

BOOK REVIEW:

Review of A Long Time Coming: The Story of Ngāi Tahu's Treaty Settlement Negotiations with the Crown, by Martin Fisher (Canterbury University Press, Christchurch 2020)

REVIEWED BY RACHAEL EVANS*

My first attempt at reading *A Long Time Coming* by Martin Fisher was on my summer camping trip to Kaiteriteri.¹ I had a copy of the book, signed by Fisher and Tā Tipene O'Regan, and I was determined to enjoy it in the Tasman sunshine. An accident with a loosely capped water bottle and a toddler put paid to this dream. I pegged the saturated book to the camp clothesline, and it swung in the sea breeze with the togs and towels, an ignoble end to a copy of an excellent text.

In 2021, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (TRONT) is one of the South Island's most influential entities. The octopoidal reach of the iwi has established a strong presence in the private and public sectors. To understand the growth of the tribal structure from an impoverished Māori Trust Board to the powerful corporate entity that is Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu with nearly 70,000 registered members, *A Long Time Coming* is a must-read.

Fisher begins with a brief history of Te Kerēme, the Ngāi Tahu Claim. It is impossible to understand this seven-generation struggle without appreciating the injustice and breadth of Te Kerēme. Fisher covers the basics efficiently, before taking the reader through the Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ Treaty of Waitangi process to the filing of the Ngāi Tahu claim by Rakihiia Tau Snr in 1986.

The substance of the book covers the 1992–1998 negotiation period. Fisher explains how the primary sticking point for both the Crown and Ngāi Tahu was the issue of quantum. The Crown's own accountants had valued the reserves that should have been set aside for Ngāi Tahu at between \$14 billion and \$18 billion. This posed a problem to the Crown, who had no money and a lot of political pressure to settle fairly but efficiently. Fisher adeptly summarises how negotiations broke down to a point of collapse between 1994–1996.

Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu Act 1996 established a corporate legal personality for the tribe. This prompted the renewal of negotiations, with the signing of a heads of

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¹ Martin Fisher *A Long Time Coming: The story of Ngāi Tahu's treaty settlement negotiations with the Crown* (Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2020).

agreement in just a few short months in October 1996. Perhaps the most interesting chapter of Fisher's book is his analysis of the period that followed, and the practical measures that were taken by the Crown and Ngāi Tahu to finalise a deal. Fisher's step-by-step breakdown of the grinding final steps of the negotiation highlights the immense amount of work that was put in by both parties to reach a settlement that adequately addressed the past while spring-boarding the iwi into the future.

A Long Time Coming ends with reflections on the Ngāi Tahu post-settlement journey. Fisher links aspects of the Settlement to contemporary Ngāi Tahu success while asking pertinent questions about the future direction of the iwi. This is not a book that locks history in a box – it builds on the lessons of the past to understand the present.

While ultimately not my dream beach read, my ambition to read the history of the Ngāi Tahu Treaty settlement negotiations with the Crown on my holiday was not ill-founded. The text is incredibly accessible. Despite the importance of the subject matter and the often-heavy themes of partnership, equity, and iwi-Crown relations that the book traverses, Fisher has done an admirable job of crafting a concise and readable text. At only 214 pages (including sources), the book summarises 160-odd years of important history in a manner that will be appreciated by both the interested layman and the academic. Arguably, this book ought to be considered essential reading for those who live in or maintain an association with the people and places in the Ngāi Tahu takiwā.