

Ngāi Tahu Treaty Festival, Te Rau Aroha Marae, Monday 6 February

Discussion on the current review of the New Zealand Constitution and the restoration of Waituna Lagoon will be highlights of this year's Ngāi Tahu Waitangi Day commemoration festivities.

Awarua Rūnanga will host the festivities at Te Rau Aroha Marae, at Awarua (Bluff), on Monday 6 February. The location is significant as in 1840, Ngāi Tahu signed the Treaty of Waitangi at three South Island locations, including Ruapuke Island, which is out in the Foveaux Strait, just 20km SE of Te Rau Aroha Marae.

After a final signing at Port Underwood in Cook Strait by Te Tau Ihu tribes, Te Waipounamu was brought under the cloak of the Treaty of Waitangi.

Festivities at Awarua will start at 10.30am with a pōwhiri to welcome manuhiri (visitors).

Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Bill English, Minister for Treaty Settlements, Hon Chris Finlayson and Te Tai Tonga MP Rino Tirikatene will be amongst those to be welcomed at the commemoration festival.

Each year important kōrero (discussions) are held at the festivities. Discussion on the current review of the New Zealand Constitution and the place of the Treaty in a post-Treaty settlement Aotearoa will be led by Tā Tipene O'Regan, who is Upoko Rūnaka of Awarua. He is also co-chair of the group undertaking the first stages of the review process and the Hon Bill English is one of the two ministers responsible for the work.

The second issue to be discussed is the restoration of the Waituna Lagoon near Bluff. The wetland and lagoon is under threat from high levels of nitrogen and phosphorous and if it continues to be polluted the treasured wetland and mahika kai will almost certainly become another biological and environmental disaster.

Tā Tipene O'Regan says the day presents an opportunity to explore how the Treaty relationship can provide the platform for the community to work together to save Waituna.

"Immediate intervention is needed to save this magnificent internationally-protected lagoon. The Treaty presents us with a wonderful opportunity to drive a strong relationship that will work towards its rejuvenation and restoration."

Participating in the discussion will be speakers from Awarua Rūnanga, Environment Southland, Fonterra and insight from aquatic scientist, Andy Hicks.

Members of Te Waihora management board will join the discussion to share the experiences they have had working towards cleaning up Te Waihora (Lake Ellesmere) in Canterbury.

Also on the day, 90 people are going over to Ruapuke Island for a guided tour. This tour around the Ruapuke coastline will be led by Awarua fisherman and Ruapuke descendant, Riki Topi, and Tahu Potiki of Otakou, a noted tribal historian.

At the marae there will be a barbeque and fun activities for kids. There will also be a rare opportunity to view endangered takahē and kākāpō thanks to the Department of Conservation. Ōraka-Aparima Rūnaka are also bringing their waka ama (outrigger canoe) for people to have a go.

The public is welcome to attend.

Each year the Ngāi Tahu Waitangi Day commemorations rotate between the three locations where Ngāi Tahu signed the Treaty: Rau Aroha Marae, at Awarua (Bluff); Ōtākou Marae, near Dunedin and Ōnuku Marae on Banks Peninsula.

Ends

For more information please contact:

Kahu Te Whaiti

Kaiwhiri Whakapāpātanga

Assistant Communication Advisor

Office of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu

PO Box 13 046 | Christchurch

DDI: 03 371 3904

Mobile: 021 443 895

Email: kahu.tewhaiti@ngaitahu.iwi.nz