Speaking notes for Ngā Kōrero Tuku Iho - Whakarongotai 22 April 2015
Mahina-a-rangi

The ecology and geomorphology of the Waikanae and Paraparaumu area was very different pre 1880, to what we see today. It was a network of small and large waterbodies, springs and connected wetlands, that were navigable.

Ngāti Awa didn't necessarily come with the intention to stay permanently, but to help with the raupatu of the area. However, the food here was just too good, and many stayed, and they were able to flourish on the food supplied by the wetlands. The mahinga kai species available were abundant and diverse.

Species:
5 galaxiid species
Including inanga, kokopū (native trout) koara
Kahawai
Kanae or mullet
Pātiki, flounder
Kōura
Tāmure
Toheroa
Watercress
Tuna
Piharau
Tipitipi
Surf clams
Tuatua

Besides the Waikanae river there were other key streams or watercourses that were valuable in terms of settlement.

Whareroa
Tikotu
Wharemaukū
Mangakōtuku/Muaupoko Stream
Waimeha
Kakariki/Ngārara
Paetawa

These streams were gravel bottomed, they did not have the large load of sediment or mud that rivers and streams do today. They were able to move freely. These factors and their connection to wide wetland structures gave them a large flood carrying capacity. When there was high rainfall, and they flood, as all streams regularly do. They were slow to rise and fall. They didn't flash food to the extent

that that do today, where they rise quickly, and often breach their narrow banks. They were safe waterbodies to settle on in part because their flood risk was low.

The Waikanae river was also gravel bottomed but more powerful and not as steady as the other smaller streams. Today when we talk about the geomorphology of the Waikanae River, we describe it as having a short watershed, or catchment length, which has always been true. However the natural meander of the Waikanae, and the wetlands that could be found connected to it also provided more flood carrying capacity, and safety to the communities here. (Someone died here not that long ago). These wetlands were the Waimahoe, Kaitoenga, Waikanae Estuary, Waimeha lagoon area.

These structures had implications for the wider biocultural landscape of the rohe. The network of small streams and drains also provided for the connectivity of the communities here. The Waikanae area in particular consisted of a large network of pā, kainga, mahinga kai, pā tuna and wāhi tapu. Today we often think about water bodies as being our boundaries, things which separate one group from another. The impression I have of pre 1880 Waikanae is that the waterbodies were in fact what connected our people. They were navigable, which allowed for much interaction and sharing of resources between different groups. Cultivation did occur in the area but the archaeological and oral history evidence suggests that the key resource came from the coastal marine area and wetlands. The archaeological work conducted as part of the expressway through the region has uncovered what archaeologist Mary O'Keefe has described as 'factory floor middens' That is; piles of shells of 3-5 different species, the height of this room where shellfish has been processed, and as far as 2km inland of the shore. This suggests that shellfish would be harvested in bulk, brought inland via waka and processed, and then shared amongst large networks of communities.

This interaction and sharing of resources supports the recorded descriptions of different kainga and pā being occupied by diverse and dynamic communities. Groups for many different hapū were often living in one large area. And the settlements along the coastline appeared to be active busy highways of trade and interaction.

For example, Kaiwarehou Pā, was at one time occupied by many hapū, and as many as 2000 people, Otaraua, Ngāti Rahiri and Ngāti Kaitangata were all living here.

So these waterbodies were also safe to settle on because our people structured their settlement, and day to day life around the reality of the wetlands, as an integral part of the geomorpological and ecological landscape, to support life. Which is quite a contrast to how wetlands are viewed in terms of suitability for settlement today.

The geomorphology and ecology of the landscape is I believe an important aspect of our identity as Ngāti Awa ki Kāpiti We were shaped by the land much more than the land was shaped by us, our identities are truly interconnected. We are people of the wetlands, our tūpuna were seduced by them and their descendants sustained by them.

This what I think of when I hear the pepeha:

Whakarongo ki te tai
Whakarongo ki te whenua
Whakarongo ki te tangata

The vitality of the tai, the whenua and tangata are all interconnected.

Waikanae beach crystals, are also found in the womb of a woman. The tai, the whenua, the tangata, we are all comprised of the same life giving minerals. And clearly, our Ngāti Awa tūpuna knew this.

In the context of our grievance, I believe the effects of the changes to this geomorphology and ecology are critically important to consider. The effect of Te Kooti Tango Whenua, the Native Land Court, and the individualisation of property title, where few or perhaps even one individual ended up monopolising the land and assets; was in stark contrast to the pre-existing framework that was based on interdependence and thus the interconnectivity of the many that was supported by the wetland system.

The first step of colonisation was the systematic alienation of our people from our land, the second step being the exclusion of our people from local and central government management of our land and water resources.

Many of these small streams are classified in the law as 'drains' which means under the law, they are not subject to the same protections as our rivers and streams. You do not need a resource consent to discharge to them for example. So our awa our manga are suffering a Crown imposed identity crisis.

The result of this has been the lands were drained, to convert to pasture, or to create land for urban residential development. The wetland system has been reclaimed where there are now far fewer running waterbodies. The result of this and further development has been and increase of sedimentation flow into the rivers and streams, and in many if not all our supporting streams we have lost the gravel bottoms, and they are now filled with mud or sediment. This is significant both from a flood safety and ecological perspective. In order to manage the rivers and streams we are now subject to an intensive flood management scheme where the river bed is regularly lowed, which destroys the habitat in the river bed, and the aim with river management is to now get the water out as quickly as possible, so the river channel is cut into straight lines.

The mud also has significant impacts for our fish species, especially the galaxiid species, as juvenilles these are what we call photophobic species, they evade light as a means of avoiding predation, and thus rely on a the gravel bed of a river to survive.

So I wanted to talk about the geology, about the gravel bed of our rivers and streams and make reference to those minerals, that Uncle Peehi had affection for at the Waikanae Coast, as part of the whakapapa of this rohe because, its the destruction of that habitat which existed when our tūpuna

had tino rangatiratanga over the region has led, the suffering of us and the tai ao physically, but to that identity.

I feel that if we still had the same framework for interaction with each other within our people through our waterways, then we would not face the same struggle to feed ourselves, or the same internal fracturing.