



WANGANUI CHRONICLE

Whanganui River recognised as 'legal person'

Quote

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3 minutes to read



DISTINGUISHED GUESTS: Maori King Tuheitia Paki (centre) arrives with his party. Photo/Bevan Conley

Wanganui Chronicle

Tuesday was a momentous day for all people of the Whanganui River, Whanganui Iwi spokesman Gerrard Albert said.

"Our entire existence as a people is intrinsically linked to the river as reflected in our saying 'Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au - I am the river and the river is me.'

"We have always viewed the river as a single living being from the mountains to the sea - its bed, banks, waters, fisheries, flora and fauna and mauri as an indivisible whole."

The Whanganui River settlement will see world-leading legislation passed which recognises the river as a legal person - Te Awa Tupua - with its own values, rights and voice. The Crown-owned parts of the river bed will also be vested in Te Awa Tupua, meaning that in effect the river owns itself.

"Those appointed to act on its behalf will have legal obligation to uphold and protect the river's values and health and wellbeing", Mr Albert said.

"In addition to the legal recognition of Te Awa Tupua, the iwi will work together with the

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Crown, local government and the river's community to develop a long term strategy for the river's wellbeing. We believe the unique approach in this settlement will not only benefit the river and the iwi, but also the Whanganui region and, in turn, all New Zealanders for many generations to come."

The Whanganui River Deed of Settlement - Ruruku Whakatupua - is the culmination of nearly 150 years of struggle by Whanganui iwi to protect and provide for their relationship with the Whanganui River.

Whanganui iwi first petitioned the Crown over concerns about the welfare of the river in the 1870s. By 1891 most of the iwi's eel weirs had been destroyed to open up the river for steamers. In 1903 the bed of the river was deemed to be vested in the Crown under the Coal Mines Amendment Act.

Between 1938 and 1962 the iwi pursued one of New Zealand's longest running court cases seeking the return of the river. Further court action challenging the diversion of the river's headwaters for the Tongariro Power Development took place in the 1990s and 2000s.

Almost 1000 people were at Ranana Marae on the river's banks to celebrate the signing.

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Guests and dignitaries included the Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations; Whanganui Mayor Annette Main; Ruapehu Mayor Don Cameron; the Paramount Chief of Tuwharetoa, Sir Tumu te Heuheu; the Maori King, Tuheitia Pahi; Waikato-Tainui chairman Rahui Papa; Ngai Tahu chairman Sir Mark Solomon and Ngati Maniapoto chairman Tiwha Bell.