



**Motu Kokako:** The Hole in the Rock has special meaning to its Maori owners.

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# We view it as a whole

Looking to the past

The Maori owners of Motu Kokako, the Hole in the Rock, want tour operators to respect their mana, writes **Lamorna Rogers.**



I am a child of the 1960s, born of a Maori mother and Pakeha father, at a time when race relations were being reshaped around the world. In our whanau, it was always easy. There was lots of aroha, and my dad was keen to learn about Maori culture and to respect our ways. He learned te reo, and he took my mum's big family into his heart. Outside the whanau, it wasn't so easy. Mixed marriages weren't common in those days, and people would stare, sometimes disapprovingly. But overt discrimination was rare.

We kids were mostly oblivious to it all. I thought everyone had nannies with moko on their chins, grandparents that spoke two languages, and happily spoke a jumble of English and Maori myself. Our mum, though, taught us that life wasn't always fair. She told us about not being allowed to sit upstairs at the cinema because she was Maori, while our eyes grew big as saucers. And she told us how her little sister died after being sent home from the local hospital, while tears ran down our faces.

We grew up straddling both these worlds – mainstream at school, Maori and Pakeha at home. My dad was also from a big family and we have lots of happy memories of Christmases spent at Dad's whanau home in Timaru, helping our gran put sixpences in the pudding, and playing gin rummy with our nan. Other holidays we would visit my mum's whanau, drink tea out of enamel

mugs, kiss endless lines of nannies, aunties, uncles and cousins, and hold our noses when we used the long drops.

My adult life has been the same. I have always worked in the mainstream, mostly overseas: Australia, England, France, Germany and Finland. When I come home,

though, it is to te Ao Maori. My mum settled in granddad's papakainga, Te Rawhiti, a Maori community in the Bay of Islands. After my travels, I still think Te Rawhiti is one of the most beautiful places in the world. We wake up to glistening blue seas, dotted with storybook islands that my tupuna roamed, we walk down the road to "kia ora" from the whanaunga.

It is also the place where my Maori and Pakeha worlds recently collided. We are some of the Maori owners of Motu Kokako, the "Hole in the Rock". In the Maori world, ownership is less about property rights and more about kaitiakitanga. As owners, we have a responsibility to protect our island, and to manage it for the good of future generations. In the Maori world view, land and sea are indivisible. The mana of the owners naturally flows from the island to the waters below it. Would our island be an island without the sea around it? Would there be a kohao (hole) without the island above? But, in New Zealand law, these are separate things. So, while we can control what happens on our island, legally we can't control the waters below and around it. In a case before the Waitangi Tribunal, we are asking for redress and the ability to manage those waters, including passage through the kohao.

Why do we want this? We manage access to our island very carefully, reflecting its special significance to Maori and its high conservation value. The ecosystem on Motu Kokako is a microcosm of what the Bay of Islands looked like hundreds of years ago, and we want to preserve this. We want to manage the waters around our island in a similar way. We plan to conduct a survey of the kohao, the geology and marine life. We need to understand the impact of boats on the ecosystem: the island is an important place for schooling fish, and we have received anecdotal reports of large declines in their numbers.

In the meantime, we request that users of our island respect our mana whenua and mana moana. We are happy for private users to respectfully traverse the waters below our island but we want the boat-tour operators to work with us, not ignore us. We don't think they need a law change to do the right thing. We already have a joint tourism venture with Salt Air that provides a model for a respectful and equitable cultural and commercial arrangement.

Aotearoa has changed a lot since I was a child. Bit by bit we have been moving towards a society that is respectful and inclusive of all our cultures. This has been a great thing to see, and our take (issue) is just one more tale in that unfolding story. Each time I hope we learn to understand each other a little better.

**Our mum, though, taught us that life wasn't always fair.**

■ Lamorna (Pukepuke Ahitapu) Rogers is a trustee of the Motu Kokako Ahuwhenua Trust. Her mother, Peti Pukepuke-Ahitapu, is one of two surviving founding trustees. Her great grandfather, Pukepuke Ahitapu, was the chief of the Patukeha hapu, who in 1905 applied for, and won, Native Land Court recognition of Maori ownership of the Te Rawhiti peninsula, including Motu Kokako.

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