

TUNA FROM WAIRARAPA MOANA



Longfin Tuna. Photograph Alton Perrie

HE TAUPARAPARA

Tēnei au, tēnei au
Ko te hōkai nei o taku tapuwae
Ko te hōkai nuku, ko te hōkai rangi
Ko te hōkai nei o tō tipuna a Tūmatauenga
Taku tapuwae, ko taku tapuwae nei nā Tāne-nui-a-rangi
I pikitia ai te Rangi-tūhāhā
Te tihi o Manono
I rokohina atu ra ko lo-matua-te-kore anake
Ka riro iho ko ngā kete o te wānanga
Ko te kete tūāuri
Ko te kete tūātea
Ko te kete aronui
Ka tiritiria, ka poupoua
Ki Papatūānuku
Ka puta te ira tangata
Ki te whaiao, ki te ao mārama
Whano, whano, haramai te toki
Haumi e, hui e, tāiki e!

This version of a widely recited tauparapara/karakia, is unique to Wairarapa. Indeed, the now famous karakia originates from the writings of our tohunga Te Whatahoro. It refers to the acquisition of the baskets of knowledge by Tane and is especially suitable for use at any learning-related occasion.

Nau mai taku kura mokopuna,
Wairarapa Moana Trust 2007

KARAKIA

Tēnā te puna kei Hawaiki,	The source is at Hawaiki,
Te pū kei Hawaiki,	The origin is at Hawaiki,
Te puna kei Rangiriri.	The source is at Rangiriri.

A simple karakia to encourage tuna to enter a hinaki.

From Elsdon Best, Fishing methods and devices of the Māori. (Originally published 1924)

The tuna of Wairarapa Moana

Tuna is the generic Maori name for eels. The tuna of Wairarapa Moana were once famous for their quantity and quality. For centuries, Wairarapa Maori valued tuna as a food source and mainstay of the pre-European economy. Tuna were used as gifts and were traded in the South Island and at various locations throughout the North Island.

Early Europeans came to Wairarapa via the western side of Kawakawa (Palliser Bay) thereby encountering Lake Onoke and Wairarapa Moana. Before agriculture was established, the newcomers had to rely on Maori knowledge of native animals and plants to survive. It is from Maori that they also learnt the value of tuna.

The ability to maintain and then control the Wairarapa lakes' eel fishery was at the centre of disputes between Maori and Pakeha. Colonists demanded that their land be safeguarded from flooding and also pushed for more land to be made available through draining of the lakes and wetlands.

Successful lobbying by the colonists saw eel habitat destroyed, migratory paths blocked, traditional practices restricted and eventually a serious decline in eel numbers.

While today, eels are once again a valued species within the Wairarapa lakes, it is their status as an ancient species that faces a major threat to their survival.

Tuna and Māori mythology

Tuna origins

According to Maori mythology, tuna are the children of Te Ihorangi, the personified form of rain. Their family include Para (frost fish), Ngoiro (conger-eel), Tuna (river-eel) and Tuere (blind eel). Tuna lived in the waters of Puna-kauriki in the highest of the Maori heavens. But due to the sun being so close in by-gone days a severe drought caused the water to dry up and so the family descended to earth to avoid Matuku-whakapu (the bittern). Once on Papatuanuku the family fell out because Para ate the offspring of Tuna. So Tuna went to live in the swamps, while Ngoiro, Para and Tuere moved to the sea.

The many names for eels

There are only two main species of eel resident in New Zealand. Maori had names for different sizes, colours and other characteristics of eels. Ethnologist Elsdon Best collected 160 different names from throughout the country, including several from the Wairarapa.

Aporo te Kumeroa, a well known southern Wairarapa chief and scholar of the 19th century, provided the following descriptions of eels that are found in Lake Wairarapa or rivers flowing into it.

- *Matamoe* (also called *hikumutu*).
- *Hao* (also called *puhi*). This eel has blue eyes, and is the best eating of all.
- *Riko*. The largest of all. Te Kumeroa said he had seen them 6 feet long.
- *Kōkopu-tuna*. Very large. There are two kinds: *paratawai*, a short one, and *putake-harakeke*, reddish in colour.
- *Haumate*. Like the hao, but with short ears. *Karaerae*.
- *Kōpakopako*. Silver-eel. The Ngai-Tahu people call this *pakeha*, a name they used long before the advent of the Europeans.
- *Tarehe* (called also *tirehe* and *mairehe*). A silver-eel; is short, and not the best eating.
- *Kongehe*. Can be caught with the hand. Soft and flaccid.
- *Tātārākau*. Same thickness head to tail; black like *riko*.



The picnic at Pigeon Bush to celebrate the gifting of Wairarapa Moana. Those present include Richard Seddon (far left, wearing a hat and Māori feather cloak), Tamahau Mahupuku (right of Seddon, also wearing a cloak), and James Carroll (right of Mahupuku behind girl in hat). Wairarapa Archive

Māui and Tuna-roa

Maui, the great explorer of the Pacific region, who discovered the islands of New Zealand and left us with the enduring tale of his hauling a great fish from the depths of the ocean, was also involved in many other legendary feats.

One day Maui's wife Raukura was getting water from a stream when the god Tuna-roa sneaked up and hit her with his powerful tail. He then proceeded to insult her so she ran home to tell Maui what had happened. Maui grabbed his axe Matoritori, the severer and went straight down to the stream where he saw Tuna-roa coming towards him. Maui placed logs across the stream for Tuna-roa to use as a bridge and then hid. As soon as Tuna-roa stepped off the logs Maui jumped out and smote his head from the rest of the body. The head was thrown into the sea to become the conger eel and the tail became the freshwater eels. As Maui waved the body to and fro blood fell onto the pukeko and kakariki birds and the toa toa, rimu, totara and matai trees. The very end of the tail became the creeping vines of the forest that since that time have been used to make eel baskets.

Eel facts

- Both main species of eel are found in Wairarapa Moana, Lake Onoke and surrounding areas.
- The endemic longfin is found only in New Zealand, while the native shortfin is also found in south east Australia and around the Pacific.
- New Zealand eels breed once, possibly near Tonga (longfin) and Samoa (shortfin) and then die.
- Juvenile eels float on currents back to New Zealand. Those that survive the long journey enter river mouths and estuaries and then find somewhere to live.
- Although both species can be found in the same habitat, the shortfin prefers brackish waters nearer to the coast, while longfins like flowing waterways further inland.
- If they live to maturity, both species will eventually attempt to migrate back out to sea to breed.

