau, hapū and iwi. It is not enough to add Māori words or symbols after decisions have already been made. Schools in the rohe need to recognise the cultural knowledge our tamariki already carry, and build learning from that foundation.

17. I also remember taking a photo of the school hall because it could have been anywhere in the world. It did not look like the hall of a school with an 80 percent Māori roll. There was nothing in that space that said this was a kura for Whakatōhea tamariki. That absence matters, because the physical environment tells students whose identity, history and mana are valued. Where is the mana in that!

Concluding Remarks: Partnership, LSMs and Outcomes for Tauira

18. This is why I believe we now have an opportunity to move beyond repeated intervention and deficit-based responses. Our new principal is a whāngai of Ngāti Rua and one of ours, yet he has started his role with a Limited Statutory Manager overlooking his practice. I think it is time to support him properly, and to work alongside whānau, hapū and iwi to create a kura that reflects the aspirations of Whakatōhea, responds to the needs of our tamariki, and recognises the cultural knowledge, identity and competencies they already possess.

Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi Obligations

19. In my view, the Crown has breached its Te Tiriti obligations in several connected ways. I see a failure of active protection, a failure to uphold tino rangatiratanga, a failure of partnership, a failure to provide equitable educational outcomes, and continuing prejudice to Whakatōhea tamariki.

20. The Crown has an obligation to actively protect the educational interests and wellbeing of Māori tamariki. The fact that five LSMs have been appointed since 2015 shows that the Ministry knew Ōpōtiki College faced serious and continuing difficulties. But despite that knowledge, those interventions did not produce sustainable improvement for Whakatōhea and Ngāti Ngahere tamariki.

Failure to uphold tino rangatiratanga

21. The repeated imposition of externally appointed managers reflects Crown control rather than genuine recognition of the authority and aspirations of Whakatōhea, Ngāti Ngahere, whānau and hapū. The interventions appear to have been done to the school and its community, rather than designed and implemented with iwi as an education partner.

Failure of partnership

22. To me, a genuine Treaty partnership would mean the Ministry working alongside Whakatōhea and Ngāti Ngahere to identify the real causes of educational failure and to co-design a long-term response. In practice, that means iwi authority, whānau voice, local mātauranga and the needs of tamariki must shape the solution from the beginning. They should not be added in later, after an external governance or management model has already been chosen.

Failure to provide equitable educational outcomes

23. Repeated LSM appointments and the use of a Principal Recruitment Allowance are evidence that the Ministry recognised the exceptional challenges facing the college. However, recognising those challenges without addressing their causes has allowed inequitable outcomes to continue. Equity requires more than treating Ōpōtiki College like any other school; it requires a response proportionate to the longstanding disadvantage experienced by its Māori learners.

Continuing prejudice to Whakatōhea tamariki

24. The school was required to pay the costs of government-appointed LSMs from its operational grant. This diverted money intended for teaching and student learning to pay for interventions that did not deliver lasting change. Whakatōhea tamariki therefore carried the cost of the Crown's response while continuing to experience the consequences of a system that did not adequately recognise their identity, language, culture and existing cultural competencies.

25. Taken together, these matters suggest a pattern of repeated Crown intervention without partnership, sustainable improvement or redress. The Ministry's own education strategy states that whānau, hapū and iwi should exercise authority in education and be active partners in defining outcomes for Māori learners. The experience of Ōpōtiki College described in this evidence falls well short of that commitment. Ministry of Education

26. I also think about the fact that scientists from Lincoln are now acknowledging Whakatōhea mātauranga in their research. I ask: where has the Ministry of Education respected the mana and mātauranga of Whakatōhea in the past? If others can recognise the value of that knowledge, then surely the education system responsible for our tamariki must also recognise it and build from it.

27. My final point to the Tribunal is this: our tamariki should not have to leave their identity, language, whakapapa and mātauranga at the school gate in order to succeed. The current system has too often treated those things as separate from education, when they are central to who our tamariki are and how they learn. The way forward must be built with Whakatōhea and Ngāti Ngahere, not imposed on us. It must restore mana as well as improve outcomes.