

## TE RUNANGA O TUPOHO

### New Zealand Geographic Board Proposal Wanganui/Whanganui

#### *Submission presented by Che Philip Wilson*

#### **Whanganui: Its Meaning – Te Ahunga Mai O Te Ingoa**

##### ***Whanganui iwi: the correct version***

The correct meaning for the name Whanganui is: *the long wait*, 'whanga' meaning to wait. This name originates from the time of Kupe the great navigator and in fact the extended name is *Te Whanga-nui-a-Kupe*<sup>1</sup> and refers to the extended wait for the return of Kupe from his "exploration into the interior".

This is the correct version of the meaning of Whanganui however there are also two other versions which I will briefly summarise.

##### ***Hau version***

According to our southern iwi neighbour, Ngati Apa, the ancestor Hau<sup>6</sup> named and/or acknowledged names already in existence based on his experience as he travelled along the west coast of the North Island. This journey is documented in the *oriori* composed by Te Rangitakorou where it states:

*"... na nui ia, ko Whanganui"*

This acknowledges the '*the long wait*' but refers to the time it took for the tide to change so that Hau could cross the river in pursuit of his wife Wairaka:

*"too wide to swim, too deep to wade, I will wait until the tide turns"*

##### ***The common but non-Whanganui iwi version***

Due to incorrect recording, the non-Whanganui iwi version has gained more prominence, that meaning being the 'big harbour or bay'. This name comes from an interpretation of the river having a large mouth and the tide that expands which therefore enlarges the river and mouth.

Another possible reason for this meaning may be related to the pre-Kupe name for the river, Te Awanui-a-Rua – The great river of Ruatupua, which is normally used in ceremonial speech only. As this name is often used during formal ceremonies it is possible that this name and its translation may have influenced the 'big harbour' interpretation for Whanganui.

#### **Correct Spelling – Te Tuhi Tika**

The name Whanganui, as referred to above, is a compound word and has two components: whanga meaning '*to wait*' and nui meaning *large* or *long*.

If the name meant 'great harbour' then the word should be spelt **wha**anga-nui. Whaanga meaning harbour or bay whereas the correct prefix is whanga, meaning to wait.

#### **The 'H' Issue – Te Kaupapa Nei**

The propaganda around the 'h' issue in my opinion is a misnomer. I say this as linguistically any discussion should be related to the 'wh'.

For the Maori language, a diagraph is a single sound which is created by two consonants. The two diagraphs in te reo Maori are: the 'wh' and the 'ng'.

For the local dialect, it is the 'wh' diagraph that creates the distinctive sound which is often explained as a dropping of the 'h'. However the 'h' sound is glottal and made in the throat.

The impact the incorrect spelling of the name Whanganui has on Whanganui iwi is immense. Socrates stated that: "Regard your good name as the richest jewel you can possibly be possessed of—for credit is like fire; when once you have kindled it you may easily preserve it, but if you once extinguish it, you will find it an arduous task to rekindle it again." It is this point, the matter of the 'wh' in Whanganui, that we are seeking to rekindle.

The incorrect spelling of the name has also resulted in the strong asperation of the 'g' when Maori pronunciation focuses on the 'ng'. In turn the 'g' focus results in the pronunciation of a name which is incomprehensible.

## **Impact On Identity**

### ***2006 Referendum***

In 2006 a referendum was held on the 'h' issue where only one councillor was in favour of returning to the correct spelling.

The result of the referendum was that the current corrupted spelling remains and had an 82% majority. However, media generally fail to highlight that the actual turnout for this referendum was only 55.4%.

### ***Special Meeting of the District Council***

Over the past six weeks the 'h' issue has gained national coverage. This culminated on 24 February 2009 with the Wanganui District Council extra ordinary meeting to discuss this point.

Whanganui iwi chose to march from Pakaitore to the Council Chambers to listen to the public debate. As an iwi we chose to peacefully march through town and sit quiet in the chambers maintaining the tikanga of te pore (passive resistance) handed down from our ancestors.

This was an extremely belittling time for Whanganui iwi, sitting quietly while the mana of Whanganui culture was put in disregard.

Nevertheless, Whanganui iwi were encouraged by the rebuttals made by councillors in support of including the 'h'.

The vote significantly changed from 2006. This time the vote was eight for the corrupted version excluding the 'h' and five for the correct inclusion of the 'h'. This is a symbol of the changing tide and the five Councillors that supported the inclusion of the 'h' must be commended.

... As river people the Whanganui river is the alpha and omega of iwi existence and as expressed in the tribal maxim it defines who Whanganui iwi is:

*E rere kau mai te awa nui, mai Te Kahui Maunga ki Tangaroa  
Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au.*

*The river flows from the mountains to the sea  
I am the river and the river is me.*

#### *Impact on the Future*

I have already demonstrated that the name Whanganui has a meaning and a history that is unique to the River, the rohe, the people and the city that iwi share with the community at large. Thus it is vitally important to iwi that iwi perpetuate the correct spoken and written form of the word both amongst ourselves and amongst the general populous. Iwi simply do not accept that “Wanganui” is a derivative of the original Whanganui and therefore has an altered meaning or value that renders it a non-Maori word. It always was and will always be a Maori word. As Maori is an official language of Aotearoa it is both logical and legal that the word is spelt correctly.

The impact on iwi identity by denying the correct rendering of the word in the written and spoken form is immense.

Quite apart from the impact of language loss on past generations, it is the current generation that will suffer the most if the integrity of the language they are now responsible for transmitting to future generations is not upheld in all areas.

This is particularly important where a people's identity is intrinsically linked to a word. Thus to continue the corruption of a word is to continue to corrupt the people to whom that word belongs. So regardless of arguments raised by others around dialect, phonetics, and spelling first used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Conclusion – Te Whakarapopotanga**

Smart & Bates note that the correct spelling acknowledged by local Maori is *Whanganui*. This is important as the name is a reo Maori name and as the Maori language has been acknowledged formally by statute since 1987, it is appropriate and right that the name be corrected and spelt *Whanganui*.

The incorrect spelling of the name Whanganui should be corrected to *Whanganui*. This would result in rekindling of an identity that can be shared with the community and nation. Therefore, I assert that the Maori language must retain its depth and breath of meaning no matter the context.