

WAI-810

Wai 686 #T5
Wai 810 #A2
COPY

**BRIEF OF EVIDENCE
OF
SELWYN PEARSON**

15 APRIL 2002

HWC 1
517-H07
Wai 810-
Pearson S
Evidence
on behalf
of Moana
Te Aira
Te Uri
Karaka
Te Waero

13th-17th May 2002

I need to begin by explaining my involvement firstly in Rugby League then onto the Ostend Domain (which is the home of Waiheke Rugby League) then a brief outline on Maori involvement in Rugby League, which will lead to Ngati-Paoa and its relationship with Rugby League.

My participation in the sport began in the 1950s but I didn't realise the terrible bias towards the game until I reached high school. The punishment young boys received for "playing their game" instead of "the other game" was absolutely disgraceful and I am still scarred by some of the resulting events for doing so. That made me more determined to hang in there and the list of wonderful people I have met in Rugby League has resulted in me being very well rewarded. After years of playing, working at administration club level, then taking over the chair at Auckland Rugby League, I am now the Executive President of the governing body, i.e., New Zealand Rugby League Inc.

One of the affiliated clubs within the Auckland Rugby League boundaries is the Waiheke Rams. Another Rugby League family member doing a fantastic job of looking after our children. The sports club was their home and it came as a huge shock to me that there were human undercurrents looking to extract them from their home and relocate them somewhere else. What's wrong with that some asked? The answer was simple. Everyone was extremely happy where they were and no-one wanted to leave and certainly did not want to shift a distance up the road. That is when I became involved.

Meetings and an enormous amount of dialogue followed. Two important meetings were with Council's Park's representatives and a sub-committee of the Auckland City Council. On analysing all my participation, what unfolded for me was extraordinary and on reflection, the racial ignorance, bias, slight of hand and the inflexibility of some will remain with me forever.

No one from the "other team" had a grasp of how the Waiheke Rugby League (and the sports club of course) were part of the ongoing exercise of blending our people from different bloodlines to become part of a team learning to be tolerant, getting along with one another and understanding each others cultures. They are just another

group of hard working volunteer race relations officers helping a sport that is incredibly multi-cultural.

To this day it is very sad that more people haven't witnessed prize-givings, player of the day and awards events at the sports club. It is a very moving experience and the look of pride and joy on the youngster's faces is something to behold.

Having met people from Ngati Paoa it is becoming very obvious that they (along with most Maori) are very proud to be part of Rugby League and their involvement goes back an awfully long time, back to the very beginning actually.

In 1888, a team known as the Native Team toured England to play Rugby. Seven years later in 1895 the Northern Union was formed. This was the beginning of Rugby League. In 1907 the All Blacks toured Great Britain and one year later in 1908 NZ Maori toured Australia. Yes, they beat Australia 20-16. So I guess this shows Maori really were there from the beginning.

Talking of meeting people, my life has been enriched by the introduction to Hariata Gordon. She is the Chairperson of the Ngati Paoa Whanau Trust Board. Disregarding the Wai-810 claim, Hariata and her Board have seen what is potentially Ngati Paoa land used for public use already, but when it comes to the children of Waiheke Island making use of the land not only does it receive her support, it receives her blessing. Hariata and her Board have never wavered in their support of the club and I guess that is one of the main reasons my support will not waver either.

The other person who has also greatly affected me from Ngati Paoa was a wonderful man called Mason Clarke. Mason touched so many people through his life's travels and it was devastating to lose him so young. His rugby league resume is sensational. He was also a person you do not meet very often on this planet because he was such a caring, loving person who never had a bad word to say about anybody. On saying that, everyone either loved or admired Mason as well. I have also met Mason's eldest daughter who seems to have inherited her dad's attributes. Her written statement on her father is a moving piece of literature. It describes the biases her dad experienced in Rugby League but he never gave up. When he returned to the island he quickly

recognized the struggle that the Waiheke Sports Club were going through an experience he had had twenty years prior. Moana talks of her dad's loves and it is worth quoting. "Dad loved to laugh". "He loved sport". "He loved children". "Dad was a family man". That says it all really and it is very comforting to know Mason's wairua will always be present guarding over us.

My position in Rugby League is unique for which I feel extremely lucky and my life's travels have allowed me to rub shoulders with wonderful people who are lodged in my memory forever, among those, of course, being our friends from Ngati Paoa.

SELWYN PEARSON
Executive Chairman
New Zealand Rugby League Inc

15 April 2002