

SOUNDS OF SILENCE – by Anahera Herbert-Graves (Chief Executive Officer Te Runanga-a-Iwi o Ngāti Kahu)

On Saturday Chris Finlayson and his officials were in Te Hiku meeting with different iwi in the region, starting with Ngāti Kahu. By Sunday we were hearing very muddled reports of the hui with Ngāti Kahu. There was this from TVNZ: “Ngati Kahu broke away from the four other iwi about a month ago, and asked to be allowed to come up with its own draft deed of settlement.”

That would have been news to everyone up here alright. Especially to those who know that, in order to write the deed, Ngāti Kahu made a planned and well-signalled withdrawal in January 2010 from the now-defunct Te Hiku Forum. But even if you didn’t know this background, hands up those who believe Ngāti Kahu ever asked anyone for permission to write its own deed.

Even more interesting than TVNZ’s piece, was the polly-speak coming from Chris Finlayson himself about the meeting with Ngāti Kahu and our deed. He was reported on stuff.co.nz as saying the draft deed would be a "partial settlement" that would "allow grievances to linger", that "full and final settlements are the cornerstone of the historical settlement process", and that “finality allows the Crown and iwi to draw a line under the grievances of the past and focus on developing a positive future together.”

Translation: “If Ngāti Kahu wants to settle, they have to first let the Crown put the words ‘full and final’ on their deed, second stop acting like they own their lands and other estates, and third start pretending the Crown does.” As you can imagine, Ngāti Kahu’s response needs no translation.

Finlayson and the Crown have had the deed for two months now. The deadline for them to make submissions to it closes at 12 noon today. They hadn’t asked for an extension at time of this column being written.

If the Crown is still not ready to make full redress for all its wrongdoing and lawlessness, Ngāti Kahu will allow it to make a partial settlement at this time. We would prefer to sign a final deed of settlement, on the simple condition that it does actually contain full settlement redress.

It’s worrying for the future wellbeing of this country that the Crown still seems unable to see or portray Ngāti Kahu as anything but breakaways from the other iwi and beggars to the Crown. But even more worrying is the unnatural silence from the other iwi to whom I tātai. Just last month their leaders all sat unmurmuring, except for one of their number who told Ngāti Kahu off to a standstill for having finished our deed and then come expecting to sort out the finer details of our shared interests with them, when some of them hadn’t even started writing their deeds yet. But on Saturday Finlayson announced the other four iwi were all ready to sign their deeds of settlement.

What deeds of settlement are those? Who wrote them and when? Be interesting to hear something more than the sounds of silence from the other iwi.