

Tabled at Hearing 16/10/14.

BEFORE CANTERBURY REGIONAL COUNCIL

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of proposed Land and Water Plan (Variation 1)

**EVIDENCE OF MARGARET ELIZABETH HINE JONES
ON BEHALF OF TE RŪNANGA O NGĀI TAHU
DATED 16 OCTOBER 2014**

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My name is Margaret Elizabeth Hine Jones. I am the daughter of the late Mere Kokopu Elizabeth Teihoka of Taumutu and the late Roy Hamilton.
- 1.2 I was born and raised at Taumutu, on the shores of Te Waihora and have had an ongoing connection with the lake and Ngāti Moki Pā for my entire life. I am a member of Te Taumutu Rūnanga and a member of Te Taumutu Kaumātua Council.
- 1.3 Over many years, I have worked closely with our Kaumātua and Rūnanga representatives on a range of different kaupapa including issues pertaining to Te Waihora. I was particularly fortunate to work alongside my late Aunt Ake (Maria Johnson) who was an inspirational figure who was passionate about the Lake and its health.
- 1.4 My evidence today will cover the time I spent at Te Waihora as a young person and the important role the Lake played in our lives as tangata whenua at that time. Within my evidence, I will also refer to some of the views regarding Te Waihora that were expressed by my late mother, Mere Kokopu Elizabeth Teihoka (Hamilton) and my late Aunt Ake (Maria Johnson).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 I was born in 1939 at Taumutu and I lived there right through until I left home to go to work at the age of 17. It was a super place to live. We lived at Fishermen's Point – right on the Point, until I was about four years old and then we moved up near the marae. When we were kids, there were only two other Māori families still living at Taumutu. The Māori community had reduced greatly from what it had been in my mother's youth and in the years when Aunt Ake was growing up, just 15 years earlier than me - the resources of the area were no longer able to sustain expanding families, so many Ngāi Tahu whānau had had to leave.

3. GROWING UP ON THE SHORES OF TE WAIHORA

- 3.1 There were three children in my family, I had a sister and a brother who have now passed away. As kids we may have missed out on a lot of things but we were fortunate to grow up living on the shores of our beloved lake, Te Waihora.

- 3.2 The Wards' whānau lived nearby and our families would often go down to the creek by the Hone Wetere Church together - that was our regular playground. We frolicked in the creek and chased little fish as they swam up and down. There were wee black flounders and whitebait. We had hours of fun there. Not far from the creek was an area of lush green grass, where we used to play and my Mum and others would spread their rugs out and we'd have lunch. Later, the Wards moved away and we were the only Māori family left living there.
- 3.3 During whitebait season, from where we lived, you'd see flocks of birds diving for whitebait in the creek that runs into the Koru. We'd run down to the creek with a bucket or a bowl and simply scoop them up – the whitebait was that plentiful. We also had a lot of fun in the creeks by the marae. We used to play there and climb the willow trees collecting birds eggs.
- 3.4 The islands that have appeared in the Lake in recent years did not exist when I was growing up - it was just water, water everywhere. We could walk from Fisherman's Point right around the lake edge to the Church. There was a shingle area there where the boats were pulled up and the fishermen would land their fish.
- 3.5 When they opened the lake we would stand on the bank as kids and watch. They used to cut straight across the bank with bulldozers and we'd see all the eels going through. Sometimes with big storms the sea would come right across the spit and drizzle into the creek. I don't think many people have seen that today.
- 3.6 My enduring memory of life at Taumutu was that morning, noon and night it was FISH. There were the three types of flounder when I was growing up: the black flounder, the yellow belly and the three corner. My favourite was the three corner. They were a smaller fish but the tastiest. I remember that one black flounder would feed the five of us in our family for a meal. Mum would fillet it and batter it. The flounders were huge, enormous and thick too.
- 3.7 In her evidence presented to the Waitangi Tribunal on the Ngāi Tahu Claim in 1988, my mother recalled that the flounder were "so thick they had to be sliced so they would cook through." In her evidence she also lamented that the flounders had by that time, become so poor. My mother was a strong woman who rarely shed tears, but her despair at the state of the Lake was such that she was too upset to deliver her own evidence at the Tribunal hearing so the late Aunty Cath Brown had to read it for her.

4. FISHING

- 4.1 My Dad, Roy Hamilton was a Pākehā fisherman who moved to Taumutu in 1933, after buying my great-grandfather's house. He married my Mother in 1936 and they moved to live at the Point. He was a commercial flounder fisherman. There were only about four or five fishermen working on the lake at that time. We used to go out with Dad in the boat and we would row the boat while he picked up the nets or set them out. Every day he went out, weather permitting. If he wasn't set netting, he would drag net. We would go down with him while they were dragging. They would go way out in the lake in the boat dragging the net in a semicircle – there'd be five or six fishermen and they all took turns. Sometimes they'd get 20 cases in a single drag, and that was a lot.
- 4.2 Dad used to get the odd eel in the net which wasn't very good as they'd break the net trying to escape and you'd have to do a lot of mending after that. We didn't do a lot of eeling in our generation which was a big change from my Mother and Aunty Ake's time. Eeling had been a major part of life at the Lake for both of them. My mother recalled working with the other families as a child, to pāwhara the eels and leave them to dry on whata overnight – she said that the laden whata were a beautiful sight to behold.
- 4.3 Aunty Ake recalled that the Taumutu families would take hundreds of eels over a fortnight each March. Once the eels were dried, each family would send a case of eels to their relations down south who would reciprocate, sending titi (mutton birds) back. The traditional harvest of eels had all but stopped in my childhood as most Māori families who had participated in customary eeling, had left Taumutu. Sometimes whānau would come from Little River and Rāpaki for meetings at Te Awhitu House and Pōua Dick and Riki Ellison would go down to catch just enough eels for a hākari (feast).
- 4.4 When Dad was fishing, Mum was a crackerjack at gutting the fish. She would gut the fish for Dad and anybody else that was there. In those days they just threw the gut back into the lake. There wasn't a rule about not throwing fish waste in the lake then as it almost immediately disappeared – eaten by eels or the ever present sea gulls. I did have a go at gutting the fish, but almost cut my fingers off because the knives were so sharp.
- 4.5 In the late 40s and early 50s the fish stocks seemed plentiful but as the 50s progressed, the numbers died down. Eventually, there just weren't enough

fish and the fishermen including my father had to go and find other work, mostly on local farms or potato picking.

5. DEGRADATION OF THE LAKE

- 5.1 When I married in 1961, we moved to north Canterbury, to Waiau. I maintained an ongoing association with the Lake through visits to Taumutu on the odd weekend throughout these years. In about 1963, my Mum and Dad moved back to the Point and that's when I noticed the lake changing. The water was right up by the bank and I could see the discolouration. I didn't think about it at the time, but it was obvious that the water was dirty and that the dirt was getting in from somewhere.
- 5.2 My children used to go down during most school holidays to stay with my Mum and she'd take them out in her wee boat. There was no floundering by that time but there was commercial eeling. The odd younger person was fishing but they didn't do a lot – the fish just weren't there to catch.
- 5.3 I do not recall people talking about the degradation of the water at the time or the depletion of fish in the lake. Perhaps this was because new people had come to live in the area and the older ones with knowledge of what the Lake had been, were no longer there.

6. THE FUTURE OF TE WAIHORA

- 6.1 Today, I am very involved with my Marae and there's not many of us left who remember the Lake as it was. It is difficult for the younger ones to understand the depth of our feeling for the Lake - they don't have the same aroha as we have because they have not witnessed it.
- 6.2 My mother lived at Taumutu all of her life. Her family lived off the land and the Lake including puha, watercress, eels, herring, flounder, inaka, smelts and whitebait. She remembered the Lake being much higher and clear with a shingle bottom in many places. She was shocked at its deterioration over her lifetime.
- 6.3 Aunty Ake too, recalled the Lake as a beautiful place in her childhood.
- 6.4 When she returned to the Lake for her first visit after 50 years away, she could not believe what she was seeing. These are her words:

“On my return to the Lake in the 1990’s I found a very different place. There were only three or four people living off the Lake and fishing. I found most of the community was gone and now living in town. In my day you could go right around the Lake on a single track. Go right round and the colour, you could see the shingle bottom when I was a young kid. You could see the fish in the water, now you can’t see anything and it smells. I would not swim in the Lake anymore and I wouldn’t let my mokopuna swim in their either. There is no one living from the Lake like we used to. I can’t believe my eyes that it has changed so much. The Lake is still special to me. It is in my blood. I dream of what it could become.”

- 6.5 Today, my grandchildren say, let’s go out to Nana’s Lake. The Lake is part of their inheritance and their identity. I know that it will take a lot of work to restore the lake but we’ve all got to work together to get it done. We just hope and pray that that is possible.

Margaret Jones

October 2014