



# Working together to tackle the rapids

Nga Tangata Tiaki o Whanganui chairman **Gerrard Albert** writes about Prince Harry's historic waka journey on the Whanganui River yesterday.



**Y**ESTERDAY we embarked on a waka journey on the Whanganui River with a rather special passenger on board.

A 30-year-old prince, younger son of Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana, both of whom visited Whanganui in 1983, paddled in a waka with descendants of those who signed the Treaty of Waitangi in Whanganui in May 1840.

It is a most auspicious honour for Prince Harry, and a timely recognition that the relationship between the Crown and the iwi is reaching a new phase.

On August 5, 2014, at Ruaka Marae in Ranana, the Crown and Whanganui Iwi signed Ruruku Whakatupua, the deed of settlement for the Whanganui River.

The signing was a crucial day for the iwi. We came together as one, believing in the power of the river as our ultimate source of spiritual and physical sustenance, ko te awa te matapuna o te ora.

The foundation was set to move forward in our approach to promoting and protecting the health and wellbeing of our river through Te Awa Tupua legislation.

Since then we have established Nga Tangata Tiaki o Whanganui, the post-settlement governance entity for Whanganui Iwi. We have set up an office in Victoria Ave, organised a "hotline" (0800 AWATUPUA) and set up a website ([www.ngatangatatiaki.co.nz](http://www.ngatangatatiaki.co.nz)).

As initial trustees in this establishment period, we have appointed an interim manager, Hera Smith of Te Ati Haunui a Paparangi. Nga Tangata Tiaki o Whanganui is also supported by a dynamic and capable team who are working across large and complex work streams to enable Te Awa Tupua, Whanganui iwi and the community to contribute to the health and wellbeing of the river.

The common purpose for the Crown, the community and the iwi is to imbue Te Awa Tupua, an



**HISTORIC JOURNEY:** Prince Harry joins the waka crew for the trip from Putiki Marae to the Union Boat Club. PHOTOS/ LEWIS GARDNER, STUART MUNRO 140515WCLGPRINCEHARRY-7.150615WCSMHARRY10.150615WCSMHARRY12

indivisible and living whole from the mountains to the sea, into our day-to-day relationship with one another and, from there, in to our decision-making in respect of the use, care and protection of the of the river that links us all.

In doing so, the Crown will recognise a set of intrinsic values (Tupua te Kawa) which represent the essence of Te Awa Tupua. One of the key values is "nga manga iti, nga manga nui e honohono kau ana, ka tupu hei Awa Tupua" (the small and large streams that flow into one another and form one river).

It feels like that expression is coming into force as we make steady progress towards tabling the first draft of the legislation in the House.

We are building on a legacy of action dating right back to 1848 when the Crown purchased a block of land at Whanganui through which ran the lower reaches of the Whanganui River.

From the late 1850s, legislation enabled local authorities to manage structures on the river but did not provide

for iwi involvement. In 1887, Whanganui Iwi first petitioned Parliament that the water steamers were destroying their eel weirs and fisheries.

And so began over a century of action.

Forty years later, in 1927, iwi petitioned against the taking of gravel and land which caused damage to the eel and lamprey weirs. The Government

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authorised the Native Land Court to inquire into the petition, but 10 years went by without any action.

In 1937, the iwi applied to Native Land Court to investigate their claim for customary ownership of the river — this claim proceeded through the courts for another 28 years.

From the Native Land Court, claims were heard at the Supreme Court, in the the Court of Appeal, and there was a Royal Commission in 1950, a Crown Order in Council in 1958 and,

finally, in 1990 the Whanganui River Maori Trust Board lodged the Whanganui River claim with the Waitangi Tribunal.

From the 1870s to the present, the many streams of action have come together, seeking due access to justice, leaving a legacy in respect of upholding and protecting the mana of the river.

Today, that action takes on a new phase by conducting the first elections of seven trustees to Nga Tangata Tiaki O Whanganui.

The trustees role will be to act on behalf of and in the best interests of Whanganui Iwi for

the whole of the river, not parts of, and to receive, manage, hold and administer the trust assets that will derive from the settlement. In doing so, the trust must advance the social, cultural, spiritual, educational, environmental and economic wellbeing of Whanganui Iwi. It's not a job for the faint-hearted!

Once these trustees are on board, our waka will be in perfect position to travel the next part of the journey, with a singular navigation point being what we can do together to focus on the

health and wellbeing of the river and act for the whole, not parts, of the river.

Of course, the river has a life of its own, and there will be many ebbs and flows along the way. As any paddler worth their weight will know, the only way to tackle the rapids is to work together.

The strategy must be co-ordinated, each hand to the hoe in unison, even if we fall out of beat from time to time. Prince Harry's passage yesterday was important. As a young man, he's trying something new, as a representative of the monarchy, he's taking a step closer to honouring the relationship with the Treaty partner.

One could say that he is doing this not just for his grandmother, not just for her great-great grandmother Victoria, the original signatory (through her representatives) to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, but he is prepared to paddle in the waka of Whanganui Iwi for the sake of the generations to come.

And for us, we too will rise up, conscious of the heavy responsibility left to us by our tupuna to do the very best that we can in creating a world for all our mokopuna to live in.