

THE PROMISE OF TE TIRITI – by Anahera Herbert-Graves

At every [hui](#) of [Matike Mai o Aotearoa](#) where [Te Tiriti o Waitangi](#) was discussed, there were three main [kōrero](#). First was the kōrero that consistently referenced what the old people had passed down.

¹*“Knowing what our old people have told us, it just seems logical that we would never have ceded anything to the [Crown](#). But the old people also said that we offered [Pākehā](#) a place to stand, and that seems logical as well because it’s about [manaakitanga](#) ... it’s not about them trampling on our manaaki and us trampling on their right to be here which Te Tiriti gave them ... that was the bargain really, only it never worked out the way that the [rangatira](#) intended ... and probably not the way some Pākehā might have wanted at that time either.”*

“It is important that if you are to write about a constitution based on Te Tiriti, that you stay focussed on what our [tūpuna](#) said, and not what generations of Crown officials and lawyers have told us.”

Second was the korero that reaffirmed Te Tiriti maintained our [mana](#) and did not cede it.

“Understanding Te Tiriti means understanding ... that our old people only talked about and signed the words in [te reo](#), because that was it at that time, and ... we didn’t give away our mana to be in charge of ourselves, but kept it and asked Pākehā to look after themselves too, according to certain [tikanga](#).”

“When Te Tiriti is seen as maintaining our mana rather than giving it away, it is easy to see it like two lots of different mana coming together, us and Pākehā, and all of us having to work out a proper relationship where one doesn’t boss the other around.”

Third was the korero that understood that Te Tiriti is fundamental to any future constitution.

“Te Tiriti as a base (for a constitution) is a no-brainer ... It will finally settle the past and provide ... a good blueprint for the future. But as always the devil will be in the detail.”

“Te Tiriti has everything a constitution needs – the recognition of each community’s mana, the preservation of each community’s decision-making authority, and the recognition that there are things everyone has to come together to make a decision about.”

“I have always believed that Te Tiriti is a constitutional agreement. It said that we were to carry on making law for ourselves while the Crown was to organise Pakeha. That is what a treaty-based constitution means.”

As can be seen, these korero come from people who believe in the constitutional promise of Te Tiriti, and are realistic but undeterred about the difficulties of bringing that promise to fruition. In coming weeks we will share some of their thinking on those difficulties.



¹ Fifteenth edited extract from pp. 53 – 54 of [He Whakaaro Here Whakaumu Mō Aotearoa – The Report of Matike Mai o Aotearoa](#)