

# NGĀTI RUAPANI mai Waikaremoana

Chairman's speech delivered February 25, 2025 at Tūai

## **Tēnā koutou katoa.**

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā rangatira, tēnā koutou katoa.

I will not speak of the pain of our tūpuna. That is theirs. They carried it. They endured it. And they brought us here.

What I speak to today is unity.

Not unity spoken. Unity lived.

The hapū of Waikaremoana have stood together. Through distance. Through absence. Through time. Bound by whakapapa, and by this whenua.

Waikaremoana has outlived every generation that has stood beside it. It will outlive us too. We do not shape it. It shapes us.

And it has shaped a people who did not disappear.

I acknowledge those whose work is rarely seen, but always felt.

To the ringawera, the cooks, the workers — the hands that have prepared this place and cared for all of us throughout this journey — tēnā koutou. Your mahi upholds the mana of this kaupapa, of this occasion, and of our people.

You do not stand at the front. But you are the reason we can stand here at all.

Today, the Crown acknowledges what was done. We receive that acknowledgment with dignity. But we do not stand here because of the Crown.

We stand here because our tipuna never relinquished who they were. And because we have not relinquished each other.

This deed does not define us. It affirms what has always been true.

That Te Urewera remains.

That Waikaremoana remains.

That the hapū who call this place home, remain.

We stand together as Te Whare Kotahi o Waikaremoana, as hapū of this place, and as uri of Tūhoe, held within Te Urewera.

We were never lost. We were always here.

This is not an end.

This is a beginning.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa