

He Koha: He Poha

Michael J Stevens

As part of the final thank you speeches, Jacinta Ruru, on behalf of the Faculty of Law, organised a special gifting ceremony to take place which I took a lead in. Her idea to present each of the speakers and chairs with a pōhā (kelp bag) containing tītī (muttonbirds/sooty shearwaters/Puffinus griseus) that my family is known for, originated earlier in the year, and we agreed to supply them, subject to having a successful season. At the symposium, I gave a presentation on the annual tītī harvest. Here is some of what I said:

The customary harvesting of tītī takes place on the Tītī Islands adjacent to Rakiura/Stewart Island during April and May each year. The tītī harvest was critically important in the pre-European economy of Kāi Tahu and its importance was consolidated in the post-contract era. Interestingly, unlike most other natural resources, access to and control of the tītī harvest remained exclusive to those Kāi Tahu genealogically entitled to participate in it. Muttonbirding, as it is commonly called, thus still plays a crucial role in the economic and cultural life of southern Kāi Tahu.

Approximately 36 islands clustered together in three main groups to the east, south and west of Rakiura are home to the tītī. Historically and in the present-day, preserved tītī are important commodities in the diet and economy of Kāi Tahu whānui. In 1864, the Crown and Kāi Tahu negotiated the sale and purchase of Rakiura. As part of this deed of cession, 21 of the islands were exclusively reserved for certain Kāi Tahu individuals and their descendants. These islands became known

as the Beneficial Tītī Islands. The remainder became known as the Crown Tītī Islands. Pursuant to the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998 the latter were renamed the Rakiura Tītī Islands and ownership vested in Te Runanga o Ngāi Tahu.

Since 1909, the Native Land Court (now the Māori Land Court) has had jurisdiction to update the list of owners to the Beneficial Tītī Islands (for the most recent provision, see section 6 of the Māori Purposes Act 1983), and since 1912, the Tītī Islands have been subject to specific regulations.

I am a regular participant in the tītī harvest, and my pōua (grandfather), Tiny Metzger, has ensured that our Bluff-based whānau, which visits the small island of Pikomamaku-nui, still preserve much of our annual catch in pōhā. Pōhā are traditional storage containers made up of rimurapa (bull-kelp), kete (woven flax baskets), kiri-totara (de-laminated totara bark) and harakeke (flax). Pōhā-tītī usually stand vertically, with the kete that forms the base holding both the sealed vessel of preserved tītī and the strips of bark that protect it from damage. Nowadays, pōhā like this hold about 14 tītī on average, although they were formerly much larger. It is also possible to make smaller pōhā, which instead lay horizontally and are contained entirely within a long kete. Our family occasionally makes the latter, which can hold more or less six tītī. We refer to these as “pensioner-packs”. In the season just gone, we made one such pōhā- tītī for each of today’s speakers and chairs. We hope that you enjoy them!

Pōhā-tītī are important markers of Kāi Tahu tribal identity and their persistence is a reminder that the *Lands* decision and the subsequent thinking it informed, enabled not just the restoration of tribal asset bases through, for instance, the iwi-corporate development of ex-railway lands into shopping malls, but that it also assisted Māori communities to continue to utilise natural resources and therefore, to paraphrase British Columbian historian Paige Raibmon, fashion self-identities considered authentic on our terms.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ For more information see Michael J Stevens, “Kāi Tahu me te Hopu Tītī ki Rakiura: An Exception to the ‘Colonial Rule?’” (2006) 41 *The Journal of Pacific History* 273; and Jacinta Ruru and Michael Stevens, “Māori Land Owners and their Spouses and Partners” (2007) *New Zealand Law Journal* 325.