

Newsletter



He Kōrero Whakapapa: The Founding of the National Iwi Chairs Forum

The National Iwi Chairs Forum (NICF) was born out of a time of deep political challenge and visionary leadership. Tā Mark Solomon, a founding figure, shared the kaupapa behind the Forum in a kōrero that traces its roots to two defining moments: the Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004 and the racially divisive 2005 general election.

In 2004, the Crown's decision to vest ownership of the foreshore and seabed in itself, denying Māori the right to seek redress through the courts, deeply undermined the principle of due process. Tā Mark, incensed by this denial, described then-Prime Minister Helen Clark's stance as hypocritical—defending justice overseas while denying it at home. That same year, political rhetoric reached new lows, with Māori portrayed as recipients of undue privilege. For Tā Mark, these events were a call to collective action.

He approached the late Dame Te Atairangikaahu with a proposal—to bring iwi chairs together to discuss a collaborative path forward. Despite internal challenges within some iwi, she offered her support. Thirty invitations were sent out; thirty-six iwi responded, gathering at Takahanga Marae (Ngāti Kuri) to plant the seeds of a national forum.

From the outset, the National Iwi Chairs Forum was grounded in mana motuhake and kotahitanga. It was not intended to be a decision-making body, but a space where iwi could share knowledge, align on key kaupapa, and uplift one another. The model was simple: four hui a year, starting in Waitangi to honour the Treaty, and rotating across Aotearoa. The Forum would host Crown representatives and community stakeholders to support collective advocacy—but always with the understanding that decisions lie with iwi, whānau and hapū. Tā Mark's insight was that while iwi across the motu were working toward the same goals—economic resilience, cultural revitalisation, environmental stewardship—they were often doing so in isolation. He believed deeply that unity would not only preserve Māori rights but accelerate intergenerational prosperity. He highlighted the rise of the Māori economy—from \$9.5 billion in 2001 to \$123 billion by 2023—driven largely by whānau enterprises, despite Māori remaining invisible in national economic discourse.

The Forum, underpinned by values of rangatiratanga, whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, now operates through kaupapa-led Pou: Taiao (environment), Tangata (social development), Tikanga (customary law), Tahua (economic development), and Āhuarangi (climate change). It continues to evolve, always anchored by the founding vision of collaboration, transparency, and transformation.

Tā Mark's message remains clear: our strength lies in our unity. The NICF stands as a testament to the power of iwi-led collaboration to shape a future that is grounded in tikanga, driven by kaupapa, and accountable to the people.

Key dates

02 - 04 July 2025

Pou Tahua Symposium / NICF July 2025

05 -07 November 2025

Pou Tahua Symposium / NICF November 2025

He pātai āu? Have you got a question, give us a call, or send us your pātai

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