



Iwi Research and Development – Nga Tahuu o Te Taiao 2007 Fisheries Research: Summary of Findings

In 2007 a number of Te Rarawa people contributed to a fisheries research project under the banner of Nga Tahuu o Te Taiao. The fisheries research was contracted by the Ministry of Fisheries as part of the work associated with establishing a plan for Te Rarawa customary fishing. This paper summarises the key findings of the research and may be read in conjunction with other Iwi Research and Development summaries that will be produced throughout 2008.

The enlightened thinking and crucial role of those Te Rarawa people who contributed to the research, hapu planning, setting up of takutaimoana committees and discussions about rohe moana and fisheries management is gratefully acknowledged. Several research interviews were undertaken by community interviewers trained specifically for this project. Their enthusiasm has been greatly appreciated.

Those who contributed interviews were asked about the nature of their interactions with their local marine environment, the range of species they fished, the fishing methods used, and the changes in the environment that they had seen in their lifetime. In effect the focus on oral sources of information reflects the fact that the main access to customary knowledge of Te Rarawa fishing is through the oral narratives of Te Rarawa people.

Overview

Overall, the research reveals a strong flax-roots view that hapu and iwi management of Te Rarawa customary fisheries ought to emphasise and plan for the revitalisation and long-term sustainability of the coastal and marine environment. When asked about changes in their fishing practices, practically every research participant described an environment and fishery in a state of decline. When asked about aspirations for the future, they prioritised the desire to ensure that the basic act of fishing and gathering kaimoana could be enjoyed by all future Te Rarawa generations.

Meanwhile, the current 'official' approach to customary fishing is viewed cynically - regarded as too weighted toward policing on behalf of the ministry; issuing and enforcing permits, for instance. Also, there is a related perception that the ministry uses far too narrow a definition of terms like 'customary fishing', 'taonga species', and 'kaitiakitanga'. As one interview contributor put it: "how can we talk about kaitiakitanga if we don't have rangatiratanga?" And to paraphrase another: all kaimoana has a value, and it is too difficult to value one species more highly than another.

These views, and the key findings that follow, developed against iwi backgrounds and histories that are deeply attuned to the sea. The current generation of ahi kaa variously referred to growing up 'abiding by the laws of nature' and fishing in a way that responds to 'what the sea throws up'. This lived responsiveness to nature and the sea is fundamental to understanding Te Rarawa fishing practices and knowledge. It is further highlighted by the Te Rarawa environment itself; water and its associated fisheries feature in the life and geography of all Te Rarawa marae and hapū. Te Rarawa marae are historically part of the marine environment, dependent on the produce of the sea in economic, political and survival terms.

Key Findings

The following key points have been discerned from the research findings and conclusions and ought to be accounted for in the development and implementation of the Te Rarawa fisheries plan:

- Fishing knowledge and practices are highly nuanced, specific and localised. Fine distinctions in fisheries knowledge, practices and species occur between hapu along the Te Rarawa coastline. Informants who are familiar with the features from Tauroa to Hukatere will not necessarily be as familiar with the Herekino and Whangape harbours, for example. And, typically, they cite particular grounds along particular stretches of coastline, and identify individual species in relation to individual sites, such as named rock formations or other grounds.
- The Te Rarawa marine environment supports an impressive variety of kaimoana, far too many to list here. Te Rarawa iwi have customarily fished and gathered from all parts of their marine environments – creeks, rivers, lakes, wetlands, harbours, the foreshore, and from fishing grounds miles out at sea.
- In contemporary times, the range and availability of kaimoana is characterised by decline – in size, numbers and ease of catch. Many species could once be harvested in abundance, but can no longer. For

example, shellfish like pipi, tipa and scallops were once found in the Hokianga harbour, but nowadays cannot be found, even at locations known to have been plentiful less than fifty years ago.

- 'Getting a feed' is the reason interview contributors most often gave for fishing. However, the 'feed' for which they fish is not necessarily for themselves alone, or even their families, but is often distributed throughout their community or provided for a variety of hui, community functions and events. Such acts of getting a feed are regulated by tikanga and nature (including seasons, tides and weather). They are interwoven with manaakitanga, which has the effect of maintaining long-established practices of re-distributing kaimoana caught and gathered.
- Te Rarawa fishing knowledge and practice is transmitted in organic and experiential ways. The learning of Te Rarawa fishers is so socially, culturally and historically embedded it is often couched in terms of 'common sense'. It occurs around whanau and community activities, and is regarded as constituting a 'lifetime of learning'.
- The remoteness and isolation of many Te Rarawa communities means that kaitiakitanga is often an exercise in self-reliance. Tangata whenua often take a lead in dealing with the waste left by visitors, assisting people whose vehicles get stuck on the beach, saving people from drowning or retrieving those who have drowned. Te Rarawa people effectively do what must be done for the sake of the environment and for the safety of people. The responsibility falls to them due not only to their customary role as bearers of mana whenua and mana moana, but also to the absence of the usual publicly provided facilities such as refuse facilities and water safety services. Consequently Te Rarawa communities make an important, and largely unrecognised, contribution to the public good.
- Customary Te Rarawa fishing occurs against a background of an ever-changing and stressed Te Rarawa marine environment. A priority concern is environmental degradation, coupled with a great – yet un-resourced – commitment to restoring and preserving the natural health of the sea.

- People are especially concerned by the threat that trawlers and other large-scale commercial fishers pose to Te Rarawa fisheries. Siltation, pollution and littering also concern Te Rarawa hapu and whanau, and the problems range from the petty littering of visitors who fail to pick up after themselves to the dumping of waste and spent fishing gear by commercial fishers.

Management of Te Rarawa Fisheries

Overall, the research indicates that contemporary management of Te Rarawa fisheries ought to respond to current Te Rarawa fishing knowledge and practices. The details of how to implement such an approach are yet to be worked out in discussions with the komiti takutaimoana and tangata tiaki. In the meantime, a couple of potentially useful broad observations arising from the research are offered here:

- Firstly, the nature of customary Te Rarawa fishing, with its mix of basic human need (food) and socio-cultural responsibility, means it is not well-suited to the usual methods of monitoring catches. For instance, counting a net full of mullet as the single catch of one or two fishers may not reflect the customary reality of that catch being distributed well beyond the fishers' households; and
- Secondly, if environmental issues are not addressed at a local level, there will be no fisheries about which to comply. Strategies to restore species, such as fish farming or the imposition of bag limits, will have little effect without a comprehensive programme for ecological restoration at a very local level. Meanwhile, Te Rarawa communities live with and respond to other people's poor environmental habits on a daily basis. Yet (for example) if Te Rarawa customary practices had any real authority beyond their own whānau and hapu the simple guideline of 'no waste, no fires, no gutting and cleaning' below the high tide mark would make a marked difference to coastal waste management.