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TUKAU
LAW AND CONSULTANCY

**Wai 1750 – Wai 1884 – Hearing Week 10 speaking notes of Nicholas Magill**

## Opening

1. Tēnā koutou katoa. Ko Nicholas Magill tōku ingoa. He uri nō Te Whakatōhea, nō Ngāi Tamahaua.

2. I want to begin with words that have come to hold a great deal of meaning for me.

3. E kore au e ngaro / E kore au e whakamā / He kaha nei i ahau / Ki te kimi, ki te rapu / Ko wai au.

4. To search. To seek. Who am I?

5. For me, those words describe a journey that began with not knowing. I grew up disconnected from my iwi, my whakapapa and my whenua. I knew there was something missing, but I did not have the language or the knowledge to name it.

6. My evidence today is about that journey: who I was before I knew where I came from; how I came to understand the disconnection in my own whānau; what it took for me to reconnect; and what I hope might make that journey easier for other uri of Te Whakatōhea.

## Pou 1 — Ko wai au: Who I am

7. I am giving this evidence as an uri of Te Whakatōhea and Ngāi Tamahaua. But I did not grow up with that knowledge as a lived part of my identity.

8. For most of my life, I understood myself primarily as Pākehā. That was the world I knew. I did not grow up knowing our whakapapa in the way that I now understand it. I did not grow up connected to Te Whakatōhea, to our marae, to our reo, or to the everyday life of the iwi.

9. When I was a teenager, I found out that I was Māori. I remember that as an important moment, but not as a complete answer. Knowing that I was Māori did not tell me who my people were. It did not tell me where I belonged. It did not tell me how to reconnect or whether there was a place for me.

10. I knew I was Māori, but I did not yet know how to belong.

11. At that time, my identity felt uncertain. I had a piece of information, but I did not yet have a relationship with it. I did not know my iwi. I did not know my whakapapa. I did not know the tikanga. And I did not know whether someone who had grown up as disconnected as I had could really find their way back.

12. Over time, my education and research became closely connected to those questions. My learning has helped me find language for experiences that I had felt

personally: identity, belonging, endurance, disconnection, and reconnection. But my evidence today is not primarily an academic argument. It is grounded first in lived experience, in what happened to one whānau, and in what it meant for me five generations later.

13. I am not speaking about disconnection as an abstract historical idea. I am speaking about its consequences as they were experienced in my own life.

14. I also want to be clear about the way I speak about my whānau. I do not speak with blame. I have come to understand that people made decisions in the circumstances they faced, often with survival in mind. My purpose is to show how those circumstances can continue to shape the lives of descendants long after the original events.

15. For a long time, the question "Ko wai au?" was a question I could not answer with confidence. I could say my name. I could say where I had lived. But I could not say, in a grounded way, who my people were or where I came from.

16. Growing up disconnected did not mean I felt nothing. It meant I did not always know what I was feeling or where to take those questions. There can be an uncertainty in knowing that something is missing, while not knowing how to ask for it. There can also be a fear that asking will expose how little you know.

17. That is why this evidence matters to me. It is not just a story of eventually finding information. It is a story of gradually finding relationships, confidence, and a sense of place.

**Pou 2 — Ngā tīpuna me te motu: My tīpuna and how we became disconnected**

18. I am the fifth generation descended from Ngahiraka. I understand myself to be the first person in my direct line since Ngahiraka to reconnect with Te Whakatōhea in the way that I have been able to.

19. When I look back through that line, I do not see one simple moment where connection was lost. I see a gradual process. I see raupatu and upheaval. I see leaving Ōpōtiki. I see generations living away from home. I see the pressures of assimilation and the silences that can grow around whakapapa. And eventually I see a descendant, who grew up not knowing who he was in relation to his own iwi.

20. I have come to understand Ngahiraka's departure from Ōpōtiki not simply as a decision about geography. It was a decision made in a period of immense upheaval, about how our whānau would survive. I cannot claim to know every detail of her experience. But from what I have learned, I understand that those decisions were shaped by the raupatu, and the resulting conditions that made remaining connected to home, land and community incredibly difficult.

21. Surviving those five generations was itself an act of endurance.

22. The generations that followed slowly began losing that connection assimilating into te ao Pākehā. There were movements away from home, new lives built elsewhere, and a gradual weakening of the everyday relationships that carry whakapapa, reo and tikanga from one generation to the next.

23. By the time of my mother's generation, that knowledge was no longer readily available. Whakapapa was not something that was known. The connection had not disappeared in the sense that our ancestry had ceased to exist, whakapapa was always there. But the knowledge of it, and the lived relationship with it, had disappeared.

24. That distinction matters to me. My whakapapa was never gone. What was lost was our family's knowledge and lived connection to it. And when that knowledge is not passed on, the effects can become very personal. You may grow up without knowing what has been lost. You may simply feel that there is a part of yourself that you cannot explain.

25. The land was not the only thing that was lost.

26. There was also loss of reo, tikanga, whakapapa knowledge, iwi identity, belonging and relationship with whenua. These are not separate things. They hold each other up. When a whānau is displaced from its whenua and its community over generations, it can become harder for the next generation to know where to begin.

27. This is why I do not describe my own disconnection as a personal failure or as a lack of interest by my whānau. It was the outcome of a much longer story. In my experience, historical events do not stay in the past. Their consequences can move through a family quietly, through what is not taught, what is not spoken of, and what no longer feels possible.

28. By my generation, I had grown up mostly thinking of myself as Pākehā. That was not because my whakapapa had disappeared. It was because the bridge to that whakapapa had been weakened across generations.

29. What happened to my whānau was not one moment of disconnection. It happened gradually, across generations.

30. Understanding this has changed the way I see Ngahiraka and the generations who came after her. I see resilience. I see people who endured extraordinary conditions. I see a whānau that survived. And I also see the cost of survival when the connection to home becomes harder to carry forward.

31. It is important to me that this is understood as one whānau story. I am not saying it is identical to every Te Whakatōhea uri. I am saying that it shows how the effects of historical loss can continue in the life of a descendant: loss of connection, loss of knowledge, loss of confidence, and uncertainty about belonging.

**Pou 3 — Te hokinga ki te kāinga: My reconnection**

32. When I first found out that I was Māori, I thought that knowing that part of my identity would somehow give me a sense of belonging.

33. But it did not.

34. I knew that I was Māori, but I did not really know what that meant for me. I did not know my iwi. I did not know my whakapapa. I did not know the tikanga. And I did not know whether there was actually a place for someone like me.

35. At the time, being Māori was just an idea, a puzzle piece that I did not know where to put.

36. Looking back now, I realise that discovering my whakapapa and reconnecting with it were two very different things. Knowing where I came from was the beginning. Learning how to belong was the journey.

37. One of the turning points in that journey happened at university. I enrolled in a Mana Motuhake paper, without knowing that the lecturer standing at the front of the room was actually my uncle, Professor Te Kahautu Maxwell.

38. At that point, I knew I was Te Whakatōhea, but I knew almost nothing about my iwi or my whakapapa. Meeting Uncle Te Kahautu became a really important turning point for me. He encouraged me to become involved, gave me confidence, and helped me take those first steps into a world that I knew very little about.

39. At the time, I probably thought it was just a remarkable coincidence. Looking back now, I see it differently. I see it as a tohu from my tīpuna.

40. Another moment that stands out to me happened even before I really understood my whakapapa. When I was about eighteen or nineteen, I bought a second-hand copy of Whakatōhea of Ōpōtiki by A.C. Lyall. I did not know it was a book about my own iwi.

41. For some reason, I bought it and took it home. It sat on my bookshelf for years. It moved with me as I changed houses and cities, but I never really opened it. It was only after reconnecting with Uncle Te Kahautu and becoming more curious about who I was that I remembered the book. I picked it up and finally read it.

42. Looking back, it feels like the pathway home was there before I even knew that I was looking for it.

43. That book became one of the first resources that helped me understand my whakapapa, the history of Te Whakatōhea and where I came from. But knowing the history was not enough. I still had to take the step of actually entering my iwi.

44. In 2023, Te Kahautu invited me to attend an Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti wānanga at Te Rere Marae while the rōpū were preparing for Te Matatini. I remember being incredibly nervous. I did not know many people. I knew very little about the tikanga. I was not sure what was expected of me, and I was not sure whether I belonged there. I felt like a deer in headlights.

45. But I had a strong feeling in my puku that I needed to go.

46. When I walked through the doors of Te Rere Marae, I was welcomed by Te Whakatōhea who embraced me as whānau and made me feel like I was home. People wanted to know who I was and where I had come from. Instead of feeling judged or like I did not belong, I felt welcomed.

47. That was a really important moment for me. I had spent a lot of time wondering whether I was Māori enough, whether I belonged, and whether I needed to somehow become someone different in order to fit into Te Whakatōhea.

48. There was not one way to be Māori. I did not have to become someone else. I simply had to be myself.

49. That was the first time I really experienced what it meant to belong within Te Whakatōhea. For the first time, I felt like I was finding my way home.

50. And that experience changed what happened next. From there, everything seemed to snowball. I attended Tohekura, here at Te Rere, the annual Te Reo Māori wānanga for Te Whakatōhea. There I met other people who were also on their own journeys of reconnection. That was reassuring because I realised I was not alone. Everyone was at a different stage of finding their way back to their whakapapa.

51. Tohekura strengthened my desire to learn te reo Māori and gave me the confidence to keep learning when I returned home. And Tohekura itself became a model for me to understand how reconnection can occur. Our marae opening the doors to all uri to come home for a weekend.

52. As I became more involved, I started attending my hapū hui. It didn't take long before I was, in typical fashion, “voluntold” to put my name forward for the Te Whakatōhea Fisheries Trust.

53. That meant a lot to me. My hapū placed their trust in someone who had grown up disconnected but genuinely wanted to reconnect. That trust gave me even more motivation to contribute back to my iwi.

54. Since then, reconnection has continued. I find any excuse I can to go home to Ōpōtiki and spend time with my whānau and my iwi. I continue to attend wānanga and hapū hui. I continue to learn te reo Māori. I continue to spend time at home.

55. Reconnection is not something that happens once. It is ongoing.

56. When I look back now, I realise that reconnecting with Te Whakatōhea was not one decision I made. It was a series of doors that opened for me. First, I discovered my whakapapa. Then I met people who helped me understand it. Then I was welcomed. Then I was given opportunities to participate. And eventually, I began to feel like I belonged.

57. That is what I mean when I say I found my way home.

58. But there is something else I have learned from that experience. None of those things happened simply because I decided one day that I was going to reconnect. I needed people. I needed knowledge. I needed opportunities. I needed somewhere to go. And, most importantly, I needed someone to open the door.

**Pou 4 — Ngā wawata mō ngā uri: Creating pathways home**

59. My reconnection has changed the direction of my life. It changed how I see myself, how I understand Te Whakatōhea, and what I want to contribute. My Master’s research became an extension of that journey. Through Te Whakatōhea pūrākau, tikanga and the idea of endurance, I came to understand endurance as more than physical ability. It is also part of the history and identity of our people, the capacity to endure raupatu, colonisation and generations of cultural disconnection.

60. My doctoral research continues from that question. At its heart, it asks: how can we help other Te Whakatōhea uri find their way home? I want to understand the journeys of uri who have experienced disconnection, and what helps people reconnect with their identity, whakapapa and iwi.

61. What I want is for Te Whakatōhea to have the space, resources and authority to facilitate that reconnection on our own terms. For me, that is an expression of mana motuhake. Our iwi knows our people, our tikanga, our whakapapa and our whenua. We are best placed to decide what reconnection should look like, and how it should be offered to uri who have grown up disconnected.

62. Mana motuhake means having the ability to create and lead our own pathways of reconnection, in ways that are grounded in Te Whakatōhea values, priorities and relationships.

63. My own experience has made me realise that wanting to come home is not always enough. There are many uri of Te Whakatōhea who may genuinely want to reconnect, but who live outside the rohe. For some, coming home physically is simply not realistic at a particular point in their lives.

64. There are barriers of distance and cost. There are family commitments. There is the uncertainty of not knowing who to contact, what is happening, whether an event is open to you, or whether you will be welcome. There are also practical barriers around housing and employment. Someone may want deeply to return to Ōpōtiki, but a return has to be possible as a life, not just as a visit.

65. Wanting to reconnect is only the first step. We also need the conditions that make reconnection possible.

66. I want to give a current, practical illustration of what I mean. When I checked the available listings on Sunday, Trade Me showed four rental properties across its Ōpōtiki location search. On the same day, Trade Me Jobs showed two jobs in Ōpōtiki. SEEK's exact-location search showed five jobs in Ōpōtiki, and four of those were advertised by Te Tāwharau o Te Whakatōhea, so mahi our people are already doing.

67. These figures are only a snapshot. Listings can change from day to day, and I am not presenting them as a complete measure of either the housing market or the local economy. But they show the practical reality for a person considering a return: the available options can be very few. When housing is scarce and the number of local jobs is limited, the desire to come home may not be enough to make that return possible.

68. Coming home must be possible as a life, not only as a visit.

69. I want to be clear: my experience is that Te Whakatōhea is welcoming. The barrier is not that our iwi is unwelcoming. The challenge is often helping people take that first step through the door, especially those who are far away, uncertain, or who have never had anyone introduce them.

70. That is where I see potential in Toheconnect: an online wānanga and connection space for uri. The central idea is simple. If our people cannot always come home physically, then we should find ways to bring the iwi, the wānanga and opportunities for reconnection closer to them.

71. Toheconnect is not a substitute for coming home. It cannot replace standing on the whenua, being welcomed into a marae, sitting with whānau, or the relationships that are built face to face. I do not think online connection replaces whenua. But it can be a pathway into reconnection. It can make the first step less frightening and less lonely.

72. I look at Tohekura as a beautiful kaupapa, an opportunity to immerse ourselves in te reo Māori, however the reo can still be seen as an intimidating barrier. I was asked recently how would you introduce my mother into our iwi, and the idea of a language wānanga immediately felt like a barrier.

73. An accessible online wānanga could give uri a place to begin. It could help someone learn the stories of Te Whakatōhea, hear te reo, understand our place in the world, meet other uri on similar journeys, and find out who to contact. It could tell them: you are welcome; you are not alone; there is a place to start.

74. If our people cannot always come home physically, we should bring the iwi and the opportunity for reconnection to them.

75. In that way, a person might begin online, build confidence and relationships, and then be better prepared to come home when they are able. The point is not to lower the value of physical reconnection. The point is to create more than one doorway.

76. The pathways also need to include the conditions that allow people to return and remain connected: housing opportunities, meaningful employment, support for te reo and cultural learning, accessible information about wānanga and iwi life, and programmes deliberately designed to include uri who have grown up disconnected.

77. This is why mana motuhake matters in practical terms. It is not only about being able to speak for ourselves. It is about being able to design the solutions: our own wānanga, our own pathways for uri, our own housing and employment aspirations, and our own priorities for strengthening connection.

78. I am not here to prescribe a single funding mechanism or to claim I have every answer. I am speaking from what my own journey has shown me. Reconnection takes more than individual desire. It takes relationships, knowledge, welcome, opportunity, and practical support, led by Te Whakatōhea.

79. Te Whakatōhea reconnects its people. Support from outside should enable us to exercise mana motuhake and remove the conditions that make reconnection difficult.

80. My aspiration is that future uri do not have to spend as long as I did wondering whether they belong, where they should start, or whether they are Māori enough. I hope they can find a pathway that meets them where they are, while still leading them back toward their whenua, their whānau and their iwi.

**Closing**

81. I began with a question: Ki te kimi, ki te rapu — ko wai au? To search. To seek. Who am I?

82. For much of my life, I did not know how to answer that question in relation to my whakapapa. I knew something was missing. Over time, I came to understand why that connection had become difficult for my whānau. And through the welcome, knowledge and opportunities I received from Te Whakatōhea, I began to find my way home.

83. I know who I am. I know where I come from. I know where I belong.

84. But I also know that there are other uri who are still searching. Some may not know where to begin. Some may be living far away. Some may want to return but face very real barriers. My hope is that they do not have to search for as long as I did.

85. The consequences of disconnection are still being felt across generations. But reconnection is possible when people have a pathway home.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.