



Nga Tahuhu o Te Taiao Research Project 2007- 8 Summary of Findings to Date, February 2008

The Ngā Tāhuhu o Te Taiao research programme began more than a year ago. This paper will summarise key findings from that research. Ngā Tāhuhu will be familiar to many Te Rarawa people. It overarches a number of research projects e.g. customary Te Rarawa fishing; Te Rarawa oral histories; marae and hapū planning; and Te Mauri o te U-kai-po which is looking at the intersections between the taiao and views of wellbeing. A large part of the research has involved kōrero with Te Rarawa whānau sharing their experiences, histories and perceptions of the environment, land use, fishing, sites of significance, and links with health and wellbeing. About thirty interviews have been completed, with a number undertaken by community interviewers who completed the Ngā Tāhuhu interview skills training course.

Thank you to every one who has supported the project – those of you that took the time to be interviewed and share your experiences, knowledge and stories, and our team who did the interviews – ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa. The value of your contributions shown in the findings, provide an appreciation of the diverse realities of Te Rarawa experiences.

Key findings from the interviews

These findings are broad and preliminary. They have been drawn down from the wealth of material contained in the interviews and organised into key themes. These themes will be discussed in more detail in additional summaries that will be distributed during the coming months.

1. The environment was and still is integral to Te Rarawa lives. People are attuned to their local environments. They “abide by the laws of nature” and are equipped to respond to them as required. This lived responsiveness to the taiao is critical to understanding Te Rarawa environmental knowledge and practices.
2. Knowledge of and daily interaction with the environment makes many Te Rarawa people acutely aware that they live in te ao hurihuri where change is constant: change in circumstances, the environment, weather patterns, demography and technology, for example. Those changes place great stress on the environment, the people, their knowledge and their practices, as reflected in a strong current concern for the impacts of such things as land use and development, commercial fishing, pollution and siltation. However, people are resilient and have been able to adapt in many situations, often by adopting their own strategies.
3. Health and wellbeing meant many things to different people. Some interview contributors saw wellbeing as a reflection of how well their marae functioned. Hardly anyone talked about it in terms of sickness or disease. Most talked about wellbeing as:
 - belonging and being connected, especially to the local marae and community;
 - being able to participate in, contribute to and achieve in whānau and marae activities; and
 - the healing properties of ‘home’ and certain places of special significance, including those remembered from childhood.
4. Whanaungatanga was identified as the key to maintaining the connection to home. Whether the whānau whānui returned home for happy, sad or routine occasions, such visits fulfilled the essential purpose of making, maintaining and strengthening the home links. Therefore whānau, hapū and marae events are important social, cultural and wellbeing connectors for whānau. Interview contributors talked about a range of events, including:
 - annual sports and community days;
 - basket socials and other fundraisers;
 - land block meetings;
 - whānau reunions; and

- housie and cards.

(Note: this theme will be further developed by a new project on Te Rarawa Interconnections which will begin early next year. An information sheet about it is available separately).

5. Kaitiakitanga can be interpreted in many different ways. In general, it involves functions and practices that link to specific roles, obligations and responsibilities. It is implicitly understood and practiced through regular interaction with the environment and with the marae. It is based on whānau and hapū authority and interwoven with operating principles such as manaakitanga. Though kaitiakitanga can be specific to individual people and places, it can be very practical and more about a getting a job done when it needs to be done.
6. Te Rarawa ways of teaching and learning tend to be informal and practical. People learned by watching and experiencing; and they taught by role-modelling. Te Rarawa environmental knowledge is viewed as something shared in the course of whānau and community activities rather than passed from 'teacher' to 'student'. It is so embedded it is often couched in terms of 'common sense'. Whānau and hapū knowledge is identified as central to marae and their communities, and in need of support to ensure its long-term viability.
7. Kai occurred again and again as a theme across all the interviews. It linked with all aspects of Te Rarawa being and can involve both work and fun: – surviving, planting, growing, harvesting, catching, gathering, protecting, socialising, preparing, cooking and eating.
8. Hapūtanga is strong in many Te Rarawa communities. There are a lot of similarities between different Te Rarawa whānau and communities, but the detail and knowledge from place to place is highly specific:
 - Individual hapū and marae have their own local knowledge and practices, and tend to be both isolated and insulated. This situation leads Te Rarawa whānau and hapū to be resourceful and self-reliant, often because they have to be.
 - Some difficulties with maintaining hapūtanga and ways that the Rūnanga could help were identified, but overall people want to maintain the rangatiratanga associated with it.
9. There is an ahi kaa workforce that carries a huge and varied load, taking responsibility not only for their own whānau but also the marae, urupa, church, and often school and sporting facilities.
10. Sound leadership was identified as important in many areas including: the functioning of marae, passing on of knowledge, maintenance of kaitiakitanga and so on.
11. Finally, all interview contributors were asked about their aspirations for the future. Though there was great variety in their answers, one thing was fundamental – people want to maintain and preserve what Te Rarawa has for future generations, including:
 - the natural resources: the ngahere, the moana,
 - the human resources: the people, the skills, the roles; and
 - the little things, like being able to catch a fish.

Use and Relevance of the Research Findings

One of the main aims of Ngā Tāhuhu o te Taiao, and Iwi Research and Development generally, is to contribute to current Rūnanga work under the general banner of whānau and hapū development. The research findings will be able to inform Rūnanga strategic planning, policy and direction. In summary, the research so far suggests the Rūnanga ought to hapaitia or tautoko whānau, hapū and marae by enhancing, supporting, stimulating and cultivating hapū projects and initiatives.

More specific detail on the use of the research findings will be distributed as Ngā Tāhuhu continues. In the meantime, for further information (including information about upcoming projects) please contact Jasmine Pirini, Community Researcher: jasmine@terarawa.co.nz or 09-4081971.