

Te whakatuwheratanga o Ngā Mokopuna

Opening ceremony address in the Hub. Professor Rawinia Higgins

6 December 2024

Kai aku nui, kai aku rahi, nau mai ki tēnei rā whakahirahira mō tātau te whānau whānui o Te Herenga Waka. Tēnā koutou katoa.

My name is Rawinia Higgins, and I am the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Māori and Engagement and sponsor of the Living Pā project. On behalf of Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington, thank you for being part of this auspicious occasion for Te Herenga Waka marae; the re-instilling of the mauri of Te Tumu Herenga Waka, and the opening of the new building Ngā Mokopuna that has, until today, been known as the Living Pā.

Te Herenga Waka marae has a proud history. In 1980, the first iteration of the marae was established at the bottom of Kelburn Parade. It was achieved through the vision and leadership of Professor Sir Hirini Moko Mead, supported by his contemporary, Professor Whatarangī Winiata, and alongside notable rangatira, the lates Ruka Broughton and Dr Wiremu Parker. Carvings and kōwhaiwhai panels were produced and rooms were converted into ‘marae like’ spaces. It was managed as part of the then Department of Māori Studies, now known as Te Kawa a Māui.

A few years later, the marae shifted into a villa further up the hill at 46 Kelburn Parade. Then, on 6 December 1986, our wharenuī Te Tumu Herenga Waka was opened at dawn, making it the first purpose-built marae to be established at any university in this country. At that time, a wharekai was proposed to accompany the elaborately carved wharenuī, however, this was never made a priority by the University through the '90s and early 2000s. Thus, for over 30 years we made do with the limited kitchen and dining facilities— squeezing in multitudes of people for kai and manaakitanga as the hosts of thousands of hui.

From the time I came back to this University from the University of Otago, I looked for opportunities to put the proposal for a full marae complex back on the table. I lobbied

for it as the Head of School of Te Kawa a Māui and, once I was promoted into the role of Deputy Vice Chancellor Māori in 2016, after the late Piri Sciascia retired, I began preparing a business case.

Inspired by the Kura Whare in Tāneatua, the first fully certified living building in this country, I saw how the Living Building Challenge complemented the fundamental values that Te Herenga Waka marae was founded on. Two of the distinguishing features of our marae is that it brings people together but also provides a place for students and staff to apply knowledge, rather than just theorise about it. Professors Mead and Winiata made exactly that point when they presented to the University's Academic Board back in the 1980s to get support for the establishment of the marae. They explained that the marae is to Māori students what the science labs are to chemistry students. The Living Pā project takes that whakaaro to another level. Ngā Mokopuna will be a living lab for students and staff to actively consider their relationship with the natural world and challenge them to modify their personal behaviours to protect Pāpatūānuku.

When we discuss issues such as sustainability, being “green”, or addressing climate change, many people nod their heads knowingly, register the problem and make small gestures towards slowing the impact. Most do not actively work towards changing their overall behaviour. The Living Building Challenge makes you face up to the enormity of the challenge, and strips you back to some vulnerabilities that relegate humans as secondary to the environment. Ruia taitea, kia tū ko taikākā – strip away the sapwood so the heartwood remains.

The Māori world, mātauranga Māori and our language are rooted in the environment. When we speak about kaitiakitanga, people generally understand it as guardianship, but an assumption is often made that if you are acting as the kaitiaki, your positionality is superior to the environment. If only it was that simple! Kaitiakitanga requires active guardianship, where we act as mediators and ensure the longevity of our whenua and natural world. So our positionality is not superior, but rather in service of our relationship with the environment.

While the two buildings, Te Tumu Herenga Waka and Ngā Mokopuna, are exactly 38 years apart, their aspirations, vision and methodologies are similar. Inside our wharehenui are untold whakapapa, genealogies, that connect people to people, to histories, to encounters, to events, to memories, to identities, to place and the natural world. There are depictions of kai, of atua, of ancestors, and knowledge systems. Similarly, Ngā Mokopuna supports our understanding of natural resources, has a whakapapa of non-toxic materials, draws on the characteristics of Māui to inspire the next generation of leaders, and upholds a knowledge system that is exciting and paradigm shifting within the parameters of the LBC. Both buildings have so much knowledge inside them — they could fill innumerable theses, articles, books, and libraries. We are excited about all of the creation of new knowledge going forward.

Finally, I want to acknowledge some of the people who have contributed to this building. The journey to today has been long, and could not have happened without the belief and support from so many:

- Firstly, to all the donors, trusts and foundations who believed in our kaupapa, we are humbled by your donations and your faith in our project. Fundraising has been a challenge and we were turned down more often than I care to remember. We never seemed to meet the funding criteria, whether it was for the Marae Purposes Fund, governmental education capital funds, or the Provincial Growth Fund. We were told that we wouldn't be able to pull off this building, so it was best not to give us hope by giving a donation or funding — but as a team we never gave up!
- While we haven't reached our donation target, we are extremely appreciative of all those who gave in the belief that this project could become a reality, particularly the many friends, former and current staff and students of the University. We are still taking donations for the building by the way, and the size of the donation may elevate your future booking requests lol. In all seriousness though, while the building is now complete, the challenge to achieve certification over the next year is still in front of us and we welcome your continued support.
- Another group that I want to acknowledge is the ambassadors who allowed us to use their faces, voices, and connections to spread the message of the Living Pā.

Sir Joe Williams, Hon Christopher Finlayson, Rachel Calcinai, Dame Patsy Reddy, Tricia Walbridge, Te Wehi Wright, Mereana Hond, Poipoia Taonga Poa and Christie Wallace. You helped us to articulate and share our huge vision, you opened doors that were otherwise closed, and your unwavering support helped keep the project momentum moving forward.

- While tikanga would dictate that it would not be appropriate for me to acknowledge members of my own iwi, but I do want to mention Tamati Kruger and Kirsti Luke for supporting us and inspiring us to take hold of the Living Building challenge. Our team traveled to Waikaremoana, Ruatāhuna and Taneatua to understand the LBC and these types of buildings and we were welcomed with open arms and heart from these communities.
- It's fair to say that most people don't realise the complexity that has to be managed during a construction project of this scale. When the Living Building Challenge dimension is added, we're talking about a level of challenge that's very difficult for even experienced people to fully appreciate. The degree of innovation, decision-making, continual cycles of induction, education and iteration, the challenges of industry readiness, and Covid market conditions have meant that the Living Pā journey has not been straightforward.
- Assembling the right Design and Construction team – the pool of consultants and the building contractor – with a commitment to deliver an LBC project within our local market was vital. Our selection was based on relevant project experience, history of work, shared values and cultural awareness. Our choice has stood the test of time, and the team has worked tirelessly, 'above and beyond', rising to the challenge time and again, and passionately advocated for the project's objectives and for sector change. At the heart of this team are two significant people, Rhonda Thomson and Lincoln North. They have been my ringaringa waewae on this project, my project managers, my eyes, my ears and my go to people. Thank you both for believing and achieving. I will forever be grateful for your love of the kaupapa and tireless mahi.
- The Living Pā has also taken its governance and leadership groups through trials, tribulations, and successes. In keeping with the project's vision, strategies and

drivers, the Living Pā governance group has provided consistent and strong guidance and authority. To the Council, my Te Hiwa/SLT colleagues, Faculties, Te Kawa a Māui, Property Services, and Te Whānau o Te Herenga Waka – thank you for believing. We did it!

- To all the staff, students, neighbours, Wellingtonians, and passersby, who suffered and tolerated through the construction period, including the pile driving that reverberated across the campus, we thank you for your patience and kindness.

Finally, to all the people who woke up early this morning to be part of this momentous event for Te Herenga Waka, mana whenua, students, staff, alumni, friends, and beyond, tēnā koutou. “Mō te āpopō – for a better tomorrow”, has been the tag line of the project since the beginning, and its name Ngā Mokopuna reflects that future. Today we have been part of history and the future – certainly something worth waking up early for.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou katoa.

Professor Rawinia Higgins

6 December 2024





