WHY I'M PROUD TO IDENTIFY AS AN URI OF TARANAKI WHĀNUI

I want to talk a little today about how we identify ourselves, and I want to begin on a personal note. I am proud to identify as an uri of Taranaki Whānui. I am proud of the name, what it represents, and most importantly, its inclusive nature.

You see, I do not identify as Te Āti Awa. That is not a criticism of Te Āti Awa. Far from it. I am proud to stand alongside my Te Āti Awa whanaunga and to be part of a collective that includes them. But my whakapapa, like that of many of our people, speaks to a broader story. Our tūpuna who came south did not come from one iwi alone. They came in different waves of migration, from different communities, carrying different whakapapa.

And this is where words matter.
Taranaki Whānui does not require us to erase the iwi, hapū and whānau identities from which we descend. In fact, to do so would, in my view, be disrespectful to our ancestors. Instead, Taranaki Whānui gives us a collective identity broad enough to embrace them all.

We do not have to make everybody the same in order to belong together. I can stand here with my whakapapa and my hapū connections. Someone beside me can stand proudly as Te Āti Awa. And both of us can say: we are Taranaki Whānui.

That matters because names shape how we understand ourselves. If we substitute Te Āti Awa for Taranaki Whānui something important is lost. We narrow a history that was never narrow, and risk overlooking tūpuna whose identities and whakapapa were different.

I know there is a criticism that Taranaki Whānui was simply a term adopted for our Treaty claim. But the settlement process did not create the identity. Some 20 years before settlement, our old people, under the leadership of Kara Puketapu Snr, established Te Rūnanganui o Taranaki Whānui. The concept was already there: a name for our broad collective in all its complexity.

For me, Taranaki Whānui is not a compromise between different identities. It is an identity in its own right. It speaks to our shared history here in Te Whanganui-a-Tara while giving us room to acknowledge difference without allowing difference to divide us.

So when I say I am Taranaki Whānui, I say it with pride. I don't need somebody else's whakapapa to replace my own for us to belong to the same collective. There is room for all of us.

That, to me, is the beauty of Taranaki Whānui: multiple whakapapa, multiple tūpuna, multiple strands, one broad inclusive identity.As we look to the future, I hope we protect that breadth. Because that breadth - that whānuitanga - is not just part of our name. **It is part of who we are**