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Te Papa Tongarewa

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20<sup>th</sup> January 2007

Andrew Burnett  
Deputy Director  
British Museum  
Great Russell Street  
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ENGLAND

Tēnā koe Andrew,

**RE: MĀORI KŌIWI TANGATA (ANCESTRAL HUMAN REMAINS)**

Thank you for your letter of 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007 addressed to Mr Te Taru White, Kaihautū. I am also grateful to you for meeting with Kay Harrison, Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Manager whilst she was in the UK recently. This was a very useful opportunity for face-to-face discussions.

In response to the points outlined in your letter, we would respond as follows:

- How would Te Papa regard the Trustees making a long-term loan of some or all of the human remains to Te Papa?

Te Papa does not accept the return of kōiwi/koimi tangata (Māori and Moriori ancestral remains) on the basis of long-term loan. The Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme is dedicated to provenancing kōiwi/koimi tangata with the ultimate aim of domestically repatriating these ancestral remains back to their iwi (Māori and Moriori tribes) where possible. Te Papa places no conditions upon the return of ancestral remains back to their iwi, so such a loan agreement would compromise our stance and make such returns untenable.

- How would Te Papa view the possibility of scientific research being carried out on the remains?

Since the kōiwi tangata (7 Toi moko and 9 skeletal remains) are in the care of your museum, we feel that this decision regarding scientific testing is ultimately the British Museum's decision. However, we would stress that destructive and invasive testing of kōiwi/koimi tangata would be considered offensive by iwi Māori and Moriori.

Te Papa does not currently carry out any scientific testing on kōiwi/koimi tangata or allow any access to the ancestral remains for this purpose. However, the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Team make sure that they are kept up to date with current scientific methods, which are applicable to their work (e.g. DNA testing, carbon dating). Any research that is carried out by the Karanga Aotearoa repatriation team is based on non-invasive observation of the kōiwi/koimi tangata and archival records.

For the reasons outlined to date in previous correspondence and papers, we feel that the potential loss to science of repatriating the Toi moko is strongly outweighed by the cultural significance of the kōiwi tangata to Māori.

In terms of provenancing Toi moko, the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Team are currently discussing engaging a Ta moko (Māori tattoo) expert contractor, whose





work would be complemented by archival research carried out by the Karanga Aotearoa Researchers.

- Would Te Papa be willing to indicate the final resting place of the remains if they were returned?

The Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Team would be more than happy to inform the British Museum of the final resting places of the kōiwi tangata if they were repatriated from the British Museum collections. They would also pass on all relevant research information and view this as the start of a mutually beneficial relationship between our two institutions.

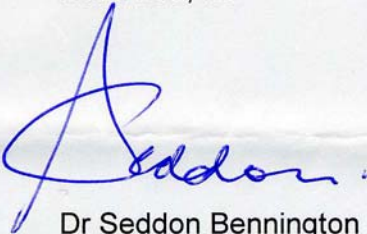
As discussed earlier, return to iwi is unconditional. To date, iwi have chosen a variety of different options, which include: burial, burial with the option of reinterment and long-term placement and care of kōiwi tangata with a local museum.

We would like to clarify and reiterate our position, that we are only requesting the repatriation of those kōiwi tangata, including Toi moko (preserved, tattooed Māori heads) which are unmodified since death, as per our government mandate. In our repatriation request we included those 5 kōiwi (skeletal remains) described as possible 'implements' because clarification regarding their status was sought but not given. However, if the British Museum feels that these human remains fall into the category of humans remains modified since death/taonga (Māori treasure/artefact), then we would support this decision.

We look forward to receiving and commenting on the reports and information, which will be subsequently presented to your Trustees at the meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> March. I would be grateful if a copy of these files could also be sent to Natasha Barrett, Repatriation Researcher, Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Team, [natashab@tepapa.govt.nz](mailto:natashab@tepapa.govt.nz).

Please let us know if you would like to discuss any of these or other matters further. Our staff do look forward to working with your staff on these koiwi tangata, and the records which are available.

Nāku noa, nā



Dr Seddon Bennington  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

