

Utuhina

The Utuhina Stream was once known throughout the land for the taste and healing qualities of its waters. It was a place of abundance, connection, and wellbeing. Our whānau relied on the Utuhina as a source of water, kai, and spiritual healing and cleansing. I have a photo of my kuia standing on a rock, putting down her hooks to catch koura and tuna, gathering food for the day. The stream was more than a waterway — it was a living part of our community, a gathering place where whānau swam, played, and connected as a community.

That all changed in the 1930's when the Mayor came down to the stream and erected a sign that said polluted. We stopped drinking the water at that time but continued to fish and swim in the awa. In 1950 the Council straightened the natural bends of the Utuhina and turned it into a stormwater channel. To them, our taonga was nothing more than a drainage system. The rocks that had long been the habitat of our taonga species — koura, tuna, and other life — were removed and dumped.

During this time upstream development continued and the water quality deteriorated to the point in the last 10 years where we are no longer able to fish or swim because e-coli levels have gone through the roof.

To make matters worse, the Council cannot identify which of the more than 300 stormwater pipes discharge into the Utuhina. Our efforts to raise these issues have been ignored. Decisions about our waterways — the health of our taonga — are made behind closed doors, driven by economic priorities rather than environmental or cultural wellbeing. Māori voices are excluded from decision-making, and any consultation that occurs happens only after the fact, with no real power to influence outcomes.

Today, there is little hope that anything will change. When you are not swimming in your awa, not gathering kai, not caring for it as your ancestors once did, your connection fades. The awa becomes just another feature in the landscape — something that exists, but no longer forms an integral part of community life. For us, this loss is devastating. The Utuhina once gave life and healing to our people. Its neglect and pollution represent not only an environmental tragedy, but a loss that goes to the heart of our whakapapa and identity.

The Wai Manawa Whenua case is about restoring balance, justice, and recognition of the rightful role of Māori as kaitiaki in freshwater governance.

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Te Arawa