

BEFORE THE FRESHWATER HEARING PANEL

UNDER the Resource Management Act 1991
IN THE MATTER of the Proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement 2021

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF EVELYN COOK
ON BEHALF OF WAIHŌPAI RŪNAKA, ŌRAKA-APARIMA RŪNAKA AND TE
RŪNAKA O AWARUA**

28 June 2023

MIHI/INTRODUCTION

1. I will share my pepeha and mihi when I stand in front of the Freshwater Hearing Panel at the hearing, just as I did in the previous hearing on the non-freshwater parts of the proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement.
2. My name is Evelyn Cook.
3. I am the Waihopai Rūnaka representative on the Board of Te Ao Mārama Incorporated. I currently represent Waihopai Rūnaka on Invercargill City Council and represent Te Ao Mārama at the governance level in relationship with Environment Southland, as well as representing Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku on the Otago Regional Council (ORC) Land and Water Regional Plan Governance Group.
4. I am providing evidence on behalf of Waihōpai Rūnaka, Ōraka Aparima Rūnaka and Te Rūnaka o Awarua, to be read alongside the evidence provided by Edward Ellison, Brendan Flack and Justin Tipa.
5. My preference is to speak using the collective terms “we” and “our” as it is customary for me to do because I am carrying my tūpuna, my whānau and my hapū with me.
6. The evidence I give below is additional to, and supplements, the earlier whakaaro I shared during the hearings on the non-freshwater parts of the proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement.

WHAKAARO

Spiritual, health and well-being

7. I think about water as the foundation and source of all life – nā te wai ko te hauora o ngā mea katoa¹. Ko kā roto, kā puna, kā awa, kā hīrere hoki kā whēkau o Pāpā tū ā nuku, nō ērā te oraka o te whenua me te wai, tō tātou hākui a Pāpā tū ā nuku (the lakes, the springs, the rivers, the waterfall are the veins and organs of Pāpā tū ā nuku - from those places comes the health of our waters and lands, our Earth Mother, Pāpā tū ā nuku.). I think about ngā puna, the springs, ngā roto, the lakes, ngā awa, the rivers, e rere ana ki te ao (flowing out into the world). Puna is the source, which can be a

¹ This is the translation of “water is the foundation and source of all life”.

spring, or the source of a river or stream, but also a source of our well-being, which is as much spiritual as it is physical.

8. When I think about where within Mata-au and Te Ākau Tai Toka (the Catlins) I can feel the strength of mauri, it can be different depending on the day or the time of year. I am a coastal person and partial to waterfalls in the Catlins, the combination of the pool at the bottom of the falls, with native bush right down to the water and that feeling of tranquillity, close to the coast. I am fortunate to benefit from lands whānau still own that are allowed to be as nature intended, or are regenerating native bush. Seeing kererū feeding in the Catlins and being plump and plentiful, hearing the sounds of the bush, the birds and the water, it is an experience I wish everyone could have, a feeling of spaciousness and calm, connection and breathing space. You need all the elements, the water, the trees and the birds. It is indefinable, the aroma that comes from being in the bush, by the water, not far from the sea, and this speaks to me the strongest as a coastal person.
9. The upper Clutha is harder because so much of it has changed; really all of Mata-au is changed. I am familiar with the smaller byways, although not as familiar as I am with the coast. I traverse that area where there are little streams coming down rock faces, the places where you see there are still native bush remnants or those little native plants clinging onto the side. You know that they are going to join a bigger waterbody that is not as natural. The landscape around the sides of Mata-au includes many water sources, not just those we think of as important like Whakatipu Waimāori (Lake Wakatipu) and the main stems, but also those smaller waterbodies. Around the big lakes, Wānaka and Hāwea, that have become very busy, and along the journey to the lakes there are still places where there is a space where the water trickles or moves over rocks, following its natural paths, where you can see the glistening on the stones and nature is still doing what nature does. Places where there are tussocks, where there is water, moving water and still water, trees and birds, where it is not just all exotic trees and sometimes you will hear a native bird, find a little bit of calm, and that is what is healing for me.
10. We talk about the kohu, the mist, and what comes with the mist, being out in the mist. Ngāi Tahu do not see mist as an adversary; it is part of the cycle. For our wairua, we need as people to be nourished through our connection with water in all its forms. Water is essential for drinking but it is also its sound, its movement, the use of all your senses, taste and touch, and what water does for the rest of the environs that we experience. This may seem a sentimental 'new age' way of talking, but I think of it as the 'old age' way of experiencing; it is being back with the ancestors.
11. All living things, it does not matter what they are, insect or fish or bird or person, they all need water, plants need water, everybody needs water and most need pure water.

12. I think for me too, we do not talk so much about what Māori did in the water for fun. It is what we do as human beings; cooling off, splashing around, soaking your aching bones in a warm pool, and having a drink when you are thirsty. We do not talk elaborately about that, it is just part of life so why would we? It is part of what is precious to us that we need to protect.

Mātauraka and mahika kai

13. When I presented in the previous hearing I spoke about seasonal resources that our tūpuna travelled up Mata-au to access, species that were not coastal or sea run, the inland species of fish, birds and plants. These journeys were also the time used for learning and developing skills and knowledge of the environment as our tūpuna moved through the environment, through a lot of physical walking but also on mōkihi, temporary watercraft. The rivers, streams and lakes took our tūpuna to where they wanted to go because of the human need for water, so it was either travelling on it or by it. According to the kōrero of our tūpuna, this was a resource rich environment, in a different way than how we think of resources and riches now. Our tūpuna knew how to live with it and harvest from it. The water sources were more pure, contained fewer contaminants and no introduced chemicals or the things that we worry about now like didymo and duck itch.
14. The journey inland, and back out to the coast, was about working with what was found along the way, staying in wharerau, temporary shelters, where there were materials to make them with, which would determine where to stop for the night. It was about how to dry fish to take along, dried īnaka (whitebait) as a snack for instance, and what berries, depending on the time of year, that you could add to your diet. These food sources might not be the primary reason for going inland to harvest but they helped to make food go further and kai more interesting. In autumn and late summer there might just be kererū that had fallen off the branches drunk or too fat to fly, a koha from Tāne to help on the journey. This was all about living with what was found there.
15. We were taught to take flappers (fledglings) in spring; that was wisdom handed down to us. There were no guns, so it was a different way of hunting, different skills, and taking flappers is low energy harvesting. Taking the young not the old means that the parent birds continue on to breed again. Birds could be preserved and carried, or cooked fresh.
16. All the nooks and crannies of the smaller tributary waterbodies provide for galaxiid species that were eaten directly by our tūpuna or that provided a food source for the manu (birds) that were eaten. Tuna (eels) and all the galaxiids were much more plentiful in the past, not bounded by dams, more naturally transitioning through their life stages and living in

balance with each other. We do not hear so much about the tuna heke² now, and we have to actually move tuna below the dams on Mata-au so they can make that journey to the sea. Not many of our people are still alive that will have seen the natural migration in our principal waterways. Sadly, for those tuna that we do not bring out, they die up there. Every tuna that does not make it to sea is unable to breed and ensure there are more. All of the impoundments in Mata-au contribute to the change in the variety of species. Our indigenous species face competition with salmonids as well.

17. The rivers, lakes and swampy bits are also where to get dyes for flax, for tāniko and rāraka (weaving). The tannin laden waters that come from the bark of trees that settle in the water are used as dyes. Nowadays there are streams that people say are dirty, but they are naturally tannin laden, just related to what they run through, and these are valued for their natural properties. Where the paru (mud) is for dyeing is a lot to do with the geology and what is uncovered by how those rivers and streams interact. Knowing where to go to find one that is red and one that is blue, those very highly prized sources, is all part of the rhythm of life as well. So travelling to these places is about bringing resources home for weaving too, including all the feathers from birding.
18. From the past we see fish hooks and snares made with bird bone because nothing is wasted. It is the equivalent of using your chicken carcass to make soup broth, so every part of the harvest is used, to make pins for clothing or to make an ornament for your hair or ears, or to use it for a game. We have whānau working this way, doing this more and picking up the way our ancestors worked with natural materials, not wasting anything. We look for what we can substitute, chicken instead of kererū, beef bone instead of whale bone to make a kōauau (flute). What we can now find in the natural environment or source in other ways is utilised, which is why mahika kai and mara kai are now adaptations because so many of our customary species are unable to be accessed anymore. Where we can still access them, whether it is fish species, plants or birds, these places and resources are precious connections to the ways of our tūpuna and how we honour those practices now.
19. I am so full of admiration for my ancestors that were able to create watercraft from what was around. They may not have lasted very long, but they could be found and repaired and repurposed by others, maybe another mōkihi or maybe a wharerau. It is the original re-use and recycle, and return to the earth if it is no longer fit for the purpose. It is all about living with nature.
20. I understand that it was possible to use the skin of tuna to make bindings but I have not seen it, the equivalent of taking leather of a reptile, drying it and treating it like

² The time when eels gather to migrate

shammy to roll it and carry it. To do that you would need to catch them somewhere that you could stay for several days, where there were a range of natural resources to work with. We have whānau looking at these things, making pōhā (storage bags), which again might be re-used after tītī season, and left to break down when no longer usable.

Degradation and restoration

21. These days how we plant in the riparian margins that surround our waterbodies changes what insect life and bird life there is and how that all interacts with one another. Introduced trees and plants changes people's perceptions about what is a natural river or natural stream. Most people cannot think of a Central Otago waterbody without poplars. For a Ngāi Tahu person those straight deciduous trees are not harmonious and adversely affect the natural ecosystem, the same as the weeping willows or crack willows. The fact that a lot of indigenous vegetation was ripped out and not recognised as beneficial has undermined river banks. We now have to work carefully with introduced species to protect the banks and habitat created by their roots in order to transition back to indigenous riparian vegetation.
22. The leaf fall, the kind of humus, what is created by trees changes the insect life and what grows there or thrives there. Introduced plantings have changed the water chemistry. Deciduous trees are more intense in terms of leaf drop and the build up. While it is good for some things, it also brings other bugs, leaf mould and the like. Most people take these changes for granted. However, it has actually changed the flavour and the smell of the water. Over 150 years of these incremental and fundamental changes to the properties of waterbodies has affected indigenous species habitat and ecosystems. We have seen decline in some species and changes in species composition.
23. We are working to try to get raupō re-established. It has almost disappeared from our wetlands and small lakes because it was not valued, but we could build houses and boats out of it. What it does within the water, binding, trapping, cleaning and providing macroinvertebrate and galaxiid habitat is incredibly valuable. It is a plant mostly underwater, but then you get the flower heads that are food for birds, insects and people. My partner Kelly would talk about how his mother used to make a kind of bread out of raupō. A lot of people knew those things, but by Kelly's generation there was so much less working with this knowledge, how to use harakeke, the medicinal purposes of plants and the dyes. This is how intergenerational knowledge transfer is affected by loss of access to resources and loss of what should be plentiful in our natural environment. That is why it is

so important to protect what we still have and work to restore places to bring species back where they should be.

24. Parts of Central Otago and the surrounds probably never had a lot of water in summer, but we have decreased what is available, which includes for the lizards and birds. Our actions affect how well they are able to survive. There are fewer safe places for indigenous species to inhabit. It is all about the interconnected nature of land and water, the pressure of population growth, introduction of pest species and the changes we have made to waterbodies. We have affected the natural balance. The whole natural system needs water, enough water, the right sorts of water, slow moving and fast moving, and shallow and deep, and strong enough to move boulders. Coastlines are eroding because the big gravels are not making it to the sea and there is less natural build-up there because of the changes we have made.
25. Our whānau are working to support the health of the lakes, for instance at Wai Whakaata (Lake Hayes) where human activities are affecting its condition. Restoring species to the lake and connections to wetlands that would naturally be there is part of our plan to bring back some of what has been lost and support the health and well-being of the lake, as well as our connection to it. We need to look after every part of Mata-au, from the upper lakes and the purity of those waters, all along the tributaries and out to the sea. It is a huge interconnected system and whatever we do within that system ultimately has an impact at the coast, whether it be excessive sedimentation or pollutants affecting the health of our indigenous species.
26. We cannot necessarily take it back to how things originally were, but we can make sure we do not make the same mistakes and allow all the water to be harvested for instance. We need to start by not taking all the water, and not taking the headwaters in a way that affects the whole river. We need to allow the streams to just be streams, and if we take some water, then return what is not used back into the river, rather than taking the lot of it out and making it work really hard. Our tūpuna lived more in harmony with the rivers. This does not mean that we never modified anything because we knew how to make tuna travel where we wanted them to for harvest, but at the same time we lived with what nature gave us rather than making nature something that it was not meant to be.
27. It was obviously a harder life for our tūpuna but more a life in harmony with their surroundings. Natural resources were there to be used to sustain and nourish you but not in a wasteful or greedy way. It was about need not want. If you imagine there are 100 kererū on the ground easy to harvest, what is prioritised? What is the most urgent or the most needed? Is it the feathers? If all the meat cannot be carried, what is practical? What can be improvised so that the resource is not wasted? What is left to nourish the earth?

28. With a fish run, tuna going to sea are not wasted, that is their destiny; whatever is not taken continues the life cycle. It is the same with water. The sea needs that freshwater coming down and fish need it, so water going to sea is not wasted, one feeds the other, they are not divorced. The intermingling places, the place where salt meets fresh, the marshes, are all part of the life cycle of some species, and these places are of value to us.
29. We can be capturing rain water off the roofs of our houses to ease demand for water from rivers, streams and groundwater. We need to be intercepting overland flow of stormwater before it reaches waterbodies so any rubbish and contaminants are removed first. The earth can clean and the plants that we plant by rivers and streams can help take out some of those contaminants.
30. We cannot avoid creating effluent but we need to think about this in a more cyclical way. If it is treated to a good enough standard then we might apply it to land to grow trees or non-edible crops. More toxic wastewater streams need to be separated out, and we need to look at ways to contain them through drying or creating biosolids. We cannot keep treating our waterbodies as drains for pollutants. That has never been ok.
31. I am encouraged by the acknowledgment of Te Mana o Te Wai and how this concept will guide change in Otago over this next generation. The way it is expressed provides a place for mātauraka to come through, and sets the right foundation.
32. We have a chance through this process of resetting freshwater management in Otago to do things better, taking a new approach, one that recognises the wisdom of our tūpuna and brings our activities back into balance with nature. We need to teach our young people to work with what remains. We need to encourage the community to put resources back to restore our waterbodies and their surrounds because the water on its own is only part of the story.