



Iwi Research and Development – Nga Tahuhu o te Taiao Te Mauri o Te Ukaipo Summary of Findings: Kai

In 2007 a number of Te Rarawa people contributed to the Te Mauri o Te Ukaipo research project under the banner of Ngā Tāhuhu o Te Taiao. This paper is one of several that summarises the key findings of the Mauri research and interviews. It can be read in conjunction with other Iwi Research and Development summaries that will be produced throughout 2008.

Te Mauri o Te Ukaipo is about the intersections between the environment and Te Rarawa views of wellbeing. This summary focuses on 'kai', a central theme drawn from the Mauri interviews. No matter what the topic, kai became a part of every interview. Kai seemed to link with all aspects of Te Rarawa being – species of kaimoana and plants, planting and harvesting kai, rearing animals for kai, whanau practices around kai, the economics of kai, protecting sources of kai, socialising and kai, preparing kai, recipes and cooking kai, eating kai, the flavours of kai, the work associated with kai. The list could be endless, but generally korero about kai related to survival, manaakitanga and socialising.

“We didn’t starve, if we couldn’t get fish we’d get mussels”

Food has been central to Te Rarawa survival. All sorts of locally available foods have been hunted and harvested – from berries (karaka, taraire, miro, totara, kahikatea), tawhara, rabbits, pheasants, ducks, turkeys, pigeons, to the usual home-kill meats, and vegetables. People living in remote coastal areas were especially dependent on the sea for kai. It was the whanau pantry and weekly routines revolved around gathering various types of kaimoana.

... eighty percent of our diet would have been fish; fish in one form or another ... The sea was just as important as breathing

The season and stocks determined the species of kaimoana gathered. The focus was on “getting a feed” of the best that was available, rather than a particular species, though without breaking certain rules and learned tikanga.

All kaimoana to me has a value ... When I can harvest anything from [the sea] I'm grateful

Specific and local knowledge of mahinga kai practices was fundamental to getting a feed – knowing when mullet were spawning for example and not fishing for them during that period, knowing when kai was in prime condition, the fishing spots for netting and line fishing, and when and where to gather shellfish. With a good grasp of the moons, tides and local environment, the practices became common sense.

They [our people] live by the cycle of the moon and the weather and the tides ... lived according to what nature was doing ...

.. time for fishing was sort of three days before the full moon and three days after the full moon in those days. ... those Maori calendar days sort of don't work these days because there's so many changes in the whole environment ... my old man he always worked by the Maori calendar. It seemed to work in those days.

Whanau love kaimoana

Dozens of fish species were talked about, often in a way that made you hungry. The fishers were very particular about quality and had learned exactly what to look for, and kai preparation. For every variety of kaimoana there was a recipe or two. Whanau recipes involved different techniques and there was plenty of rivalry between whanau for what was considered the best dish.

Whanau made use of whatever varieties of kai were available. For example, seagull eggs were so plentiful they were collected and used for frying, and baking cakes and sponges.

... we used to go and pick seagull eggs ... two four-gallon drums of seagull eggs in a day and that's shelled ...there was just bloody millions of seagulls around ... but [now] you can go down the beach her and you can drive the whole beach, you probably can count the seagulls on two hands.

Mutton birds, penguin and seagulls were also remembered as kai on the tables in the late 1940s.

... the old people used to eat them penguins, the baby ones though and seagulls. I know I didn't like them because they were really rich oily taste. I know my Dad and my grandfather used to love them.

Other delicacies included starfish, stingray, seahorses, and:

... karengo off the rocks. It was like a little green lettuce and kotare moana, you fry them in cream

My grandmother used to eat the shark. She used to hang it on the line till it dried but I didn't eat that.

Gardening

A wide variety of fruit and vegetables was grown in the old days when gardening was prolific. Bottling, preserving, and making pickles and jams not only provided for the household but also the marae and community functions throughout the year. Seed was collected and saved from season to season to maintain good stock. Fruit tree cuttings were spread amongst whanau to ensure special varieties lived on. Modern lifestyles, the advent of all-year-round, all-day access to supermarkets, refrigeration, and transport changed the practice of gardening for many people and few large gardens are seen these days.

Gardens and the lands that raised animals were generally organic by default but it was only in recent times that this was acknowledged as a positive and healthy thing,

... you knew your parents had gardens and you knew organically organic was good. We never needed to be told that, we knew from experience, tasting nice, good, healthy food that you'd grown yourself ... your body tells you it's good kai, your whole ahua knows it's good kai ...

Kai and social interaction

Kai played a huge role in social functions – whether for a planned event or celebration, a tangihanga, unexpected visitors, or a meeting or picnic on the beach. Family Sunday outings at the beach were once common:

... everybody. You know like the cream truck used to come out and pick up all the families along the way, just park down the beach all day Sunday and that's all they do is pick enough kai to last for the next weekend.

... there were nine of us ...Dad would throw an iron on the truck and the net and after church on a Sunday we used to go to the beach and just net for mullet. Build a fire, throw the mullet [on], you know guts and scales and all, onto the corrugated iron. It was great as a family.

Manaakitanga was closely linked to kaimoana:

... if somebody came we'd go down and get some toheroa, get some mussel, depends on the tide ... if we were getting visitors we'd go down and do some netting and get some mullet and smoke them ... if they had something on at the marae or something at the school or a tangi.

Kai as currency

Exchanging kai was common practice, particularly between the fishing, hunting and gardening whanau.

..only certain people that went out fishing ... other people that went out hunting ... the inlanders ... doing their gardens ... Exchanged fish for kumara and pumpkin and corn and riwai and all that kind of thing. Happened all the time ... cause nobody had any money ...

...they would arrive at our place with about 70 [or] 50, 20lb snappers and they'll swap one of the snappers with my old man for a bottle of cream, and go to the next house and swap a snapper for a bucket of potatoes or something. That always happened and that's how people lived and they done really well by doing it.

Changing kai supplies

People remembered back to when kaimoana was plentiful, when tikanga ensured sustainable supplies, when there was no need for formal regulatory controls.

... we would pick kutai and toheroa and fish for snapper and trevally. We didn't even fish for kahawai in those days. Kahawai was just a bait fish and that everyone sort of turned their noses up to cause there was so much snapper around.

The kaimoana and fisheries was protected and everybody went out to get kai for their whanau ... that was the only reason they went to the beach.

If there was a lot of fish, which there always was, it was all shared out to all the whanau around.