

TE REO MĀORI THE MĀORI LANGUAGE

Te reo Māori is a highly contextual language where many single words carry multiple interconnected meanings, metaphors, and layers. In this section of the guide, we introduce you to the history of te reo Māori and its revitalisation as well as introducing you to some basics of te reo Māori.





Te reo Māori me tōna whakaora

Te reo Māori and its revitalisation

Te reo Māori is more than a language, it carries whakapapa, mātauranga, and identity. As one of Aotearoa New Zealand's official languages, it is protected under the Māori Language Act 2016.

History of te reo Māori

Te reo Māori has experienced a varied history, from being a language that was solely spoken in the early 1800s, to a complete reversal where English was prominent more widely in the mid-1900s. Despite the change in roles, the Māori language has survived and experienced revitalisation since the 1970s.

The following timeline shows the history of Te Reo Māori following European settlers arriving in Aotearoa.

TE HĪTORI O TE REO MĀORI

HISTORY OF TE REO MĀORI

Missionaries in the far north open the first school based on a European style curriculum, with early lessons held in te reo.

First Māori language dictionary, A Dictionary of the New Zealand Language, is published.

The Native Schools Act introduces state schools in Māori communities with lessons taught in English.

1 in 10 Māori children can no longer speak te reo Māori.

76% of Māori people can't speak te reo.

Ngā Tamatoa and Te Reo Māori Society begin mobilising support for language revitalisation, circulating a nationwide petition for te reo to be taught in schools. Several churches support.

Māori Language Day is replaced with Māori Language Week.

5% of Māori children can speak te reo. A record low.

1816 1844

1867

1913

1960

1971

1975

1827 1847

1894

1930

1970

1972

1978

The Bible is translated into te reo Māori.

Education Ordinance Act sets English as the predominant, normal language of New Zealand schools. Schools start banning te reo and children are punished for speaking Māori.

The Education Ordinance Act makes school compulsory for Māori children. Those caught speaking te reo are often physically assaulted.

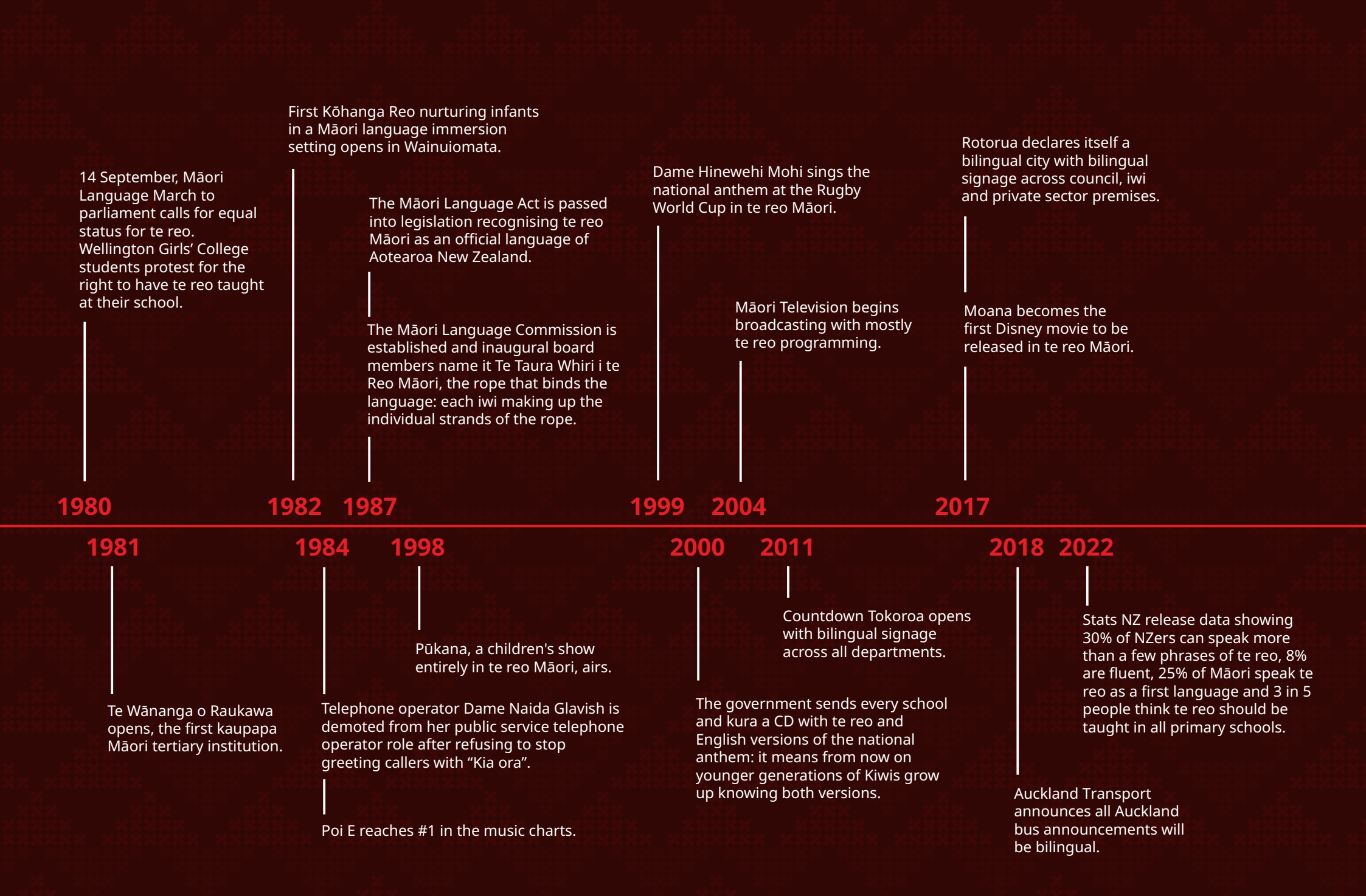
Director of Education blocks a move to include te reo in the school curriculum by teachers.

Te Reo Māori Society forms to revitalise te reo and is based at Victoria University in Wellington. Most members are students and academic teaching staff.

The Māori Language Petition is presented to parliament by Hana Te Hemara of Ngā Tamatoa. It is signed by more than 33,000 people calling for te reo to be taught in schools.

14 September becomes Māori Language Day.

First bilingual English/te reo Māori school opens in Rūātoki.



Using te reo Māori

Te reo Māori is not a single uniform language – it contains rich regional and iwi-based variations that reflect whakapapa, history, and identity. Acknowledging these differences is essential for culturally responsive and respectful communication. Kupu, spelling, and macrons can be dependent on which area of Aotearoa you are from.

For example, the translation for ‘ancestors’ is different across three different dialects:

- **tīpuna** (eastern dialect)
- **tūpuna** (western dialect)
- **tiipuna** (Tainui dialect)

Pronunciation

If you have ever heard a name pronounced incorrectly, or maybe your own name has been miss pronounced, you can understand it makes a big difference when someone makes the effort to get it right. Like any language, pronunciation of a language takes practice.

Māori alphabet

You may notice te reo Māori does not have the same alphabet as the English alphabet the Māori alphabet is made up of:

- 5 vowels: **a,e,i,o,u** and 10 consonants: **h,k,ng,m,n,p,r,t,w,wh**

A vowel can have a long or short sound. A long vowel sound is usually denoted by a tohutō | macron or by double vowels such as, ā in Māori or aa in Maaori.

The **‘Ng’** digraph is pronounced as it sounds in the English word **‘singer’**.

The **‘wh’** digraph has evolved to be more like the English **‘f’** sound.

Tohutō Macrons

Tohutō matter. They help new te reo Māori speakers pronounce kupu correctly. There are some kupu in Māori that can be likened to homonyms in English. These words are spelt the same but have different meanings depending on how they are used or spoken, which is shown by the use of the tohutō.

TE REO MĀORI

Keke – cake	Wahine – woman	Peke – to jump
Kēkē – armpit	Wāhine – women	Pēke – bag
Kekē – to creak		

TE REO PĀKEHA

Close – to shut	Lead – to guide	Tear – a rip
Close – be nearby	Lead – a metal	Tear – from crying

Ngā mihi me ngā poroporoaki i te reo Māori

Te reo Māori greetings and farewells

You have likely heard several different te reo Māori greetings and farewells and may be using them daily, if not, they are a great way to start incorporating te reo Māori into your everyday kōrero and emails.

Below we have broken out each kupu to give you a deeper understanding of the greeting but also to show the depth of the saying and how it can be used in multiple ways.



GREETING	TRANSLATION	KUPU BREAKDOWN
Kia ora	Hello (informal) Cheers, best wishes	Kia – used for future time
		Ora – to be alive, well, safe
Tēnā koe	Hello (formal) Thank you	Tēnā – that (determiner)
		Koe – you
Tēnā kōrua	Hello to two people Thank you both	Tēnā – that (determiner)
		Kōrua – you two
Tēnā koutou	Hello to three or more Thank you	Tēnā – that (determiner)
		Koutou – you (3+ people)
Kia ora e hoa	Hello friend (informal)	Kia – used for future time
		Ora – to be alive, well, safe
		E – used before a name (particle)
		Hoa – Friend
Mōrena	Good morning	Mōrena – Good morning
Ata mārie	Good morning	Ata – morning
		Mārie – peaceful



ONLINE	TRANSLATION	KUPU BREAKDOWN
Nā	From	Nā – form a past tense emphasising who or what did the action
Ngā manaakitanga	With best wishes	Ngā – many (plural of te – singular) Manaakitanga – hospitality, kindness
Ngā mihi	Regards, Thank you	Ngā – many (plural of te – singular) Mihi – acknowledge, thank

IN PERSON	TRANSLATION	KUPU BREAKDOWN
Ka kite (anō)	See you (again)	Ka – tense past, present or future Kite – to see Anō – again, more
Mā te wā	See you later Time will tell	Mā – for (indicating future possession) Te – Used in front of another verb following a stative (determiner)/ the (singular) Wā – time
Pō mārie	Goodnight	Pō mārie – Goodnight



There are also resources available to help you learn Waiata and Karakia in NZSL which can be found on the New Zealand sign language board website.

Karakia

Karakia are intentional words with purpose, to set the scene, clear the air, and call for guidance. Karakia in the modern context is a form of mindfulness that brings people together.

Karakia is one small way in which we can contribute to the revitalisation of te reo Māori and show our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

How we use karakia at Rīpeka Whero Aotearoa

We use karakia in multiple areas of our mahi including, to open and close a hui, to clear tapu after a death within our organisation, to open a new building and before and after disaster deployments. We also run Te Taha Wairua, an online karakia delivered every Monday morning by one of our people. This online event is available to anyone at Rīpeka Whero.

In this section we have included karakia to open and close a gathering, and to show thanks for **kai**. You can add these to your **kete** and incorporate this into your day to day mahi.

Please contact kaupapamaori@redcross.org.nz if you would like to attend Te Taha Wairua and or sign up to be a kaikarakia.

kai	food	kete	basket
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Whakataka te hau

This is an ancient karakia that was used when you were out at sea and a storm was approaching. However, the storm is a metaphor for any life-threatening force. It is now widely used at the start of the day or at the start of a meeting.

Ka whakairia te tapu

*This is widely used as a karakia **whakamutunga** that lifts the tapu of a space or activity, clearing the way for a safe return to ordinary life. It reflects a key principle in Te Ao Māori: the transition between tapu and noa, ensuring balance and spiritual safety.*

Tēnei te whakamoemiti

It originated from traditional practices of gratitude towards the natural world

KARAKIA TĪMATANGA | OPENING KARAKIA

Whakataka te hau ki te uru	Get ready for the westerly
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga	and be prepared for the southerly
Kia mākinakina ki uta	It will be icy cold inland,
Kia mātaratara ki tai	and icy cold on the shore.
E hī ake ana te atākura	May the dawn rise red-tipped on ice,
He tio, he huka, he hauhū	on snow, on frost
Tihei mauri ora!	Tis the breath of life

KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA | CLOSING KARAKIA

Ka whakairia te tapu	Restrictions are moved aside
Kia wātea ai te ara	So that the pathway is clear
Kia tūruki whakataha ai	So we may move forward
Kia tūruki whakataha ai	Join, group, and affirm
Haumi ē, hui ē, tāiki ē!	

KARAKIA KAI | RECITATION FOR FOOD

Tēnei te whakamoemiti	We give thanks
mō ngā ringawera	to the hands
i whakaritea i ēnei kai	that prepared this food
mai i te rangi	from the sky
mai i te whenua	from the land
mai i te taiao	from the environment
Mauri ora!	Good health!

Rīpeka whero Aotearoa Waiata Red Cross New Zealand song

Waiata are songs that are sung to give extended meaning to speeches, convey a particular message, impart a story or historical event, to entertain, or to bring closure as a single entity. We were very fortunate to be gifted our own waiata – Ngā Mātāpono from Joe Mcleod (Tūhoe) and his whānau which speaks to our Fundamental Principles.



QR code to audio/
YouTube recording

NGĀ MĀTĀPONO OUR RED CROSS WAIATA	
Anei ngā mātāpono taketake	Here are the Fundamental Principles
a te Rīpeka Whero	of the Red Cross.
Te ngākau atawhai,	With humanity we're always
tētahi ki tētahi	working together,
Te tōkeketanga,	Working with impartiality no
ahakoa ko wai	matter who they are.
Te whakaraupapa,	With neutrality staying always
te noho taharua,	with one another,
E kore e whai wāhi atu	Our compass leads us always
Engari me tū takitahi,	in the right direction.
me tū motuhake,	Allow us to work alone with
he tangata tūao	independence as volunteers,
Tū ki te Ao,	To stand tall to the world with
tau ana, he tangata tūao	pride as volunteers.
E ō ai rā te kōrero	Our language is about peace and harmony,
Te Kōtahitanga o te Ao	For everyone here in this world.
E ō ai rā te kōrero	Our language is about peace and harmony
O te Ao katoa	For the entire world.
(repeat second verse)	(repeat second verse)
O te Ao katoa	For the entire world.

Pepeha

A pepeha is a way of introducing yourself in Māori. It tells people who you are by sharing your connections with the people and places that are important to you. People from all cultures introduce themselves when meeting new people – a pepeha is a deeper understanding of who you are and where you come from delivered in a structured way.

When to use a pepeha

A pepeha is typically used as a form of introduction and is often used at the beginning of a formal meeting or ceremony. It is also used when meeting someone for the first time or when introducing yourself for the first time.

Pepeha structure

A pepeha uses a familiar template of phrases that define and describe iwi, hapū and whānau connections. It can incorporate ancestral mountains, rivers, waka, tribes, subtribes, marae and other kinship ties.

The order of a pepeha commonly flows from the natural world to the personal world representing a journey from land to people.

Variations of pepeha exist with people often changing their pepeha to reflect the speakers before them and show connections to others they are meeting.

whenua

land

Waihangatia tō pepeha

Create your pepeha

Learning and reciting a pepeha can be a transformative experience. For those who are disconnected from their cultural roots, it can be a way of finding a sense of belonging and purpose, it can also be a way of connecting with others who share a similar cultural background. For non-Māori it can be a way to show your connection to Aotearoa and to discover a deeper connection to your ancestors, building connections with others you may not know exist.

There is no single right way to create your pepeha as they are often deeply personal, however we have supplied some templates to keep you safe and help you on your **haerenga**.

haerenga

journey

FOR MĀORI	FOR NON-MĀORI
Tēnā koutou katoa	
Ko _____ tōku/te maunga _____ is my/the mountain	Nō _____ ahau I am from _____
Ko _____ tōku/te awa _____ is my river	I tipu ake au ki _____ I grew up in _____
Ko _____ tōku iwi _____ Is my tribe	E noho ana au ki _____ I live in _____
Ko _____ tōku hapū _____ is my sub tribe	Ko _____ rāua ko _____ ōku matua _____ and _____ are my parents
Ko _____ tōku waka _____ is my waka	Ko _____ tōku ingoa My name is _____
Ko _____ tōku Marae _____ is my Marae	
Ko _____ rāua ko _____ ōku matua _____ and _____ are my parents	
Ko _____ tōku ingoa My name is _____	
Kei Rīpeka Whero Aotearoa ahau e mahi ana I work at the Red Cross New Zealand or He _____ ahau My role is _____	
Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.	