

Media statement

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For Immediate Release

Whakatōhea Māori Trust Board welcomes completion of Ministerial Investigation and findings

The Whakatōhea Māori Trust Board (the Trust Board) is pleased the Ministerial Investigation into its 2017 elections and matters relating to governance and management, has now been completed.

The investigation and report by Michael Heron QC has found that there were no issues with the integrity of the Trust Board roll. The former Solicitor-General also concludes that the Trust Board's 2017 elections were held in accordance with the principles of Part 3 of the Māori Trust Boards Act 1995 and the Māori Trust Board Regulations 1985.

Trust Board Chairman, Robert Edwards says the Trust welcomes the findings and recommendations made by Mr Heron QC.

“We thank Mr Heron for the excellent job he did of capturing the views of both the complainants and the Trustees, and we are satisfied the findings substantiate the integrity of the elections process.”

“He has made a number of recommendations, which will help to ensure we deliver best practice in future elections. The Trust Board will work through those recommendations and implement them where needed, such as appointing an independent person to the role of Returning Officer to maintain transparency,” says Mr Edwards.

The report acknowledges that while there were irregularities during the 2017 elections, they did not affect the outcome of the elections.

It also notes that the Trust Board needs to improve the way it manages conflicts of interest, and that there have been some instances where full disclosure of information to all Trust Board members has not occurred.

Trust Board Chief Executive, Dickie Farrar, says the focus is now on strengthening policies and processes.

“We acknowledge there were some irregularities, and we are focused on ensuring we have the right support systems in place to help the Board in its decision making.

“Overall, we believe the report is a fair representation of the actions of the Trust Board and my role as Chief Executive and Returning Officer.

“This has provided an opportunity to review and reflect on what has occurred and move forward as a united body. I hope the completion of this investigation brings closure for those who had concerns,” says Ms Farrar.

Mr Edwards says the release of the report is an important milestone in the Trust Board's work for Whakatōhea.

“It is a huge relief to finally have the Ministerial Investigation completed so that we can now move forward,” says Mr Edwards.

“Our role as trustees is to ensure we work in the best interests of all of Whakatōhea who benefit from a shared vision and purpose.

“Despite the investigation, we have carried on with our work for our iwi, hapū and whānau and have been very active on several fronts including education, social, health as well as further developing our commercial activities. Our work in the sustainable development of aquaculture for example has the potential to set a solid future for our people.”

Mr Edwards is pleased the findings endorse the results of the 2017 elections.

“Importantly, the credibility of the Whakatōhea Māori Trust Board in the management of the roll has been justified.”

“However, we acknowledge there is work still to be done as Trustees to ensure we maintain the integrity of the roll and the privacy of each individual person who is registered. Rest assured, we do not take this task lightly.”

Mr Edwards says the Trust Board is keen to act immediately on the recommendations outlined in the report. He notes that work has already begun to implement these recommendations and they will be discussed at a special Board meeting on 12 October.

“Minister Nanaia Mahuta has set a deadline of 14 December 2018 to provide a progress report on the recommendations, and the Trust is keen to meet this timeframe,” says Mr. Edwards.

The full report can be accessed here www.whakatohea.co.nz.

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About the Whakatōhea Māori Trust Board

The Whakatōhea Māori Trust Board (the Trust Board) was established in 1952 and is constituted under the Māori Trust Board’s Act 1955. The purpose of the Trust Board is to administer its assets in accordance with the Act for the benefit of its members. These benefits include the promotion of health; social and economic welfare; education and vocational training. The Trust Board is made up of twelve members elected from the six hapū of Whakatōhea. These elections take place every three years. The Trust Board has made steady progress since 1952 and has grown its asset base to include dairy farms, kiwifruit orchards, forestry shares, property investments, fisheries assets, aquaculture ventures, social, health and education services and is very pleased with the results so far.