

**BEFORE INDEPENDENT HEARING COMMISSIONERS AT NAPIER AND WAIPAWA**

**I MUA NGA KAIKŌMIHANA WHAKAWĀ MOTUHAKE KI AHURIRI & WAIPAWA**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource Management Act 1991  
**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of the hearing of submissions on applications for the take and use of water from the Ruataniwha Basin

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF ROBERT COTTRELL, TE AWAHOHONU FOREST TRUST,  
OWNER OF TAFT FARMING LIMITED, GWAVAS STATION  
ON BEHALF OF THE APPLICANTS  
31 OCTOBER 2022**

**PART A**

**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO TE AWAHOHONU FOREST TRUST**

- 1) My full name is Robert Vincent Cottrell.
- 2) I am a Lincoln College graduate with a Diploma in Agriculture and a Dip VFM (Valuation and Farm Management). My work experience over 50 plus years has been in farming, farm valuing, rural finance, various farming consultancy and project management roles, including for Māori Trusts and Incorporations. I'm a member of several professional entities representing Māori, Chairman of the Wharerangi Marae and its full rebuild programme, among others.
- 3) I have been Chairman of Te Awahohonu Forest Trust, owners of TAFT Farming Limited, Gwavas Station, an applicant for Tranche Two water, since November 2014. Prior to this I have been involved with Te Awahohonu Lands since 1967 when my father was involved with the development of Tarawera Station.
- 4) Te Awahohonu Forest Trust is an Ahuwhenua Trust, formed in 1971 through the Māori Land Court. It currently has in excess of 1,500 beneficial owners of Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Hineuru and Ngāti Tuwharetoa descent.

Its corpus land is Tarawera C9 Block, confiscated as Tarawera Block in 1868 then partially returned through determined efforts of 3 generations of its tipuna in 1954.

- 5) Corpus land totals 22,391 ha is now developed into a 2,623 ha sheep and beef breeding property, (Tarawera Station), a 5,900 ha radiata pine forest, (Awahohonu Forest), the untouched 10,009 ha Ahimanawa Block (being one of the largest undeveloped pieces of land in the North Island), a taonga, with many species of flora and fauna found practically nowhere else in the North Island, with the balance in small native timber stands of natural beauty. Te Awahohonu corpus lands are bounded on the north, east and south by over 40 kilometres of river margins with the Waipunga, Mohaka and Ripia rivers which connect to numerous kilometres of feeder tributaries originating on or flowing through Te Awahohonu lands. These taonga awa form the life blood for many of our native river species.
- 6) Subsequent to 1965, the Trust has purchased back a further 550 ha of farmland previously in Tarawera Block, leased a further 621 ha of farmland and purchased the 1,000 ha Gwavas Station in the Ruataniwha Basin at Tikokino, plus invested in Miraka Ltd in Mokai and recently purchased land on which to establish papakāinga for owners and descendants of owners.

- 7) Te Awahohonu Forest Trust is mainly a farming and forest based business. Tarawera Station is a sheep and beef station with the majority of the land on Land Use Consent (LUC) class 6 and 7 hill country rising between 400masl and 700masl. The forest sits on adjoining lands on LUC classes 6, 7 and 8 but at altitudes from 450masl to 800masl.
- 8) Tarawera Station farms just over 32,000 sheep and beef stock units and produces over 22,000 lambs and 1,000 beef calves annually. Prior to the purchase of Gwavas Station only a small portion of these progeny were farmed on to be finished, and significant opportunity to add value and establish consumer relationships were lost opportunities for the business.
- 9) The Trust lives by its values of –  
 WHAKAPONO - Honesty, integrity, transparency, and trust  
 KAITIAKITANGA - Nurturing our taonga whenua, tikanga and tangata  
 WHANAUNGATANGA - Unity, connection, pride  
 TAUWHIROWHIRO - Excellence, innovation, enquiry, improvement, risk minimisation  
 IHI - Energy, drive, exploring our potential
- 10) Its strategic goals are –  
 TAIAO  
 TANGATA  
 PAKIHI

Taiao is protecting and enhancing our whenua, waterways, manaaki whenua projects, rongoā projects, identifying wāhi tapu, fauna evidenced by increased native bird populations today.

Demonstrating our commitment to taiao, the Trust has created a new role Kaiwhakahaere Taiao (Environment Officer), to ensure the commitment to, and vigilance of this taonga is properly addressed. The Officer will perform tests and monitor the health of significant awa bordering corpus land plus Gwavas Station, namely Mangaonuku Stream in the Ruataniwha Basin as part of the role. Longitudinal sampling will be reported on regularly to the full Trust Board.

Tangata is expressed by empowering our whānau, facilitating opportunities for them to develop, including via annual education grants.

Pakihi is tangibly living a commitment to business excellence without compromising our values, whenua, or our people and communities. Having built a very strong asset and income base with a long term intergenerational vision and medium 20 year forward plan and forecasts, Te Awahohonu has a very successful Trustee Assistant programme that prepares rangitahi for future trustee and governance roles as part of their succession strategy.

- 11) Te Awahohonu Forest Trust purchased Gwavas Station in 2011 to finish livestock bred on the Trust's high performing hill country property Tarawera Station. The farm is located in northern extremity of the Ruataniwha basin with the majority of the land classed as LUC 2, 3 and 4. The Trust's medium to longer term objectives for the Gwavas property are not fixed on livestock farming alone. Our Trustees are open to new initiatives that fit within our values and our longer term strategic goals for our owners.
- 12) Since purchase, significant development has occurred that has enhanced the finishing attributes of the Gwavas whenua while also being focussed on protecting the waterways and natural landscapes within the property. While this purchase has allowed us to finish all the livestock bred on Tarawera Station in most years there have been some years where prolonged dry periods have affected stock finishing strategies and crop yields have been severely compromised.
- 13) Our long term vision and studies show Gwavas whenua will best be protected and nurtured with irrigation, applied strategically and efficiently and with our proven kaitiaki principles. Tranche Two water will not only enhance our current farming system in the short to medium term but will open up further opportunities to diversify into higher value cropping options and potential horticulture in the future.

Tranche Two water comes with the responsibility to provide augmentation volumes to streams when trigger levels are activated. Tranche Two water is therefore a far higher cost option compared to most other water users and as consent holders this will require very high levels of efficiency and oversight. We expect there will be greater employment opportunities and more employees if Tranche Two water is consented. This will attract more people and whanau into the communities of Tamatea.

- 14) Te Awahohonu Forest Trust has a proven record as successful farmers, foresters, employers and kaitiaki of their whenua and awa resources. That record includes winning the prestigious Ahuwhenua Māori Farmer of the Year in 2013 for Tarawera Station and being finalists in 2019 for Gwavas Station. Our beneficial owners demand all the Trust does is consistent with our tikanga and our Trust values. These are epitomised in the Ahuwhenua Trophy competition, judged upon care for environment, people and staff, community, and commercial success.
- 15) Many of our beneficial owners' whakapapa to Ruataniwha. That plus being a Māori entity required us to understand and gather as much information as we could obtain about the history of the property, the area and the people including our Māori history of the area. This helped us shape our thinking on how best to farm the property responsibly and sustainably and with our Te Ao Māori lens. Our vision for Gwavas is 'forever', continually benefitting our people, the whenua, the environment and the wider community.
- 16) Our farming systems are expected to change significantly with a Tranche Two consent to optimise plant uptake of water and nutrients and reduce nutrient losses (Nitrogen and Phosphorus) to groundwater and waterways. Our environmental footprint has already been reduced with all waterways fenced off and a stream planting programme started. The Farm Environmental Management Plan (FEMP) prepared by Land Vision Ltd is an additional resource that will help monitor the performance of our farm system going forward. The Tranche Two consent will allow us to apply water strategically and efficiently to prevent pressure on whenua, feed forage, crops, livestock, and staff. This flows into shorter timeframes for finishing livestock and presents opportunities to incorporate alternative higher value land uses across different land classes of the whenua.
- 17) Our beneficial owners of Gwavas will see improved returns, the community we live in will see further employment opportunities and there will be openings to learn and apply new skills with potentially higher remuneration and greater employment satisfaction. Over time we envisage Te Awahohonu will contribute significant benefit to the local and wider community with this Tranche two consent.
- 18) Beneficial owners in Te Awahohonu Forest Trust are enthusiastic and supportive of the direction of the Trust and its achievements. We are a very transparent Trust. We hold no data back from owners. We listen to their concerns. As a result, we have a Taiao Committee, a Rongoā Committee, an Owners/Shareholders Committee, and an Education Grants Committee. Our Forest Committee is engaged in planning now to ensure best forest harvesting practices to preserve our whenua and de-risk slopes from sediment entering waterways.

In similar manner, our Farm Committee we will be ensuring Tranche Two water at Gwavas will meet the same high standards our owners expect. In that regard, the Applicant Group also share our views, extensive expert studies and modelling have determined some possible very minor impact on surface and groundwater in the Ruataniwha Basin, so mitigation measures will be adopted to offset any impacts on other users as a result of Tranche Two takes.

## PART B

### ENGAGEMENT WITH MANAWHENUA FOR TRANCHE TWO CULTURAL IMPACTS

- 1) As Māori, we understand and respect the Manawhenua interests of any region we work and live in. As Manawhenua of our land at Tarawera we are able to fully express our values and customs as a Māori landowner within its own rohe and through our direct whakapapa connection to the whenua. While our ownership base spans Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Hineuru and Ngāti Tuwharetoa Iwi, many of the owners are directly connected across multiple Iwi and Hapū within Te Awahohonu and beyond.
- 2) We are aware that Gwavas Station is located in a region of Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi where under Te Ao Māori principles Manawhenua hapu of the area maintain the whakapapa responsibility across the wider Ruataniwha basin and Tamatea rohe. We acknowledge and respect this and the first priority upon purchase of Gwavas Station was seeking dialogue with Manawhenua and communicating the Te Awahohonu Trust's purchase of Gwavas Station.

Early on we sought to identify the people of the district, seeking information on the history of the land, its people and wāhi tapu sites. Manawhenua were involved in our customary blessing of Gwavas Station at takeover, alongside our own people and the people who will work on the property.

- 3) We are a progressive and successful Trust with a long term vision for our whānau owners. To take up the opportunity from Tranche Two water required an early application. Thereafter dialogue with Manawhenua commenced, initially to know who to consult with and to understand their aspirations and critical cultural concerns and then to ask who might carry out a Cultural Impact Assessment for the Tranche Two water take application. Our approach would then be to meet, introduce ourselves (whanaungatanga) and explain our reasons for seeking water, respecting, and utilising it sustainably.
- 4) We have a genuine interest in sharing the opportunities Tranche Two water may also offer Manawhenua of the Ruataniwha Basin. Approaches to many kaumatua and Māori leaders in Tamatea were made seeking advice about who the Tranche Two applicants should engage with and bring this opportunity to. This has proved to be quite difficult based on individual Manawhenua workloads and engaging with the leaders who speak for Ruataniwha.
- 5) We were aware there was a recent Waitangi Crown Settlement secured by Heretaunga/Tamatea Settlement Group. Our approaches were to all we were referred on to by all members we contacted.

In proceeding with the Tranche Two application, we wanted to know and understand any concerns Manawhenua may have but also hear from them how benefits from an offer of a significant volume of the Tranche Two take to Manawhenua might culturally and possibly commercially benefit them as well as the Applicant Group.

As Māori, we well understand the hurts of the past where loss of whenua is concerned, indeed this loss has been acknowledged by the Crown in the Heretaunga/Tamatea Settlement, so we were and are, keen to explore how further cultural redress might be possible from this application.

Efforts to establish connection with authorised spokespersons began in 2019, they continued on regularly, then intensified once the Application and Assessment of Effects were lodged and submissions, particularly from Manawhenua and Iwi were received.

Those approached were Tamatea and Heretaunga leaders, Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated, plus kaumatua. The Chairman of Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi also visited Gwavas with me.

- 6) Te Awahohonu Forest Trust as the largest Tranche Two applicant and Māori, asked Taiwhenua leaders to extend our invitation to a series of four wānanga on Gwavas Station to observe our achievements there, explain our Trust and its journey, how Tranche two water used responsibly will benefit Gwavas and the region, and how the applicants wished to offer up a significant volume of Tranche two water to Manawhenua, should they wish to participate.

The wānanga were called for 29 May 2022, 5 and 12 June 2022, then a fourth on 13 August 2022.

Attendance was not high. Trustees attending commenced each day with a power point presentation showcasing our journey from confiscation of all our whenua up to June 2022. A tour of Gwavas, pointing out development, environmental work, all rivers, and waterways, proposed locations for Tranche Two takes and augmentation points were offered to all, and accepted by some.

The offer from all 8 Applicants for an allocation of approximately 2 million cubic meters (13.4% Tranche Two water) to Manawhenua, was announced at the wānanga. There was discussion about how this might be used to benefit Manawhenua. We also explained that the Applicants would be keen to assist and advise on use of the water, if required.

Our Trustees present sensed the individuals in attendance were largely supportive, but no collective response from manawhenua has been received yet, as I write this.

- 7) Manawhenua in Ruataniwha appear to own very few hectares of land within the main Tranche Two application area. Our view is a volume of water might be useful to Manawhenua to start a potential commercial development for their people, with land purchase to apply the water to, then create more employment which could retain rangitahi in their ancestral rohe.

We illustrated our Trust's journey, from confiscation, to development of a large farm, radiata forest, investment in Miraka Ltd, distributions of significant annual education grants and annual dividends to our beneficial owners at these wananga. The pride in our achievements we hoped could possibly lead Manawhenua to consider their own journey with Tranche Two water as progress for them.

- 8) Tranche Two water application costs are shared by the 8 Applicants. Over the past seven years they have become a considerable sum. However, the 2Mm<sup>3</sup> volume being offered to Manawhenua will not require Manawhenua to share in those costs incurred up to date of the Hearing. They will all be borne by the Applicants, but once consented, costs of transferring the portion of the water to the Manawhenua and the costs of any other consents that might be needed etc thereafter would be borne by the Manawhenua entity applying.
- 9) I am certain all those who attended the wānanga and heard our story, were enthusiastic about the prospects of receiving a volume of Tranche Two water as part of the consent application. This positivity has also extended to other Manawhenua individuals we have spoken to. Some Manawhenua are beneficial owners in our Trust so are aware of our progress already. Adding to this the prospect of assistance from applicants sincerely wishing to assist advancement of Manawhenua in utilising water is a cultural benefit in our Trust's view.

Te Awahohonu Forest Trust is successful partly because we 'know what we don't know' and seek expert input when we need it. We believe the applicants offer if accepted, would go a long way to fill in some knowledge gap Manawhenua may have if pursuing an agricultural path to utilise it.

- 10) There are options for the future use of the water on land in Ruataniwha. It is not for me to suggest what options these may be, but we do know that water availability will play a major part in many of these current or new opportunities. These may include food and seed crops, horticulture or other niche industry products or partnerships with others. There may also be some cultural or environmental uses that Manawhenua may wish to apply water for.



Robert Cottrell  
Chairman, Te Awahohonu Forest Trust  
31 October 2022