

Pānui ki te iwi

Customary fishing-A Taonga tuku iho

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Commercial fishing is an inherent right of Māori to go fishing to support whānau. This morning we are trawling between Ahuriri and Te Āwanga.

Ahuriri, in one explanation, was a sizeable conical fishing net placed at the entrance to a lake or lagoon catching fish on an incoming or outgoing tide. The rush of the current through the gap gave it a raucous or rowdy sound hence Ahu-riri.

Te Āwanga or Te Āwhanga is a reinforcing part or barb of a fish hook. This whole area is known as Te Whanga-a-Ruawharo, the Bay of Ruawharo. Ruawharo was the main tohunga on the Takitimu waka. He planted the mauri, the life forces of kaimoana and fishes, in this area through his son Mokotuararo who lived here.

The kaimoana beds running from Ahuriri along the coast, all the way to Clifton, including the Town Reef, are called Rangatira. The coast and inland is currently shrouded in mist. Whātonga called this land 'Heretaunga-haukū-nui', Heretaunga of the heavy fog, which was a sign of a very warm and fertile whenua. Because of the bounty and abundance that prevailed here, Whātonga tied up his waka and settled here.

Whātonga preceded Ruawharo by many generations. Taraia, who came about seven generations after Ruawharo, called the area, 'Te Ipu a Taraia', Taraia's food bowl. All he could see from the mouth of the Ngaruroro river was lush green flaxen and fern covered plains interlaced with a myriad of waterways right to the surrounding foothills. This was a symbol of potential and promise.

Through the fog, I see Awatoto and can just make out Waitangi - a river of blood and a sea of tears, if you want to get literal. Then Waipūreku, Clive to Haumoana, which was a trading place - fish for forest foods, and Kaimoana for kūmara. These were and are traditional and trading practices of our tipuna.

Today I'm on a commercial vessel catching customary fish for whānau struggling during the COVID lockdown and we plan to continue to Tautoko our whānau beyond COVID. We are working with the private sector Eastern Fishing and Takitimu Seafoods, the government sector MPI and hapū who have authorised the permits. MPI has been supportive and helpful to ensure customary and commercial practices are separated. They have even growled me before, for wanting to take a couple of soles for some dear old souls of mine. They were weighed in, the soles not the souls. Fair enough. We've got to stick to the system.

The landed fish will be processed, packed and sent to each Taiwhenua food hub for distribution to those in need, just like it was done in the past. The Tūtaekurī river is named after an event where a kūmara blight ravaged all the crops in Wairoa. Hikawera a young chief of Heretaunga invited the emaciated whānau from Wairoa to a feast of 70 kuri- dogs which they butchered and cleaned in the river hence the name.

What we are doing today is the same. We are nourishing whānau through the provision of fish, much more palatable than kuri. This is manaaki in action-customary practice. It is matched by the generosity of growers, farmers, dairies, supermarkets and individuals who have provided kai for whanau Kai Hau Kai.

Tihei Mauri Ora!

Ngāti Kahungunu is the third largest iwi with 35,000 registered members. Geographically the tribe has the second longest coastline in the country from Paritū in the North to Turakirae in the South. Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated maintains an independent position to provide research, advice and advocate for the interests, rights, values, beliefs and practices of Ngāti Kahungunu alongside our whānau and hapū. Our mission is to enhance the mana and well-being of Ngāti Kahungunu.