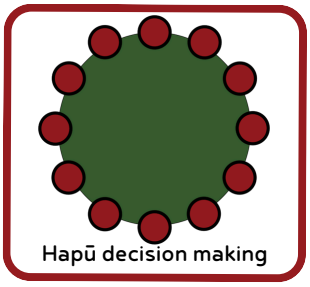
TE TIRITI O WAITANGI

WHY WE HAVE IT, WHAT IT SAYS AND WHY IT MATTERS NOW

A treaty is an agreement between independent nations. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is an agreement between rangatira, the leaders of hapū (nations), and the British Crown (now the New Zealand government).

WHY DO WE HAVE A TREATY?


Hapū decision making

Hapū nations in Aotearoa have a long history of strategic alliances. Negotiation of formal treaties between hapū, tatau pounamu, was a regular practice prior to the arrival of Europeans.

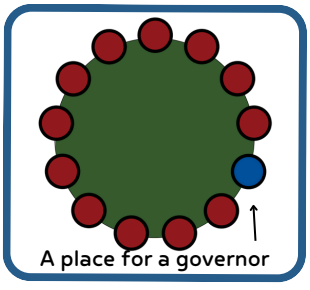
In the late 1700s and early 1800s, sealers, whalers and missionaries came here and lived amongst hapū. Māori travelled extensively and had trading relationships, particularly with Australia, England and North America.

In 1835, the authority and sovereignty of hapū in New Zealand was declared and recognised internationally. He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni (the Declaration of Independence) stated that mana and rangatiratanga (sovereign power and authority) in New Zealand was held by hapū. Any foreign authority (kāwanatanga) could only be established with their permission. The Declaration was initially signed by rangatira in the northern regions and later in other areas. It was officially acknowledged by the British Crown in 1836.

The lack of control over increasing numbers of settlers was a concern for the British government and hapū in some areas. Europeans were only a small minority here in the late 1830s, however, their behaviour was of concern in some communities. A private enterprise, the New Zealand Company, was also planning large scale immigration having sold rights to nearly 100,000 acres of Māori land in Britain prior to any agreement with Māori. The British government wanted to ensure control over their own citizens and to protect the sovereign nations of Aotearoa.

LEARN MORE

WHAT WAS AGREED TO IN 1840?


A place for a governor

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a commitment to a relationship of peace and mutual benefit. It allowed for others to come here while affirming the authority of hapū.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed in 1840 by over 500 rangatira (chiefs) of the hapū and representatives of the British Crown (Queen Victoria). It was signed in 38 locations throughout New Zealand. There was extensive discussion and debate about Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the treaty text in te reo Māori) before it was signed. In 1840 Māori were over 97% of the population.

IN SUMMARY TE TIRITI SAYS:

Preamble - The Queen wants Māori people to keep their lands and independence and she wants all peoples to live together in peace. This agreement is to make a government for her people who are now in New Zealand and for those who will come in the future.

1 Kāwanatanga - Māori give to the Queen of England the right to have a governor in New Zealand.

2 Tino rangatiratanga - The Queen agrees that Māori will keep their independence and keep control over their lands and everything that is important to them. They give to the Queen the right to buy land, if they want to sell it.

3 Ōritetanga - **T**he Queen gives Māori people the same rights as British people.

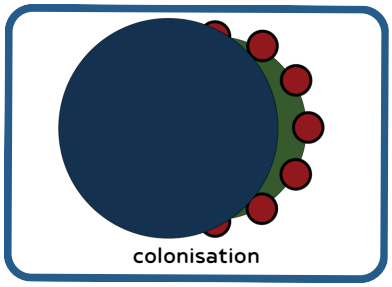
Ritenga Māori/wairuatanga - The Governor promises to protect Māori customs and the different religions in New Zealand (a spoken promise).

READ IN OTHER LANGUAGES

HOW IS TE TIRITI RELEVANT TODAY?

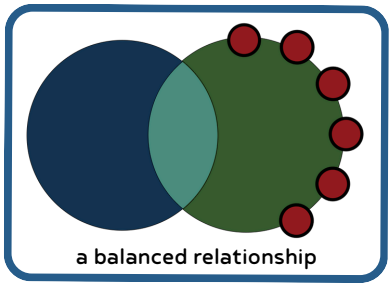
Te Tiriti is the foundation for ongoing cooperation and coexistence. It provides for a society in which all can flourish, where Māori have authority over the things of importance to them – lands, language, ngā taonga katoa – and tangata Tiriti are able to have systems that work for and reflect their diverse peoples. Te Tiriti also creates a space in between for negotiating issues of shared interest and concern.

Since the signing of Te Tiriti, the Crown has established and exercised government in breach of this agreement, for the benefit of settlers. Through laws, policies and war, governments have: suppressed rangatiratanga, tikanga (Māori practices) and te reo Māori; imposed Western systems on Māori; and taken control of Māori land and resources. This has led to deep injustice and imbalance in Aotearoa.


colonisation

Māori have responded to the Crown's treaty breaches by constantly calling for government to act honourably and uphold its Te Tiriti commitments. Māori have acted in innovative ways to exercise rangatiratanga and look after the land and the people – including through unity movements, non-violent resistance to the taking of land and movements to revitalise te reo Māori.

The legitimacy of the New Zealand government rests on Te Tiriti. However, as we have no formal written constitution, the government is not compelled to uphold Te Tiriti. At a human level and in terms of the honour of the Crown, it is a grave injustice to use a treaty to gain entrance to another country, then to take the advantages that treaty offers while refusing to uphold the rights and honour the responsibilities it sets out and to deny it legal status.


a balanced relationship

Te Tiriti is a powerful unifying document for Aotearoa which is central to a healthy democracy. We are surrounded by examples of communities working together to heal our past and to restore balance and wellbeing for people and the planet through respectful relationships. Te Tiriti provides belonging for us all - this comes with a responsibility to learn about it and to act in our communities to uphold Te Tiriti.