

Runanga's negotiation bid angers other tribes

Uepohatu, Ruawaipu, Hauiti feel shut out

by Martin Gibson

MOVES by Te Runanga o Ngati Porou to negotiate all East Coast Treaty claims have sparked outrage from East Coast tribes who do not consider themselves Ngati Porou.

"Both the Crown and its loyal Crown agent are determined to shut down and shut out Uepohatu, Ruawaipu, Hauiti and others — there is no reference to traditional tribes in their discussions," said Eru Potaka-Dewes of Uepohatu, Ruawaipu.

"Both are concerned to fast-track settlement. Judge Milroy's recent cancellation of the judicial conference complies with the runanga insistence to cut costs and save time. What the cancellation does, however, is to legitimise the voice of the Crown agent to tell its side of the story on behalf of all claimants."

Ruawaipu Claimant Cluster co-ordinator Jason Koia questions claims by the runanga that the mandate is one of the most important decisions taken by Ngati Porou.

"This is the second most important decision in Ngati Porou history. The first was when Ngati Porou swore allegiance to the Queen and Church of England in the 1860s, and allied with the Crown to unleash terrorism on the East Coast tangata whenua.

"Today, the Crown is using the pen instead of the gun to strip us of our rights. This is the only way out for the Crown and runanga. The Crown cannot afford to allow our evidence to be presented. The ballot system is simply illegal, the Crown is breaching international law."

The latest move was a complete U-turn on the Waitangi Tribunal's decision of October 2004.

At that time Judge Stephanie Milroy and the Waitangi Tribunal upheld the right of traditional tribes to pursue their own Treaty claims after a judicial conference in Ruatoria.

Lawyers for these tribes successfully argued that certain tribes, including Ruawaipu, Uepohatu and Ngati Ira, were not sub-tribes of Ngati Porou or descendants of Porourangi. Porourangi was a cousin and not an ancestor.

The tribes were also granted the right to seek funding from the Crown Forestry Rental Trust to pursue their claims.

These decisions forced the runanga to go back to the drawing board with its own

case.

Since then, the traditional tribes had done three years of work preparing their claims — a right now being undermined by a body with no mandate over them.

Mr Koia accused Treaty Negotiations Minister Mark Burton of trying to undermine all East Coast whanau,

hapu and iwi by initiating Treaty settlement negotiations with the runanga.

"This is a political move by the Labour Government. The fight is for justice. Ironically, Mr Burton is also the Minister for Justice.

"There are two major concerns. The first is Mr Burton's knowledge of previous tribunal hearings against his Office of Treaty Settlements. The office was reprimanded for not considering all the evidence.

"The second is the runanga's acceptance of a fractional payout to settle Ruawaipu, Uepohatu and Te Aitanga-A-Hauiti historical Treaty claims under Ngati Porou.

"For our claimants it's not only about money. It's about our hapu having tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) over their lands and resources, including the power to collect their own revenue, trade and development and to veto any Crown law that impinges upon te tiriti rights such as the Foreshore and Seabed Act.

"The UN has found these rights to be "permanent" and independent of the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples recently ratified. The Crown continues to breach these common law principles of international law.

"This is not a full and final settlement. This is a full and final breach. We urge all runanga beneficiaries to boycott the mandate process — Mr Burton's quick fix will not resolve our grievances, no matter how much money the Crown saves."

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— Protestors