

Protest disrupts \$35m celebration

by Marianne Gillingham

NGATI Porou Runanga celebrated the receipt of more than \$35 million in fisheries assets with a private function in Ruatoria yesterday, surrounded by selected guests including Te Ohu Kaimona executives.

But celebrations were disrupted by uninvited visitors, including police called in to help move them.

The protestors were representatives of the traditional tribes Ruawaipū, Te Aitanga a Hauiti and Ngati Uepohatu.

They believe the settlement is a breach of the rights of tribes who own the assets, says spokesman Jason Koia.

"Te Runanga o Ngati Porou is not a traditional tribe," he said.

The runanga was a pan-tribal authority created by the Government for the

Government's convenience.

The runanga should have no interest in property that belonged to the hapu, said Mr Koia.

"These assets belong to the hapu and it is up to the hapu to control them and manage their property," he said.

Allocating the assets to the runanga was a breach of international law and natural justice.

It was unclear how the runanga had been mandated to represent iwi because there were a large number of people within the region who did not support the runanga's power.

Unfortunately, they were generally the poor people who were being further marginalised by the latest distribution of the assets.

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Extra police called in to quell protest

Fishing assets are signed off

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Mr Koia doubted if any benefits would filter through to the grass roots.

The last allocation in 1992 of \$14 million had failed to address the enormous problem of East Coast hapu living in substandard homes, with leaky roofs and Third World basic amenities.

Mr Koia was one of about 30 people trying to hammer home their case to visiting Maori fisheries commission officials yesterday.

The group, waving flags and banners, stopped a bus carrying the manuhiri from entering the private function at Uepohatu Marae, said Te Ohu Kaimoana chief executive Shane Jones.

It took police over half an hour to clear a way in for visitors, where a powhiri (welcoming ceremony) was again subject to lengthy disruption by protestors making their own noise.

At that stage there was a call for extra police to quell the protest, said Mr Koia.

"We wanted them to know that the traditional tribes did not sign these deeds, but Shane and Api (Te Runanga chairman Apirana Mahuika) signed it off anyway."

Mr Koia said this amounted to ethnic suppression by the Government.

"We are putting them on notice that we still uphold our rights and will continue to pursue them so I hope the Crown does not have to pay twice."

Mr Jones said the commission was satisfied that the runanga was officially mandated to receive the assets.

The assets officially signed off yesterday included between \$35 million and \$40 million-worth of cash, fisheries quota and shares in Aotearoa fisheries.

Although the deed covered inshore quota, details of this were subject to negotiations over boundaries with neighbouring iwi and had yet to be finalised.

Inshore quota was the more lucrative asset because it included crayfish, said Mr Jones.

It is understood there are still arguments over coastal areas claimed by the Rongowhakaata people of Turanga.

In the Gisborne district fisheries assets are being distributed direct to iwi, not to Te Runanga o Turanganui a Kiwa.

Te Runanga o Ngati Porou chief executive Amo Houkamau was not available this morning for comment.