

Exciting new Māori customary fishing qualifications

By Mary McCallum

Customary fishers have finally had their skills recognised with the introduction of two new fisheries qualifications. Customary fishing is fishing using traditional methods that have been handed down by Maori over generations, but until now the people doing it couldn't hold up a certificate and say "this is what I know." Now, all those skills can be put towards gaining a Level 3 National Certificate in Customary Fishing (40 credits) and a Level 4 National Certificate in Customary Fisheries Management (90 credits).



Ngahiwi Apanui of the Seafood Industry Training Organisation (SITO) says the qualifications have been a long time coming, but they've been worth the wait. "This is such an empowering tool for iwi," says Ngahiwi, "and I look forward with some excitement to implementation of a qualification that will work for Maori for a change."

Ngahiwi is quick to point out that SITO has only been acting as a net holder for the plump fish of customary fishing qualifications. It was Ben Potaka of Whanganui who baited the hook ten years ago and, with people like Ian Ruru of Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki, and Waitai Petera of Te Aupouri, has been reeling in the qualifications ever since.

Ben Potaka first began working towards qualifications for customary fishers when he joined the Whakaruruhau set up by NZQA ten years ago to explore the Maori dimension of fisheries training. His commitment grew when he joined SITO's Maori caucus about five years later along with Ian and Waitai. "Ben's passion helped to keep us on track," says Waitai. "He reminded us everytime we had a meeting of the Maori caucus that we should get onto the qualifications issue."

Ben says he had another hand on his shoulder. "For me it was a responsibility given to me by our kaumatua and the Chairman of the Whakaruruhau: Rangiriri Harris of Te Arawa. He got sick and before he died, he gave me the responsibility to carry this task to completion. I'm still here."

It wasn't long before Ben, Ian and Waitai along with other members of the Maori caucus made strong representations to SITO on behalf of Maori in the seafood industry. They felt there was an urgent need for a customary qualification due to the impending allocation of fisheries assets to Maori and a lack of training available for people managing mataitai (customary fishing areas).

They also felt strongly the need to keep traditional fishing practices alive. "It's humbling to be reminded that without the strength of the customary and traditional fishing practices of yesterday we would not have such a presence in the commercial industry today," says Ian.

However, there were delays in addressing the issue and SITO's Maori caucus became concerned. "What really held the process up was that SITO's main focus until then was industry," says Ben. "We spent too long on things we didn't think were relevant. It was very frustrating."

He said they didn't hit their stride until Ngahiwi joined SITO at the start of this year and with colleague Cathy Webb gave the process a shove in the right direction.

A focus group representing iwi from around the country was established to explore the issue as a joint venture between SITO, the NZ Qualifications Authority and Te Ohu Kai Moana. It quickly identified a need and purpose for the customary fishing qualifications and drew up guidelines for further work. After that came a hui in March this year to set up the working group that would develop the qualifications (see box).

Ben says the group members were chosen because of their extensive network of contacts from hapu to kaumatua, "We were the *karere* (messengers) carrying all the knowledge behind us."

Ngahiwi says they weren't only experts in customary fishing but passionate about it as well. "The qualifications are really a reflection of their expertise and commitment over a long period. It is a body of work of which we should be immensely proud."

The qualifications were drawn up to cover technical skills, the identification and knowledge of tauranga ika, species management, resource management, conservation and legislation. "The qualifications are important for tangata whenua because they're a tool that can assist in preserving and utilising traditional fishing practices," says Ian Ruru. They also aim to encourage sustainable management of the fisheries and help build the capability and capacity of whānau, hapu and iwi.

Then came the hard part. Ngahiwi says Maori started asking questions about how a pākeha training organisation like SITO could tell them what they should learn, especially when different iwi all had their own fishing methods which were protected as taonga. There was also a concern that the teaching process would be taken out of the hands and heads of the rightful teachers – the kaumatua or elders.

But Ngahiwi says the working group was well aware of the unique nature of customary fishing skills and has nothing but praise for the way they handled it. "An important underlying theme of the customary fishing qualifications is the difference in tikanga (Maori customs) from iwi to iwi and hapu to hapu – the qualifications recognise this."

"A lot of soul searching and work went into not trampling on anyone's mana," says Waitai.

The strength of the qualifications has been the use of unit standards because they spell out in simple terms the areas students should be competent in but don't try and tell training providers how to teach those competencies.

For example, there is one unit standard that requires a trainee to demonstrate the making of a traditional fishing net. This means the Ngati Porou trainee will be taught by his local iwi training provider how to make a Ngati Porou net using traditional methods, while a Ngai Tahu trainee will be taught how to make a Ngai Tahu net using their traditional methods. There could be variations too between one Ngai Tahu trainee and another if they're from different hapu. But if both trainees can demonstrate the making of a traditional fishing net, then they will be assessed as being competent in that area *even though the nets may be different*.

Ngahiwi says Maori need to know that unit standards do not supersede what kaumatua know, they only use information that is readily available. "The kaumatua are still the store-houses of knowledge," he says and he knows what he's talking about. Ngahiwi learnt fishing tikanga from his koro and knows how important it is to ensure that knowledge is handed down with care.

A training provider from outside an iwi will be under close scrutiny. It will have to contract to a local iwi or hapu and if the training isn't what the locals want – they can get the plug pulled. "It is important," says Ben Potaka, "that providers form meaningful relationships with hapu or iwi to ensure the competencies being met are consistent with the relevant hapu or iwi knowledge and skills."

The new qualifications give local Maori the opportunity to monitor training providers by offering them training as assessors. Ngahiwi says, "This is consistent with the regional nature of customary fishing knowledge and empowers iwi to deliver training to and assess their own people."

The SITO working group was pleased to discover that most of the unit standards they deemed necessary for the new qualifications had already been developed for other training programmes. These are unit standards such as: *Explain Maori concepts and approaches to management decision making processes*. There are also specific fisheries

standards such as: *Make and use fish hooks and lures using Maori customary methods*.

However, it was decided to develop two more compulsory unit standards for the Level 4 Management Certificate to cover the origin of customary fishing rights and the impact of legislation, the explanation and application of customary management principles, tools and practice used for sustainable fishing.

In July, Ngahiwi held three meetings in Gisborne to present the qualifications to local iwi. He met with two training providers: Whare Wananga o Ngati Porou who declared the qualifications "innovative and exciting," and Turanga Ararau; and he's optimistic that both will make the qualifications available to their students next year. Ngahiwi also called a third meeting for all comers including local kaumatua, academics, trainers, Maori fishing industry people and people from SITO's Maori caucus.

Ngahiwi talked, they listened and at the end he noticed there seemed to be a lot of excitement about the new qualifications and the wonderful opportunity for Maori. All they wanted to know was how soon they could start.

Ian Ruru works from Gisborne as a fisheries management consultant and saw the enthusiastic response to Ngahiwi's presentations. He says he gets a good feeling knowing the new qualifications are nearing completion, "There's such a great demand already out there from people of all ages. Customary Fishing is an important part of their lives."

Ngahiwi has more meetings planned for other iwi. He says the personal touch is necessary to deal with any concerns that are still out there.

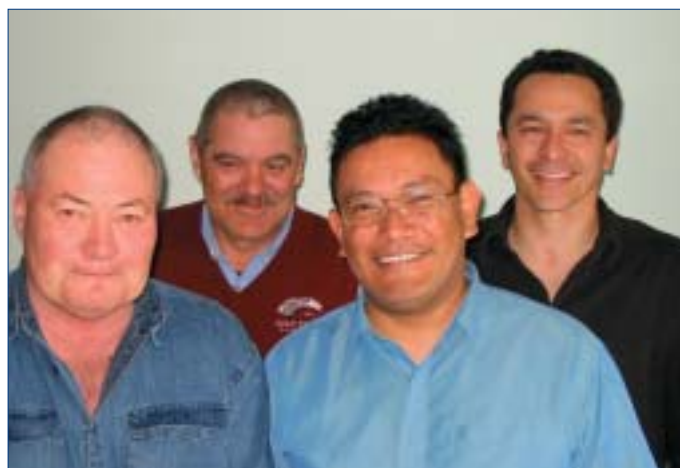
Meanwhile, SITO is busy drawing up the guidelines for training providers to teach the new certificates and tweaking some of the unit standards and Ngahiwi's hoping to get six marae trials under way around the country as soon as possible. After that, there'll be a bit of fine-tuning and the new customary fishing qualifications will be officially launched at the start of 2004.

Waitai says it will be an emotional time, "In the end when it's all over, it will be a very moving experience for all of us."

Tihei Mauri ora! ■

Māori Customary Fishing Working Group

Ben Potaka (Whānganui), Ian Ruru (Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki), Waitai Petera (Te Aupouri), Rick Tau (Ngai Tahu), Taku Parāi (Ngāti Toa), Stan Pardoe (Rongowhākata), Denis Grennell (Ngāti Maniapoto) and Diana Beech (Te Atiawa ki te Tauihu).



Some members of the Māori Customary Fishing Working Group. From left to right: Waitai Petera, Ben Potaka, Ngahiwi Apanui and Ian Ruru.