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Te Heuheu Tūkino VI, Hoani

1897–1944

Ngāti Tūwharetoa leader, trust
board chairman

This biography, written by Angela Ballara, was first published in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography in 1998. It was translated into te reo Māori by the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography team.

Hoani Te Heuheu Tūkino, sometimes known as Hoani Te Rerehau or John Heuheu, was the youngest of five children of Tūreiti Te Heuheu Tūkino V of Ngāti Tūwharetoa and his wife, Te Rerehau Kahotea (also known as Mere Te Iwa Te Rerehau). The principal hapū of the Te Heuheu line was Ngāti Tūrumakina, based at Waihi and Tokaanu at the southern end of Lake Taupō. Hoani Te Heuheu was related to other southern hapū of Ngāti Tūwharetoa, and through his mother had kin links to northern hapū, and to Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Raukawa.

Hoani was born on 25 October 1897 at Waihi. The family were strong supporters of the Catholic mission, and it is likely that he received his primary education at the convent school there. If Hoani had secondary education there is little evidence; later in life he was described as 'fairly versed' in English, but his official letters were written in Māori.

Hoani Te Heuheu's youth was spent in the shadow of his father, one of the most prominent Māori political figures of his day. His elder brother, Hēpi Kahotea, was expected to succeed Tūreiti, but died during the influenza epidemic of 1918. When Tūreiti died in June 1921, Hoani, still in his early 20s, succeeded to his father's title and status. On 24 December 1922 he married Raukawa Maniapoto, daughter of Te Maniapoto and Wakahuia of Taupō, in the Catholic church at Waihi. The couple were to have six children.

Hoani Te Heuheu was soon thrust into a leading role in the complex situation then facing Ngāti Tūwharetoa. In his father's time, an agreement had been entered into with the Tongariro Timber Company granting cutting rights over much of the timber lands between Lake Taupō and Taumarunui. This was on condition that the company constructed a railway and paid the owners substantial royalties. The agreement was later modified by both parties. The Tongariro Timber Company then entered into an agreement with the Egmont Box Company, which was to finance the railway. This agreement permitted delayed royalties for Ngāti Tūwharetoa owners of the land. The changes were validated by legislation, and the new agreement was endorsed by Tūreiti in 1919. The timber company was often in arrears with its payments, although up to 1926 the owners did receive substantial if irregular sums. However, by 1929 the company was substantially in debt to Hoani's people. The decline of the income from royalties and increasing difficulties with the two companies led to demands that the agreements be cancelled and the owners be permitted to recover their lands. Because of the fluctuations in their incomes, Hoani Te Heuheu and his people tended to depend on store credit for those of their needs that could not be supplied by farming.

At the same time, questions were being raised by irate Pākehā and foreign anglers about the right of Hoani's people to derive income from selling fishing rights for trout. Especially in the Tongariro and Waitahanui rivers, substantial income was derived by local hapū and individual landowners by charging for the right of passage over their lands. In 1924, pending negotiations with Ngāti Tūwharetoa, sales of land blocks around the lake and bordering the principal fishing rivers were prohibited other than to the Crown. The Te Heuheu family and their close relatives, the Grace family, were among the largest owners, and Hoani asked through a representative for removal of this prohibition over his lands at Tauranga-Taupō.

Negotiations over the fishing rights were to have begun in February 1925, but were postponed. That year was very difficult for Hoani; protest meetings were held at the northern end of the lake at Tapuaeharuru and Mōkai; the many independent hapū there alleged that the Waihi–Tokaanu people had already come to an agreement with the government favouring themselves. Another bone of contention was the sale by Hoani Te Heuheu and other Waihi people of the Tongariro fishing rights to Robert Jones, the storekeeper Hoani patronised. A petition demanded that the northern hapū be represented at any meeting concerning Taupō waters, and that the meeting be at Taupō and not at Tokaanu.

Friction continued up to the day of the meeting, eventually held on 21 April 1926 at Hoani's marae. The government proposed that in return for vesting Taupō waters in the Crown as a public reserve, a Tūwharetoa trust board would be set up which would receive £3,000 a year to be expended for the benefit of Ngāti Tūwharetoa. In addition, when the yearly revenue from licences and fines exceeded £3,000, the board would receive half. A number of free licences would be granted each year by the Department of Internal Affairs to persons nominated by the trust board. The department would have the right to issue permits and control erection of fishing camps, and issue licences to launch operators. The public would have access to a margin one chain (22 yards) wide around all Taupō waters. The board could recommend areas within their strip to be reserved from public access. (In spite of Hoani's ongoing efforts, by 1932 the reserves still had not been gazetted.)

It was soon clear that some of these provisions dismayed Ngāti Tūwharetoa. One of the main issues was the loss of private revenue by hapū and individuals who owned land along the Tongariro and Waitahanui rivers; this would not be compensated for by a general payment to Ngāti Tūwharetoa. Hoani was invited to Wellington to discuss these issues, but he demanded that 12 representatives, one for each of the major hapū around the lake, go to Wellington at the government's expense. Hoani Te Heuheu and the other 11 representatives met the government's negotiators in Wellington on 23 July. The government promised to set up a tribunal to assess compensation for riparian owners. Hoani Te Heuheu signed the final agreement on 26 July 1926.

This did not end the barrage of criticism. Some queried the origin of Hoani Te Heuheu's right to sign an agreement giving Lake Taupō to the government, when the majority of Tūwharetoa did not agree to the gift. Nevertheless, legislation was passed transferring the lake and rivers to the Crown, and setting up the Tūwharetoa Trust Board. At its first meeting on 24 November 1926 Hoani was elected unopposed as chairman. He was re-elected unopposed throughout the rest of his life.

His first duty was to meet with the people of Waitahanui who claimed that they wanted their river excluded from the agreement as it was their only source of revenue. Hoani persuaded

them to cease charging fees to anglers, and to present their claims for compensation for loss of their riparian rights. A lawyer, T. W. Lewis, agreed to pursue all the river claims, and Hoani was one of the guarantors of his legal costs. In the event they were to suffer a long wait; Lewis died in 1927 and the board took over the claimants' legal costs. Delays to the expected compensation did much to worsen the financial position of Hoani and his people. In 1936 he was still attempting to arrange an amicable settlement of the Taupō rivers compensation claim.

By January 1927 Hoani and the Tūwharetoa Trust Board had produced a plan for their funds, to be divided between educational and marae grants, medical care and land development. Hoani was an efficient chairman – conciliatory, but keeping discussion to the point; only rarely did he miss a board meeting and then only for urgent Native Land Court business or ill health. Hoani was also chairman of the medical subcommittee, responsible for hiring and firing doctors and deciding the level of financial support for nurses stationed at Tokaanu and Taupō. In 1928 he suggested that the director of the Division of Māori Hygiene or his officers should make a tour of inspection of the whole district and draw up a comprehensive report on the most urgent needs of each marae and settlement so that the board could determine spending priorities.

Financed by the board's grants, a refurbishing of Tūwharetoa marae and rebuilding or commencement of many carved houses was made possible, but every project completed provoked new requests, and demands for medical and educational grants increased. By 1930 the board itself and many of its members, including Hoani Te Heuheu, were in a state of financial crisis. This was provoked by the death of Robert Jones, the storekeeper at Tokaanu to whom a large section of Ngāti Tūwharetoa was heavily indebted. Board members were permitted under the regulations to borrow money from the board, and as their timber royalties declined and the river compensation failed to appear many of them borrowed small sums at each meeting, each loan secured by their land interests; their positions were getting steadily worse.

The crisis emerged at the board's meeting of June 1930. It transpired that Jones's estate was owed £12,000; Hoani Te Heuheu was one of the many debtors. The board decided that as so many Ngāti Tūwharetoa were affected, it was proper to use its funds to take over the debt. At the same time the costs associated with the ongoing legal battle with the Tongariro Timber Company for the royalties due to Tūwharetoa were mounting; Tūwharetoa's lawyer, M. H. Hampson, was owed £2,000. On 14 June 1932 the board decided to request the native minister, Apirana Ngata, to approve a loan of £5,000. This resulted in a visit from Ngata and his private secretary, Te Raumoana Balneavis, to Tokaanu on 29 October to reorganise the board's finances. A loan was approved resolving the immediate difficulties, and Norman Smith, then of the Rotorua office of the Native Department, was made the countersigning officer for all board cheques. In 1932 Hoani approved a nine per cent reduction of the board's annual grant for the next three years to assist the government in its financial difficulties in the depression years. Despite this, the board's financial position had substantially improved; it was greatly assisted by the passing of social security legislation which reduced many of its former responsibilities to sick and indigent members of the tribe.

Hoani's personal position was not helped by his many responsibilities as head of his tribe. His attempts to find paid employment (as the board's secretary in 1933, and much later as its ranger at Rotoaira to protect Tūwharetoa's fishing interests) were blocked, on the grounds that such work was demeaning to one of his rank. He was required to attend to the tribe's and

the board's business up and down the country, and though some of his expenses were reimbursed, the requirements of hospitality meant that he was usually out of pocket. He represented Tūwharetoa at many major events; at the same time his marae hosted tribal hui, and visitors such as Korokī and other dignitaries on many occasions. In 1936 the Tūwharetoa Trust Board took on additional duties in place of the Tongariro Māori Council, so that Hoani had increased responsibilities for the health and housing of his people. About this time he moved his home from Waihi to Tauranga-Taupō.

In 1937 the Tongariro Timber Company affair was moving to another crisis. The Egmont Box Company by now had entered into a new agreement with the Aotea District Māori Land Board, acting as agent for the owners; it was agreed on 13 June 1935 that the Box Company should be paid £23,500 by the board in order to discharge all claims arising out of the agreement between the board and the Tongariro Timber Company. This money was paid over by December 1935. Hoani Te Heuheu then sued the land board on the grounds of negligence. He and his board had been advised that any debts to the Egmont Box Company were owed by the Tongariro Timber Company and not by the Māori owners. The case failed in the Supreme Court, and a proposal to use the board's funds to help him take it to the Court of Appeal was vetoed by the native minister. The board appealed this decision, declaring that Hoani was suing in his capacity as chief of Ngāti Tūwharetoa and that if the Crown had been negligent it was a double injustice for it to prevent Ngāti Tūwharetoa from using its own funds to seek a ruling on the matter. In the event the case failed in the Court of Appeal.

Protest meetings were held at Waihi in 1938 and a national Māori hui was held there in January 1939. By then Hoani Te Heuheu and many others had begun to focus on ratification of the Treaty of Waitangi as their principal defence. Hoani was attempting to establish that the legislation was contrary to the treaty and therefore invalid. M. H. Hampson took the case to the Privy Council in 1940. The result was a set-back for Māori rights under the Treaty of Waitangi, the Privy Council declaring that rights under a treaty of cession could not be enforced in the courts except in so far as they had been incorporated into domestic law.

This was Hoani Te Heuheu's last big effort. As chairman of the trust board he urged conservative spending during the Second World War, wanting to ensure a fund for rehabilitation of Tūwharetoa servicemen. In 1942 he became ill with tuberculosis, and in May 1943 the Tūwharetoa Trust Board considered an annual grant to be set aside to assist him to fulfil his functions on behalf of the tribe, and for specialist medical treatment. A monthly honorarium was set in place from November 1943. Hoani was re-elected chairman in his absence on 26 January 1944, but died at Waihi on 27 April, survived by his wife and five children. He was buried at Waihi on 2 May 1944. His eldest son, Hepi Hoani, succeeded him as Te Heuheu Tūkino VII.

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