



Tarawera Awa Aspirations Document

Prepared by:

**Tarawera Awa Restoration
Strategy Group** August 2023



Introduction

Ka ora te mauri, ka ora te awa o Tarawera , ka ora te tangata, ka mate te mauri, ka mate te awa o Tarawera, ka mate te tangata.

If the life force is well then the river Tarawera is well, and the people are well. If the mauri is compromised then the awa will die, and the people will perish.

Dr Pouroto Ngaropo



As a taonga tuku iho of great significance to Ngāti Rangitihī, Ngāti Awa, Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau and Ngāti Māhino, the Tarawera Awa remains the lifeblood of our people. We have an inherited responsibility to protect and advocate for our Tūpuna Awa and to ensure that our legacy of kaitiakitanga is handed down to our mokopuna in a way that celebrates the life force of the Tarawera and the wellbeing it provides for all.

However, our ability to express our kaitiakitanga was, and continues to be, inhibited. The ancestral path of the river, as our tupuna knew it, no longer flows. The once thriving network of wetlands and tributaries stemming from the source of the Tarawera remains a memory and a source of anguish as we recall the actions sanctioned by the Crown to force a new river path - enacted exclusively for the economic potential of the lands that lay under the connected waterways of Te Awa o te Atua. The systematic draining of these waters compromised the mauri of the Tarawera with its natural meandering path forced directly to sea. These actions inevitably severed the connection to the Rangitāiki and Orini Awa as well.

As tangata whenua, there continues to be deep intergenerational hurt over the abuse of our tupuna Awa. Restoration of the mauri to reflect the state it once was, remains an enduring aspiration of the Tarawera Iwi Collective. To do this requires us to re-imagine the past to help identify pathways for restoration.

The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group (TARSG) arose as a direct outcome of Ngāti Rangitihī's Te Tiriti o Waitangi settlement. The core purpose of the TARSG is to develop a restoration strategy within a co-governance framework. The TARSG is comprised of representatives from Te Mana o Ngāti Rangitihī Trust, Ngāti Māhino Iwi Authority, Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa (Bay of Plenty) Settlement Trust, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Kawerau District Council, Rotorua Lakes Council and Whakatāne District Council.

This Aspirations Document is a critical first step in the development of a comprehensive river strategy. To ensure the TARSG fulfills its responsibilities, these aspirations will help craft strategic objectives, which will form the basis of associated action plans.

The TARSG acknowledges that the Tarawera Awa, Rangitāiki, Orini, Te Awa o te Atua and other waterways in the rohe hold special environmental, economic, social and cultural values for many people in the wider community. To activate the aspirations into meaningful outcomes for the Awa, the TARSG understands the importance of moving together with support from those who share interests in the river.

The Aspiration Document, therefore, seeks to capture some high-level intentions of the Iwi Collective to restore the mauri of the Tarawera. They are woven into three key aspirational statements, which are to:

- a.** Rechannel and reconnect the course of the Tarawera, Rangitāiki and Orini Awa back through Te Awa o Te Atua and out to sea at Mihimarino.
- b.** Work together to protect the Tarawera Awa by dealing with all contamination and discharges into its waters.
- c.** Regenerate the life sustaining properties of the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o te Atua so that it can return to the food basket it once was.

Each statement has been carefully articulated within the document. Noting, further consideration of the re-channeling of the Rangitāiki and Orini to meet Te Awa o te Atua is required. Primarily, this paper is divided into two sections. Section One contains the background, context, and historical narrative of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o te Atua, including the historical and contemporary breaches committed by the Crown. Section Two lays out a high-level strategy for achieving the aspirations established by the Iwi Collective for the Tarawera Awa. In turn, this will lay the groundwork for creating the broader Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy.

Section one: Context

Our rangatiratanga gives rise to our kaitiaki responsibilities to protect the mauri of our Awa. However, our ability to enact our kaitiakitanga is significantly impeded due to the severely degraded state of the Tupuna Awa through enabling legislation. The Crown has acknowledged that it breached Te Tiriti o Waitangi by permitting the Tarawera Awa to become the most polluted river in Aotearoa and has apologised and provided redress for its actions in the Ngāti Rangitahi settlement.

But this apology is without substance as long as the Crown continues to allow the Awa to be polluted, whether by industrial waste, agricultural runoff, or wastewater leaching. These failures are an ongoing breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Crown has a Te Tiriti obligation to respect our rangatiratanga, to actively protect our taonga and to work with the Tarawera Awa Iwi Collective to put an end to ongoing pollution.

The Ngāti Rangitahi Claims Settlement Act 2022 contains a clear directive that a Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy must be formed under a co-governance structure. The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group (TARSG) is made up of representatives from Te Mana o Ngāti Rangitahi, Ngāti Māhino Iwi Authority, Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa (Bay of Plenty) Settlement Trust, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Kawerau District Council, Rotorua Lakes Council, and Whakatāne District Council.

It should be stated that while the Crown's acknowledgement and provision of the TARSG stems from Ngāti Rangitahi's settlement, it extends from the Crown past inability to acknowledge historical actions towards the Tarawera as raised as part of previous Treaty grievances from other iwi who have relationships with the Awa. Therefore, the Tarawera Iwi Collective moves forward together in the knowledge that our current position is the

culmination of pan-iwi intergenerational efforts that have endured through time. All historical grievances of the Tarawera Iwi Collective are acknowledged and respected. In addition, the TARSG acknowledges the Statutory Acknowledgements held by individual iwi of the collective.

Given the shifting landscape of freshwater management, including the legislative weight given to Te Mana o te Wai in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020, the TARSG has adopted a phased approach to the Strategy development. This is to ensure that freshwater policymakers recognise their obligations to give effect to Te Mana o te Wai in a meaningful way, as determined by tangata whenua. Each iwi is developing their own Te Mana o te Wai Statements which will be reflected in the Strategy. While we each have our own unique expressions, this Aspirations Document draws on the collective essence of Te Mana o te Wai to ensure that our position is clear, consistent, and most importantly, honours the inherited rights bestowed to us by our Tūpuna Atua.

As a Tuakana document, it is the expectation of the Tarawera Awa Iwi Collective, that all policies that impact the Tarawera Awa either directly or indirectly, respond to the directions set in the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy.

History

The Tarawera Awa is woven into the history of the iwi collective. The Awa is perceived as an ancestor, embodying the mana of iwi who have a relationship with it. The Awa has a mauri (a life force) and is viewed as one part of a holistic network of waterbodies including Lake Tarawera and Te Awa o Te Atua.

The river once flowed freely from its source at the Tarawera lake outlet, meandering northward feeding into life-enriched wetlands and tributaries along the way towards Te Awa o Te Atua. Water from Mount Tarawera

and Pūtauaki, and geothermal water from Mangakotukutuku and Waiaute Streams feed into the Tarawera River, meeting the Rangitāiki River and Orini Stream before flowing to Mihimāriro.

Motivated by the economic prosperity that increased land mass offered for settlers, this ancestral route was abruptly severed at its head in 1917 as part of the Rangitāiki Drainage Scheme, disconnecting the Tarawera from Te Awa o te Atua and the Rangitāiki river. A large network of canals and drains were constructed to drain the extensive former wetlands and create the Rangitāiki Plains to enable agriculture. Since then, iwi along the Awa have witnessed the devastating loss of the life-enriched ecosystems and the once abundant kai cupboard the river produced, as the mauri now lies dormant.

Altering the course of the Tarawera Awa had devastating economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts. It resulted in the significant loss of the port's commercial opportunities and Te Awa o Te Atua's food supply for the Iwi of Otamarorā – Matatā and left the once thriving estuary of Te Awa o te Atua stranded – no longer receiving the cleansing properties of Te Moana a Toi (ocean water) and no longer the meeting places of the Tarawera, Rangitāiki and Orini.

Over time, the health and well-being of the Tarawera Awa has been further jeopardised in pursuit of the economic benefits derived from the establishment of a mill in Kawerau in 1954 and the employment opportunities that followed. The original mill was owned by Fletcher who established the company Tasman Pulp and Paper Ltd in 1952 with the Crown as a major shareholder.

The Crown then passed legislation freeing the mill from regular water pollution regulations (known as the Tasman Pulp and Paper Company Enabling Act 1954). This allowed the mill to discharge waste into the Awa, causing severe

pollution. The pollution was so significant that the water of the Awa was discoloured, giving rise to the nickname 'the black drain'. In addition, the Tasman Mill also leveraged off the Act by utilising Lake Rotoitipaku as the primary disposal site for liquid and solid waste.

By 1987, the Crown had no shareholdings at all in Tasman. In 2000, Fletcher Challenge sold its shareholding in the mill to Norske Skog, and in 2001 it passed ownership of its chemical pulp operations and business on to Carter Holt Harvey Ltd. In 2005 Rank Group Investments Ltd. took ownership of the Tasman mill. In 2014, Tasman was sold to Oji Fibre Solutions. Norske Skog retained the operation of the mechanical pulp mill and newsprint mill till its closure in 2021.

As an iwi collective of the Tarawera Awa, we have inherited this legacy of degradation. Despite the solemn apology of the Crown for its historical failures in relation to the Tarawera Awa, the Crown is continuing to breach Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Awa faces ongoing pollution through the issuing of resource consents permitting discharges. In 2009, for example, further consents were granted to the Tasman Pulp and Paper Mill operators, which permitted them to discharge waste into the Awa for a further 25 years. These discharges may be at levels that are considered less physically harmful than the toxic discharges of the 20th century, however; this is irrelevant. The mauri of the Awa suffers not just physically but spiritually from these offensive discharges, regardless of the perceived level of toxicity assessed through a Western scientific lens. This fundamentally fails to meet the high standard for active protection and recognition of iwi rangatiratanga.

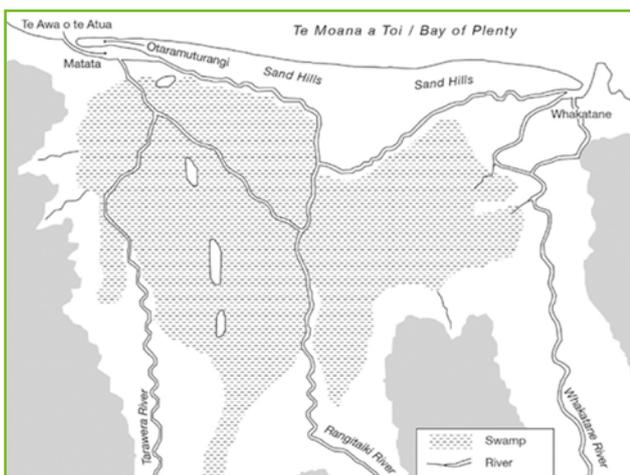


Figure 1: Rangitāiki Plains pre-drainage. Annotations added. Source: Hikuroa et al 2018

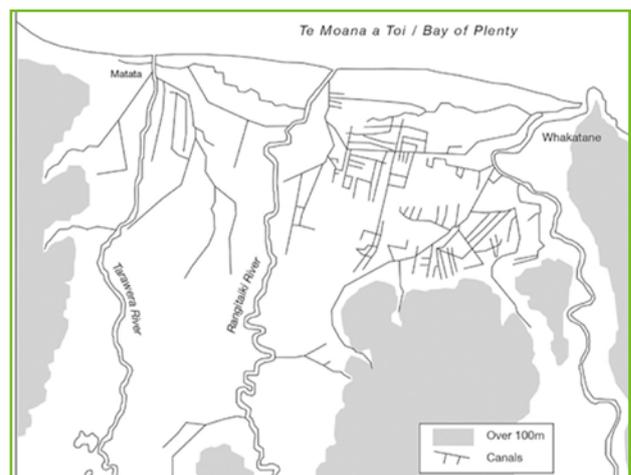


Figure 1: Rangitāiki Plains post drainage. Annotations added. Source: Hikuroa et al 2018

Section Two: Our aspirations

Ngāti Rangitihi, Ngāti Māhino, Ngāti Awa and Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau take seriously the promise and commitment reflected in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Crown has professed a similar commitment and renewed their promise to uphold the equal relationship envisaged in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, leaving behind their egregious failings of the past (see Appendix 1). These words must be given mana by action. Currently, the Crown is failing to live up to that promise through ongoing breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi that are allowing the continued degradation of the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o te Atua.

Driven by the urgency to restore the health of the river, the Tarawera Iwi Collective has developed three critical aspirational statements that must form the basis of a Mauri Restoration Strategy. They are not exhaustive or exclusive, rather, they have been informed by our collective mātauranga about what it will take to heal our Awa, what it will take to allow the Awa to recover and how we can protect the holistic wellbeing of our taonga for current and future generations. As mentioned earlier, the TARSG acknowledges the social, economic, environmental and economic values associated with the Tarawera, Rangitāki, Orini and other Awa within the rohe and the importance of working together with tangata whenua, communities, industry and river users to achieve the following aspirations:

- a. Rechannel and reconnect the course of the Tarawera, Rangitāki and Orini Awa back through Te Awa o Te Atua and out to sea at Mihimarino.
- b. Work together to protect the Tarawera Awa by dealing with all contamination and discharges into its waters.
- c. Regenerate the life sustaining properties of the Tarawera and Te Awa o te Atua so that it can return to the food basket it once was.

It is our expectation that these aspirations are a primary reference point for all discussions on the preservation, protection, and management of the Tarawera Awa.



Rechannel and reconnect the ancestral path of the Tarawera, Rangitāiki and Orini Awa back through Te Awa o te Atua and out to sea at Mihimarino

To restore the mauri of the Tarawera, we must retrace the original pathways of the river to reconnect the life-giving potential of the Tarawera waters to Te Awa o te Atua once again. As kaitiaki, we must hold an unwavering aspiration that in supporting the Awa to return to its original path, we are acknowledging the mana of the ancestral route of the Tarawera and honouring its natural path from source to sea. In doing so, we also wish to explore the

potential to reconnect the Rangitāiki and Orini Awa to meet as they once did. This will involve working together with neighbouring iwi who hold mana whenua interests with the Rangitāiki and Orini Awa. The Iwi Collective believes re-connection is a critical step to enable Te Awa o te Atua to recover from the suffering it has endured so it can once again, be the place where waters meet, and life flourishes.



Work together to protect the Tarawera Awa by dealing with all contamination and discharges into its waters

Actions to restore the mauri of the Tarawera are ultimately futile if the river continues to be contaminated by contaminants from land-use activities. Despite acknowledgement and apology by the Crown, there continue to be several major point source discharges into the Tarawera Awa. These include the discharge of geothermal fluid, and wastewater discharges from the industrial estate in Kawerau (including Tasman Mill) into the Tarawera River. The Edgecumbe wastewater treatment plant discharges into the Omeheu Canal before joining the Tarawera River.

As our tupuna Awa, we do not accept the continuation of contaminants into the waters of the Tarawera. The process of healing for the river can never be fully realised until the sources of contamination are stopped. The call to action is clear. The Tarawera Iwi Collective has actively expressed concern at multiple levels of central and local government. It is now incumbent on the Crown and local authorities to work with the Iwi Collective to create a process to end all contamination and discharges into the Awa and set a plan to prevent future degradation through leaching and runoff.

Undertaking a stocktake of actual and potential sources and pathways of contamination to the Tarawera remains a priority for the Tarawera Iwi Collective. In addition to consented discharges, several other risks have been identified within the Tarawera catchment. Left unaddressed, these issues present additional threats to the Tarawera Awa through both surface and groundwater migration. For example, the risk posed by the purposeful contamination of Rotoitipaku by the Tasman Mill remains a source of significant concern to mana whenua kaitiaki as efforts to hold the Mill accountable for their actions continue. Witnessing the devastating decline in mauri, loss of migratory fish and eels, geothermal surface features and hot springs in the space of a lifetime, the

Iwi Collective hold grave concern for the wellbeing of the Tarawera Awa if the eastern bund of Rotoitipaku fails.

Other examples include the long-standing concern of septic tank failure in Matatā for. These failures are contributing to declining water quality and ecology, elevating the urgency to develop a reticulated wastewater treatment system for Matatā. In addition, the management of stormwater in Kawerau has also been raised as a potential risk of contamination for the Tarawera Awa. Similarly, the rate at which the Edgecumbe wastewater treatment plant is undergoing maintenance and repairs remains a concern.

Ensuring that the source of the river is protected is also critical, this involves identifying potential risks to Lake Tarawera. The Tarawera Sewerage Scheme for example, is currently underway, with phase one focused on connecting Tarawera communities to the existing public network system and retiring aging septic tank systems. These significant infrastructure upgrades are critical investments.

The Iwi Collective also highlights the natural earth formation separating Lakes Rotomahana and Tarawera. Volcanic material from the 1886 eruption interrupted the path of the Kaiwaka stream, severing the connection between the two lakes. An artificial overflow pipe now runs between the two lakes allowing water to flow during periods of extraordinary rainfall. The future pressures on this area remain an outstanding concern for the Iwi Collective- especially with the increase in frequency and severity of climate related events.

In addition to a comprehensive risk assessment, improved monitoring regimes across the Tarawera Catchment are essential and long overdue. The Tarawera Awa Iwi Collective contends that the current location and scarcity



Figure 1: Rotoitipaku. Sourced from *Te Wai Settlement Trust 2023*

of monitoring sites along the Awa are not providing the expected level of data to produce a comprehensive picture of water quality. These two actions are essential to ensure that the likelihood and extent of impacts, and are better understood to enable targeted mitigation.

Mauri restoration requires a holistic approach, rather than a compartmentalized notion of waterway management. Planning of the past has allowed for certain waterways to be designated or designed as sacrificial drains or outlets. The use of the Omeheu Canal as a purposeful overflow solution to the Oxidation Pond capacity is a localized example. Often framed as a safety mechanism for flood mitigation, it provides

opportunities to improve future infrastructure planning through innovation that does not compromise the mauri of the wai.

The Tarawera Iwi Collective is committed to strengthening relationships with relevant parties, including consent holders, and acknowledges the criticality of positive communication and transparency to transition to an improved model of environmental and cultural protection for the Tarawera Awa. It is acknowledged that affecting positive change for our Awa requires a joint effort and partnership between iwi, and all river users and we are committed to traveling along this Awa enhancing journey together.

Regenerate the life sustaining properties of the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o te Atua so that it can return to the food basket it once was

Many of our cultural practices associated with Te Awa o te Atua have been lost with the severance of natural flow between the waters of Tarawera, Rangtāiki and Orini and the increasingly degraded state of the water quality. We are committed to fostering conditions that enable

Te Awa o te Atua to return to its once thriving self, to be the food basket we remember, and to revive our cultural practices so that Te Awa o te Atua can be a place where our tamariki can safely learn, play, fish, collect kaimoana and swim.

Summary and next steps

The diversion of the Tarawera Awa coupled with permissive environmental provisions, actively works against the ability of the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group to restore the mauri of the Awa. It also undermines the Crown's commitment to the Tarawera Iwi Collective and the kawenata tapu (sacred covenant) of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

While the Crown has acknowledged the wrongdoing of its actions and issued an apology, it remains without substance as long as the Crown allows Te Awa o te Atua to be polluted. It is the expectation of the Iwi Collective, that the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy will be pivotal to undoing the damage to our Awa and to activate a process of redress in a meaningful way.

The Iwi Collective, in conjunction with the members of the TARSG are committed to working together

alongside stakeholders, industry, and the community to realise our aspirations in a sustainable and manageable way. This relies on strong communication and transparency to foster meaningful dialogue between interested parties. With this Aspirations Document being the first critical step, we can now turn our attention to planning the Restoration Strategy, of which engagement forms a central part.



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