

Pānui ki te iwi

Hai kona rā level 3 & 4, nau mai hoki mai level 2

Chairman, Ngahiwi Tomoana, Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated

14 May 2020, 3.30pm

On Wednesday 25 March we left 'Alert level 2' to go to 'Alert level 4' as a Country.

History has shown that Māori have had the highest mortality rates and unemployment rates in the Pandemic and Economic Recession. In the case of COVID-19, Māori could have expected a double whammy of having the highest death rates and unemployment. We already had the highest homelessness rates, domestic violence, and imprisonment rates, as well as all other social detriments. Assuredly it was assumed that the COVID-19 Pandemic would explode Māori deprivation rates even further to new levels. However, whānau and hapū have been very diligent and ensuring that we have been supportive of lockdown measures. We have not visited our sick relatives; we have not turned up to Tangi in droves; we have not wandered in the streets, and we have not driven from community to community. I cannot think of any deaths relating to COVID-19 in our rohe of our people, **Tau kē, kei whea mai, tok, ka mau te wehi. Well done, everybody.**

The next few weeks will determine how many more of our people have become unemployed and what we are going to do about it, as an iwi, as local settlement groups and local councils and regional councils.

In the closure of the Whakatu Freezing Works, Morrisons, Birdseye, and Tomoana Freezing works in the 1980's and 1990's our response was to set up regional centres in line with the government, and redeploy redundant workers into state-owned enterprises such as Railways, Ministry of Works NZ, Forests and so on. Workers were able to transfer immediately as all these jobs required manual labour in which our workforce were used to hard work.

Today, however, we don't have that much transportability of skills as manufacturing sectors have changed and are less reliant on manual work but rather work is of a technical nature. Many of our registered unemployed whānau don't have the same work ethics as did those of old. The riddle for us is to work out how we can create productivity, inspiration, and aspiration to transition and ensure employment for everyone.

Before the Pandemic lockdown, Ngāti Kahungunu partnered with private sectors, local council's and commercial entities to establish a Trades Training Centre that will create up to 250 jobs per year.

When Whakatu Freezing works closed down in the 1980's, research shows that 5% of the tradesman and professional managers were able to find employment immediately. 20% of the manual workforce found alternative employment within two months. 50% found another job within a year, although pay levels were never the same. The other, 25% never recovered, and it's the first and second generation of those who remained unemployed that we are dealing with now.

At another level since Christmas, I have been talking with gang leaders on how we can take their children and mokopuna and create a new highly skilled force to work in construction, infrastructure, manufacturing, processing and so forth. We are attempting to break the cycle of unemployment and all the negatives that go with it.

Our parents' generation used to say 'he kai kei aku ringa' – 'we have plenty of food' even though they were down and out, they were positive. They survived the First World War, the Spanish flu epidemic, the Hawke's Bay Earthquake, the great depression of that time and the Second World War. They remained positive that within their own tikanga, kawa, ihi and wehi, they would fight their way out and realise their real potential and stand firm for their whānau, and their country.

The ambition of our iwi is not to go back to pre-COVID but to have the aspiration to do much better and work together to support each other as we have during levels 3 & 4 lockdown.

Kia mau ki te mana ahua ake o Ngāti Kahungunu.

Hold fast to the unique spirit of enterprise and innovation of our tipuna Kahungunu.

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.