

# The rights of mokopuna Māori

*"My culture means everything! It's my background, my heritage and basically my heart!"*

Mokopuna<sup>1</sup>

**All pēpi are born with mana.<sup>2</sup> It is the right of all mokopuna Māori to grow up safe and well, with whānau, connected to their whakapapa and immersed in te ao Māori.**

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Crown (all of government) has duties to ensure equitable outcomes and to uphold the fundamental and unique rights of mokopuna Māori (Māori children and young people) as tangata whenua (indigenous people), as children under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, all of government also has obligations under this agreement.<sup>3</sup>

Under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, mokopuna rights are grounded in whakapapa (family heritage), mātauranga Māori (traditional knowledge), and tikanga Māori (cultural practices). Tino rangatiratanga, the right to self-determination, is central to the rights of mokopuna Māori, as guaranteed under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Tino rangatiratanga recognises the protected authority of Māori, including mokopuna Māori, to make decisions about their own lives, resources, and futures.

For mokopuna Māori, tino rangatiratanga means having the freedom and support to live as Māori, to learn and grow within their own cultural frameworks, and to exercise autonomy in decisions that affect them – individually and collectively. Tino rangatiratanga affirms that mokopuna Māori are active holders of rights, with the right to lead and shape their own futures as part of thriving whānau, hapū, iwi and hāpori (communities). Te Tiriti o Waitangi binds the Crown to uphold these rights.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples all include rights for mokopuna to non-discrimination, culture, language, identity, and family relationships, as well as the right to participate in decisions that affect them.<sup>4</sup> Mokopuna Māori e whaikaha ana (disabled Māori children) also have rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.<sup>5</sup>

## Our calls to action

We want to see demonstrable recognition by all of government of the unique status of mokopuna Māori as tangata whenua, with rights guaranteed under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in addition to their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. All of government has obligations to ensure all these rights are reflected in the development and implementation of laws, policies, and

practices, and must enable the full participation and inclusion of mokopuna Māori without discrimination.<sup>6</sup> We call on all of government to:

- **Strengthen the focus on promoting and advancing the rights of mokopuna Māori** within the context of their whānau, hapū, iwi, and hapori, acknowledging the historic and ongoing impacts of colonisation.
- **Ensure legislative and policy decisions actively give effect to, and protect the rights, wellbeing, and participation of mokopuna Māori.** This includes creating child and youth-friendly platforms that empower mokopuna Māori to lead and participate in discussions, actively incorporating their whakaaro (perspectives) and ensuring their voices are heard in the decisions that affect their lives.
- **Invest in policies and initiatives specifically designed to reduce inequities** and advance the wellbeing and rights of mokopuna Māori within the context of their whānau, hapū, iwi, and hapori.

## What mokopuna Māori say

Mokopuna Māori have told us they are proud of their culture and identity. They want to learn te reo Māori (the Māori language) and hear it spoken more widely. Below are some of the things that mokopuna Māori have shared with us:

*"Let my culture stay alive. Incorporate more Māori culture in everything."*

Mokopuna<sup>7</sup>

*"Māori language week shouldn't just be one week. It should be the kaupapa for everyday life. The community should see our Māori culture."*

Mokopuna<sup>8</sup>

*"Help us learn about our culture, about our language, give our land back, support our family."*

Mokopuna<sup>9</sup>

Mokopuna Māori have shared that, contrary to their rights, they disproportionately face racism and discrimination, violence and abuse, poverty, separation from whānau, and disconnection from their whakapapa and whenua, including in State care and youth justice systems.

*"They arrest us for nothing. They pull up with millions of cop cars and there's only one of us they have a warrant for, but they come up, straight up and smashed me. Kneeing me, telling me to put my hands towards my back but I couldn't because he had my hand. They are racist as."*

Mokopuna<sup>10</sup>

Mokopuna Māori have told us schools and education settings are the places where they experience the racism the most.

*"...boys at school saying they are scared of me cause of [being] Māori"*

Mokopuna<sup>11</sup>

Through our kōrero with mokopuna Māori, we know that some see themselves as the taonga that they are. We want this for all mokopuna Māori, without exception.

*"Whaanau and whakapapa. Knowing where you come from builds confidence."*

Mokopuna<sup>12</sup>

*"I am a seed born for greatness."*

Mokopuna<sup>13</sup>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Mana Mokopuna (2024). [“You need to get in early as soon as you see people struggling”: Understanding the life course journey.](#)

<sup>2</sup> A fundamental principle of te ao Māori (Māori world view) is that mokopuna (or pēpi – babies) are gifts from atua (gods) and tūpuna (ancestors). They are born tapu and with mana, meaning born sacred, special, and protected, inheritors of the greatness of their whakapapa (family heritage). Any harm towards mokopuna is a breach of this tapu and a denigration of their mana. Mana Mokopuna affirms this principle and the inherent rights of mokopuna to life, wellbeing, and dignity. For more information, see: Tākai (2023). *Whakatipu te kākano: From conception to birth.* <https://healthify.nz/assets/Brochures/TAKAI231A-Whakatipu-Te-Kakano-web.pdf>;

Oranga Tamariki (2025). [Strengthening our response to unborn and newborn pēpi](#); Kuni Jenkins, Helen Mountain Harte, Te Kahui Mana Ririki (2011). [Traditional Māori parenting – A historical review of literature of traditional Māori Childrearing practices in pre-European times](#); Dr Moana Eruera & Dr Leland A. Ruwhiu (2015), [Eeny, meeny, miny, moe catch hegemony by the toe: validating cultural protective constructs for indigenous children in Aotearoa.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Te Puna Rangahau o te Wai Ariki - Aotearoa New Zealand Centre for Indigenous Peoples and the Law - University of Auckland (2022). [The rights of tamariki Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thematic Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.](#)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (Adopted 1989). [Convention on the Rights of the Child.](#) Specifically Articles 7 & 8 (the right to protect and preserve identity and family ties), Article 9 (the right to live with parents and have contact with family) and Articles 30 & 31 (the right to enjoy and practice one’s own culture, religion and language and related activities).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Convention on the Rights of the Child.](#) Articles 1 & 2, 7 & 8, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Mana Mokopuna (2024). [“You need to get in early, as soon as you see people struggling”: Understanding the life-course journey.](#)

<sup>8</sup> ibid

<sup>9</sup> Mana Mokopuna (2024). [Ki te kore te kaikiri ki roto o Aotearoa, kātahi te wāhi pai rawa atu: "Without racism Aotearoa would be better" Mokopuna share their experiences of racism and solutions to end it.](#)

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Mana Mokopuna (then Office of the Children’s Commissioner- OCC) (2019). [What makes a good life? Children and young people’s views on wellbeing.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Mana Mokopuna (2024). [Children's Right Symposium 2024 Discussion Document.](#)