HE WHAKAPUTANGA IN TE TAI TOKERAU

Last week's BREXIT vote result in the United Kingdom took most markets, media commentators and government leaders (including John Key) by surprise. They have all badly misjudged the mood of their peoples.

However for Iwi and Hapū engaged in constitutional transformation, the British vote to exit the European Union resonates with their own constitutional right to independence as first declared by Te Wakaminenga to the world in He Whakaputanga o Te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni (1835).

[1]Unsurprisingly, given that it was drafted and first signed in Te Tai Tokerau, He Whakaputanga figured largely in that region's feedback on constitutional transformation. In Waiomio, we heard –

> *"…tikanga and He Wakaputanga … define independence and predate Te Tiriti … Te Tiriti actually makes no sense unless you understand that ..."*
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> *"We have lived and breathed He Wakaputanga … we have seen the Crown reject it, laugh about it … we have read historians saying it doesn't mean anything, but we know our tūpuna thought about it and solemnly put their marks to it because they wanted the world and the King in England to know we were independent …"*
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> *"He Wakaputanga was seen by our old people as a form of protection because they could see what was coming and wanted to make it known that we had mana and were sovereign … It was … an evolution to meet challenging times, just like we have to do today."*
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> *"[Our tūpuna] weren't afraid to talk about their power because they had it, and in Wakaputanga they told everyone what they meant … It was our first written constitution and it is still relevant today."*

In Kaikohe –

> *"The Wakaminenga that is in He Wakaputanga and Te Tiriti is a body unique to us. It met and was in existence years before 1835 and provided a model for all Hapu to work together and make joint independent decisions. Our people have never lost sight of it, and neither have we forgotten what it promised."*
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> *"It has been such an important part of my life and the life of my whanau. Our tūpuna was there in 1835 and we grew up hearing stories about he Wakaminenga and the hui about (James) Busby … [He Wakaputanga] is important … politically as well as historically."*

At Whatuwhiwhi –

> *"… not many Iwi outside the North signed He Wakaputanga, but its kaupapa is something everyone can understand. It's the same kaupapa about our mana that the old people took to Waitangi five years after He Wakaputanga was signed, and it's still our kaupapa today."*

At their hui-a-marama on Saturday, Te Runanga-a-Iwi o Ngati Kahu considered last week's BREXIT vote. They see what is coming and, in the context of He Wakaputanga, empathise with its drive for independence and against globalisation.

Next week this column will consider feedback from other regions on He Wakaputanga.

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[1] Tenth edited extract from pp. 45 – 46 of He Whakaaro Here Whakaumu Mō Aotearoa – The Report of Matike Mai o Aotearoa.