

Planning for maori land and traditional maori uses

Tell the pakeha how you feel,' Hiwi Tauroa, Race Relations Conciliator, said to the maori of the eastern Bay of Plenty in 1982. 'Stop grumbling to yourselves on the marae.'



Now, two years later, the maori have begun to speak up, and a few pakeha have begun to listen.

The occasion was the hearing of the objections of the review of the Whakatane District Scheme. Maanu Paul, chairman of the Ngati Awa Maori Executive and of the Waiariki District Maori Council, and chief local agitator for maori rights, had asked that the council hearings be adjourned to Wairaka marae. After three hours of deliberations, the councillors agreed.

The decision was greeted with delight by local maori people who feel more at ease expressing themselves on their home ground. It was labelled 'historic' and 'momentous'.

Paul set about gathering the support of local elders and chairmen of local trusts. The district scheme is racist, he told them. If allowed to pass without change its effect would be to break up maori communities and prevent their further development. The growing numbers of unemployed young people returning from the cities will have nowhere to live, no land to work.

Support also came from the Whakatane Association for Racial Understanding, a mainly pakeha group aiming to bridge the gap between maori and pakeha and to prevent the misunderstandings and fear that arise from ignorance.

May 7. The sun shines as the mayor, councillors, planners, and other interested people gather at the entrance to the marae. Behind them flows the Whakatane River, and out to sea Whale Island looks on impassively.

Mayor, Jack Gow sounds very conciliatory in his speech: 'We hope the scheme will be based on traditions worthy of maintaining and changes worthy of incorporating. Change with intelligence is progress. I hope we'll be able to share the wisdom of the years, of maori tradition and incorporate it into the scheme for the benefit of all.' It augurs well.

The formalities over, the mayor asks where the hearing will be held. 'In the wharenui,' comes the reply.

'Oh, I thought it might be held in the dining hall,' says the mayor.

No, this meeting is the maori people's chance to really air their views and speak their minds, and the wharenui is the proper place for this. There they can speak freely — well, almost.

The maori people though have come some way towards pakeha custom. The wharenui is kitted out with tables and chairs. Tricky. Do councillors take off their shoes, as is usual custom in the wharenui, or leave them on? Some do one, some do the other. One councillor compromises by taking his shoes off once he is inside. Most of the elders leave theirs, on as does Paul himself.

A karakia starts the meeting, maori style. Dan Pakorehe Mason, a blind elder, is given the privilege. Symbolic, Paul says later, to show the councillors that even the blind can see.

The wharenui fills up with over fifty locals. A high-powered group, many of them elders and leaders of local trusts and maraes. Today there is complete unity. They're all there to back Paul. No one raps him over the knuckles, as has

sometimes been the case when he has responded to issues without consulting the elders. Today there is nothing but praise for his skills and ability. His presentation and organisation are faultless.

Objections 401 get underway. Paul begins by explaining the meanings and significance of the terms marae, papakainga, whenua, turangawaewae and hui. He goes on to talk of 'maori management' — the marae and maori committee structures, and the Ngati Awa Maori Executive, the elected body whose function it is 'to assist other agencies in the provision of housing and improvement of living conditions of the Maori' (Maori Community Development Act 1962).

Paul reads the whole of the relevant part of the act. He hopes the council will begin to use the maori executive more often, as the Ngati Awa maori's duly elected body. Hearing chairperson Forde Mitchell has already said in his opening speech on the marae that council had asked the maori people for their input into the plan two years earlier but had met with no response. Paul later counters this, saying the council should have gone to the Ngati Awa Maori Executive, not to Kokohinau marae and the Waimana Hall. The executive has, for two years now, been offering to act as consultants on such matters.

The terms and his position clarified, Paul pulls no punches. The district scheme review is monocultural. Maori people make up one third of the district's population. It is not possible for non-maoris to think for maoris. The present council, and the Wellington-based town planners who drafted the review, are entirely pakeha. Maori consultants are essential.

The effects of monoculturalism are illustrated over and over again as the specific objections are brought up. Te Mapou Pa, for example, where planners wish to stop further development along the road opposite the marae, since some houses are vacant and some falling into disrepair. This, says Paul, shows an ignorance of the term 'papakainga', and of the concept of 'ahi ka'. The papakainga is not just the marae. It extends to the houses across the road. It just happens that a highway runs through the middle. Former residents have had to go to the cities to look for work, but they did not sell up as the pakehas do. The houses stay, for the intention is always to return. 'Ahi ka', broadly speaking, means 'to keep the home'.

With the increase of unemployment in cities more people are returning. The planners say these people can return to Te Teko itself instead of Te Mapou. Paul says maoris should not be forced to move from their traditional historical and genealogical links a kilometre down the road. This sub-tribe is differ-