Speech by Mayor Cull to the people of Nga Ruahine
at the occasion of their hikoi
on 24 March 2015 at the Rongo in Dunedin

Mihi for Nga Ruahine

Ka tangi te tītī, ka tangi te kākā, ka tangi hoki ahau, tihei mauri ora

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e aku rau Rangatira mā, tēnā koutou katoa.

E te Manawhenua, Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Waitaha, Tēnā koutou.

E ngā manuhiri tuārangi, Nga Ruahine, Taranaki mouna, haere mai ra I ngā mārama te whakapapa o te wa. Ko tōtou tēnei e tangi nei ki ngā tupuna e takoto mai nei.

Nō reira e ngā mate, me mihi, me tangi, me poroporoaki ka tika ki a koutou katoa. E moe......... e moe......... moe mai ra!

Ka huri ki te pou e tu mai nei, e Rongo, hei tohu maumahara e tūhono nei ngā iwi a Nga Ruahine me Ngāi Tahu whānui. Ānei ngā mokopuna e mihi nei I raro I tō manaakitanga, nō reira e tu, e tu, e tu!

Nō reira e rongo e whakairihia ake ki runga

Tuturu o whiti whakamaua kia tina

Haumie huie taikie
People of Nga Ruahine, it is a privilege to welcome you here.

You come on your hikoi to acknowledge and commemorate your tupuna who were unjustly taken from their tribal lands and brought to Otepoti, to Hokitika and to Christchurch. Many of them did not return and they lie here in our whenua. I acknowledge their presence in our place, the importance of your visit and the memories it preserves and honours. I acknowledge the many other men who were taken from other iwi of Taranaki at various times and who also lie beneath the earth of Otepoti.

I know that you go on from here to Hokitika to receive an apology and such compensation in settlement as the Crown and Nga Ruahine have agreed. I wish you peace of mind and comfort in that settlement.

The imprisonment of your tupuna and those here in Otepoti was a grievous wrong by the Crown. We are embarrassed by the knowledge that our city was required to act as their wardens in their imprisonment. However good can spring from wrongs done. While your tupuna labored here, contributing to the building of our city, their dignity made them many friends. Friends not just among local Maori at Otakou, notably Ricki Ellison and his whanau who had whakapapa extending back to Taranaki. But also among the Pakeha population of Dunedin. Indeed along with Hori Kerei Taiao, there were James Macandrew, Vincent Pike and Thomas Bracken among others who petitioned the government of the day to either give your tupuna a fair trial or release them.

Eventually those that survived were released. Over the years since, the bonds between your people and the Ngai Tahu of this place have been maintained. Over time the resting places of your tupuna have been identified, honoured and preserved. It is a privilege for our community to be carers for your tupuna. It is our responsibility.

Not everyone treats it so seriously however. There are sometimes people who want to exploit the wrongs of the past for private gain and to sow discord and lies between people. As you know we had just such a situation arise recently when some shackles were offered for sale. It was claimed they had been retrieved from so-called “caves” along the harbour – caves which some believed your tupuna and other prisoners were kept in.

Our research found the claims about the shackles were lies. They couldn’t have been found in the “caves”. Indeed they weren’t that old and didn’t even come from NZ. It was a fraud.

But as I said, good can come from evil, and in the course of our research we learned that prisoners at that time were almost never shackled and that all the Taranaki prisoners behaved in an exemplary fashion in any case. We discovered other very positive things about the Taranaki prisoners and their time here. Indeed I am also proud of the way the citizens of this city treated the Taranaki prisoners – your tupuna, while I am still ashamed that the government of the time saw fit to imprison them.

So we extend the hand of fond memory and friendship to Nga Ruahine. Your tears for your tupuna are also ours, but we value the bonds built between our peoples so long ago and assure you that your tupuna are in our community’s care. They are now our city’s tupuna as well.

Tena koutou, tena koutou tena koutou katoa.