

# **Mana Whakatipu**



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**Ngāi Tahu leader Mark Solomon  
on leadership and life**

**Mark Solomon**  
*with Mark Revington*



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Mō tātou, ā, mō kā  
uri ā muri ake nei.

For us and our  
children after us.





# Foreword

**T**his is the memoir of Tā Mark Solomon, as told by him. It is also intended to give a reader some insight into what makes Tā Mark such an effective leader — but let's just say his actions often speak louder than his words.

He is known as a respected Māori leader, a forthright man, intelligent, unafraid to speak his mind, with a strong sense of justice. He is a man whom people will happily follow. Tā Mark has said himself: 'If people are doing things that I think are incorrect, I will stand up and challenge them.'

Tā Mark has an extraordinary backstory, from foundry worker to leader of one of the largest and wealthiest iwi in New Zealand. He is a man with a

good deal of influence on a national level.

Dame Naida Glavish, of Ngāti Whātua, describes him as a brilliant leader and speaker. ‘He also cares enough to address the issues that others wouldn’t dare address,’ she says. ‘For instance, Mark would speak strongly about domestic violence, whether that domestic violence is right under his nose or under someone else’s.’

A brief outline of his life follows. Tā Mark, who was born in Ōtautahi Christchurch in 1954, married Maria (née Howie) in 1974. It was, he reckons, a case of love at first sight. They raised four children and have a whāngai or adopted son. The children don’t feature in this book as Tā Mark agreed to tell his story as long as he didn’t talk about his family.

He grew up in Ōtautahi but the family spent as much time as possible at Ōaro, a small coastal settlement 20 kilometres south of Kaikōura, where his father’s parents had land. The death of his father, George, when Mark was only 12 had a major impact on his early life. George was only 39.

Mark spent the first part of his professional life as a foundryman, having previously worked in Ōtautahi in a freezing works, on a shearing gang, and as a pāua diver. It’s hard to know what would have happened

had he continued as a foundryman, but in 1995 he was elected to Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, the tribal council of Ngāi Tahu, as the representative for Kaikōura. It would change his life.

Ngāi Tahu, the most commercially astute iwi in Aotearoa and the largest tribe of Te Waipounamu, has 18 representatives on its council, each elected by the iwi's 18 papatipu rūnanga or regional councils.

In 1995, Ngāi Tahu was about to settle its Waitangi Tribunal claim with the Crown, ending seven generations of pursuit of justice after the Crown had reneged on land deals made by Ngāi Tahu leaders and left the iwi impoverished. Three years later, in 1998, as the tribe embarked on a new future, Tā Mark was elected kaiwhakahaere of the iwi, just days before the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act was to have its third and final reading in Parliament. It was the second major Waitangi Tribunal claim, behind Waikato Tainui, to be settled. Tā Mark was kaiwhakahaere of Ngāi Tahu for 18 years, until 2016.

In 2005, he was instrumental in establishing the Iwi Chairs Forum, a group representing iwi from across New Zealand. The forum, which meets four times a year, was fired by Tā Mark's belief that, together, Māori are unstoppable. As he saw it, every

tribe in the country was trying to do the same thing. They were all trying to build a capital base, to look after the social and cultural needs of their people and to protect their respective areas. What he didn't understand was, if they were all doing the same thing, why were they doing it in isolation? The forum held its first meeting at Takahanga Marae in Kaikoūra, which Tā Mark's uncle, Bill Solomon, helped build.

Tā Mark was a board member of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa from 2002 to 2007 and an original member of the Minister of Māori Affairs' Māori Economic Taskforce, established in 2009. At that time, the Minister of Māori Affairs was Dr Pita Sharples and the taskforce had a budget of \$4.5 million per annum to research and implement Māori economic development initiatives.

In 2011, he played a key role in setting up the Māori trades training initiative, He Toki ki te Rika, funded by Ngāi Tahu, and he is the founding patron of He Toki. In 2012, he was named a Visionary Leader at the Deloitte and *New Zealand Management* magazine national business awards.

He became Tā Mark, or Sir Mark, in 2013, when he was made a Knight Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to Māori

and business. In 2015, he received an honorary doctorate from Lincoln University, as Doctor of Natural Resources, and he was also appointed to the National Science Challenges governance boards for the Sustainable Seas and Deep South projects.

In 2016, he announced his resignation as the representative of Kaikōura on the Ngāi Tahu table and as kaiwhakahaere of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. The same year, he was awarded a Kea World Class New Zealand Award. Since stepping down as kaiwhakahaere, he has been deputy chair and then acting chair of the Canterbury District Health Board. He chairs Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu (the Whānau Ora commissioning agency for Te Waipounamu, which was set up by the nine iwi in the south), and he chairs the Māori Carbon Foundation, an organisation that plants trees on marginal land and trades in carbon credits.

He is a champion for Tū Pono: Te Mana Kaha o te Whānau, a pilot programme launched in 2017 by Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu to explore ways of enabling stronger Māori responses to family harm and violence; he was a key driver in the establishment of, and is a signatory to, the Children's Covenant, written by Judge Carolyn Henwood and launched in

2016. The Covenant commits to protecting children from violence, abuse, neglect and to provide a proper standard of living. It also promises to support their emotional and mental well-being, provide education and take children's views into account.

Tā Mark has been approached by all this country's main political parties but has resisted a career in national politics. He is constantly in demand as a speaker, and has been co-opted onto a number of government committees. He is usually reluctant to talk about himself. But he has an innate grasp of leadership — *mana whakatipu* — in a way that is extremely powerful. He believes that leaders must stride confidently between multiple cultures and be as comfortable on the global corporate stage as they are on the *marae*.

He is known for his *mana*, honesty, integrity and effective leadership. This book gives insights into how he has applied these throughout his life.

*Mark Revington*

*May 2021*

# Big day out

**I**n the beginning, I was tongue-tied and terrified. I had been a member of the Ngāi Tahu council — what we call ‘the table’ — for three years, but here I was, in September 1998, newly elected as kaiwhakahaere or chair of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and I had to front up on one of our biggest days in 150 years: the third and final reading in Parliament of the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Bill.

This settlement has been hailed as one of the pioneering negotiations of the modern Treaty of Waitangi settlement process and set precedents for all negotiations that have followed. For Ngāi Tahu, who occupy the major part of Te Waipounamu, the South Island, it was seen as some level of justice

and redress for the wrongs that had been committed against us, even if it was too little and too late. In the nineteenth century, our ancestors, who had long had contact with Europeans and intermarried with them, had sold land to the Crown — 80 per cent of Te Waipounamu, in fact — but the Crown had not honoured the deal. Ngāi Tahu was ripped off. The tribe had been fighting to overturn that wrong for seven generations.

The Crown reckoned full redress was worth around \$12 to \$15 billion. Our advisers thought it was closer to \$20 billion. We settled for \$170 million — a lot less, but it allowed Ngāi Tahu to move forward, to rebuild. And that we would: by the time I stepped down as kaiwhakahaere 18 years later, Ngāi Tahu had assets worth more than \$1.5 billion and the tribe was widely regarded as economically astute.

Outside the Grand Hall of Parliament, there were television crews and more than a hundred people waiting to be welcomed. As Ngāi Tahu kaiwhakahaere, it was my job to deliver the whaikōrero on behalf of Ngāi Tahu, but my grasp of te reo Māori was basic at best. I'd never been a public person and I was terrified.

I stammered through the pōwhiri, and afterwards



I realised that I hadn't acknowledged all the rangatira from other tribes who had come to tautoko us, support us. I was hugely embarrassed.

When I went to explain, I found them all standing together.

'Uncle,' I said to Api Mahuika, the leader of Ngāi Porou. 'I've come to apologise for not acknowledging you being here to support Ngāi Tahu.'

Api looked at me with a big smile on his face and said, 'Oh, boy. We could see the tūtae running down the back of your legs.'

He had forgiven me. That afternoon, I began to realise the goodwill that existed in the highest echelons of the government towards Ngāi Tahu. At the pōwhiri, we did the hongī and the harirū, then shook hands. When I got up to Jim Bolger, who, after a leadership challenge, had left Parliament four months earlier, he had his business card in his hand. He slipped it into mine and said, 'My private number's on there. Any support or help you need, ring whenever you like.' It was the first time I had met him. The same thing happened with Doug Graham, who was then the Minister of Treaty Negotiations.

It had taken seven years to reach settlement, since the Waitangi Tribunal hearings in which Ngāi Tahu

had conclusively proved that we had been rorted by the Crown, but now Bolger and Graham were more than happy to help.

Two months later, Bolger's successor as prime minister, Jenny Shipley, delivered the Crown's apology to Ngāi Tahu at Ōnuku Marae, near Akaroa on Banks Peninsula.

We are a people of long memory. Some of our whakataukī appear in this book. Our ancestors had signed the Treaty in 1840 at Ōnuku, Ōtakou and Ruapuke Island. Finally we were getting some justice. Many Ngāi Tahu had fought for this moment.