

Tribunal's final Urewera report

THE shocking poverty experienced by Te Urewera Maori was in large part caused by the Crown's many breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, the Waitangi Tribunal has found in the sixth and final volume of its Te Urewera district inquiry report.

The recently-released volume responded to claims made on behalf of the hapu and iwi of Te Urewera and contains three chapters covering environmental, social-economic and other issues.

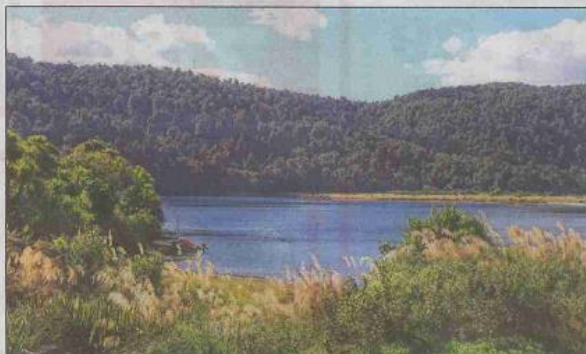
The panel was headed by Judge Patrick Savage, and consisted of historian Dr Ann Parsonson, lawyer Jo Morris, and kaumatua Tuahine Northover, who sadly passed away before the report could be completed.

In the environmental chapter, the tribunal concludes the Crown's Treaty promise to protect Maori forests included all the forest flora and fauna.

They found it failed in this duty, in particular by allowing the bird life of Te Urewera to be ravaged by introduced species. The Crown also failed to recognise the tino rangatiratanga of Te Urewera hapu in relation to conservation management, and failed to adequately protect the wahi tapu (sacred places) in the Whirinaki Forest.

The environmental chapter also highlighted the confusion surrounding river ownership in Te Urewera. For many decades the Crown behaved as if it owned all or most of the Te Urewera rivers, when in fact its own law officers could not establish who legally owned which waterways.

The second chapter in the report deals with specific claims which could not be addressed elsewhere in the chapter. These involved public works, rating, taonga tuturu (artefacts), and school lands.



□ The sixth and final Waitangi Tribunal report concluded that the Crown's Treaty promise to protect Maori forests included all the forest flora and fauna, and it failed in this duty. The Crown also failed to recognise the tino rangatiratanga of Te Urewera hapu in relation to conservation management.

In relation to rating, the tribunal found that Maori land in Te Urewera should have been rated only if it was profitable, or if the owners received services in return for their rate money.

The report concludes with a chapter on socio-economic issues.

It shows the shocking poverty experienced in most Te Urewera communities throughout the 20th Century. Evidence is presented of children dependent on charity

for food and clothing, families living in shacks and caves, and communities forced to eat rotten potatoes for want of other food.

The chapter explores the extent to which the Crown was responsible for these conditions.

The tribunal found that causes of poverty included massive land loss and failure to provide adequate assistance.

More recently, the privatisation of the timber industry in the late 1980s led to massive job losses and severe poverty in the west of the inquiry district, which had previously been relatively prosperous.

The tribunal acknowledges that the Crown did provide some aid and services to Te Urewera communities. However, it found that these were never near enough to counter the massive disadvantages holding back those communities.

Sometimes they were actually harmful. State schools punished Maori children for speaking their own language, and made them feel that their culture was inferior and worthless. Crown officials believed that they knew what was best for Maori, and would not let hapu and iwi determine the form or content of social services.

Many Maori from Te Urewera were compelled to leave the area in search of jobs, education, healthcare and better standards of living. Today only a minority of Te Urewera tangata whenua live in the area.

Many witnesses in the inquiry spoke about the pain of being separated from their ancestral lands, and how they could not return because there were no jobs and no housing.

The Tribunal found the poor socio-economic standing of the peoples of Te Urewera, in health, education, housing, and wealth, was in large part a prejudice arising from the Crown's many breaches of the Treaty.