

Te whenua te wai u mo nga tamariki o te tangata whenua

Na Joe Karetai

The recent findings of the Waitangi Tribunal that show great injustices against the Waikato people (Tainui canoe) in the Manukau Harbour only exposes the tip of the iceberg. Not only were large tracts of land spirited away from our Maori people by straight out dubious manipulation, but also estuaries and water resources. If the Waitangi Tribunal were to conduct hearings of maori land and water injustices from Taitokerau in the far north to Murihiku (Southland) in the deep south, what has occurred in the Manukau Harbour would only be an opening chapter to one of the greatest tragedies in New Zealand history.

Let me illustrate with an example concerning tribal land in south eastern Otago.

In 1848 when Ngaitahu sold the land between Kaiapoi in the North and Bluff in the South to the New Zealand Company an area of 500 acres was reserved to Ngaitahu at Tautuku in South East Otago. My ancestor Korako Karetai was an original owner in the block and my family still own shares in there. During the last 100 years or so, some of the land has been acquired by the Crown for scenic reserves and compensation paid to the owners at the time it was taken. The compensation was based on market values for land prevailing at the time. There was no compensation for loss of turangawaewae or for its value in tourist dollar terms but I digress.

The scenic reserves surround the remaining area of native bush and access to State Highway 92 is only through Crown land. The present generation of environmental agencies have looked over the remaining area of maori freehold land and seen a logical extension of the scenic reserves. They were faced with the usual problem. No money. Their method of resolving this problem was like all good ideas, simplicity itself.

Someone prompted Lands and Survey Department staff to prepare a national coastal reserves survey which advanced the concept of a Coastal Park for the preservation of the Chaslands Coast between Tahakopa Bay and Waikawa Harbour. The maori land at Tautuku was included in the study. Through the agency of the Ministry of Works and Development, still at the tax payers expense, the Clutha County Council was persuaded to have regard for the Land and Survey Department's report and to include provisions protecting native bush at Tautuku in its proposed District Scheme.

The Council did not want to designate the land for Scenic Reserve because that would involve compensation. The Crown did not want to designate the land for the same reason. Getting past this obstacle was also quite simple. The

Council zoned the maori land Rural B, and said that in the Rural B zone you cannot fell native bush without formal planning consent from the Council requiring of a conditional use application. It was very neat and tidy. The native bush was protected without as much as a thank you for the owners.

So who are the owners? There are more than 1000 owners scattered throughout New Zealand and beyond. In 1983 the Maori Land Court vested most of the block in three trustees. All three are owners namely: Sid Cormack, Rangi Te Maiharoa and Narna Dunn. Their task was to come up with a management

or development plan for the future benefit of all of the owners. The timing of the vesting in the three owners was most fortuitous because without their vigilance and active opposition this planning atrocity would have occurred before the owners knew what was going on.

The trustees contacted the Maori Trustee and pointed out the difficulty facing them. The land was vested in them, it was not revenue producing, and they were meeting all the costs of running the trust out of their own pockets. It was not possible for them to take on the Clutha County Council, the Departments of State and the conservation groups without professional assistance. It was agreed the Maori Trustee would lend his weight to their objection to the proposed district scheme and that happened. The Ministry of Works and Development and the Royal New Zealand Forest and Bird Protection Society (NZFBPS) predictably opposed the Maori Trustee's objection at the Clutha County Council hearings and while the Maori Trustee had some success, most of the maori

Map showing the proposed 'coastal park'.

