

Professor Day,

Te Urewera lies in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand.

1. Te Urewera is ancient and enduring, a fortress of nature, alive with history; its scenery is abundant with mystery, adventure, and remote beauty.
2. Te Urewera is a place of spiritual value, with its own *mana* and *mauri*.
3. Te Urewera has an identity in and of itself, inspiring people to commit to its care.

I quote here section 3 of the Te Urewera Act, which took effect on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2014. On that day, Te Urewera stopped being a national park, and became, simply, a legal entity with all the rights, power, duties, and liabilities of a legal person. The law now recognizes the *mana*, or authority, of the land, and its *mauri*, its life force. In March 2017 further legislation gave legal personality to the Whanganui River, and nine months later a promise was made to give Mount Taranaki ‘the same protections as a citizen’.

Legal personality, as many here will know, means the ability to access the legal system, the possession of full rights and responsibilities according to the law. Corporations, as well as people, have legal personality. Granting such a thing to a park and a river was a world first, repurposing a concept that once helped enable the colonial enterprises of some of the earliest corporations, like the South Sea or East India Company, so as to recognize and reconnect with an indigenous worldview. ‘I am the river’, goes the Whanganui proverb, ‘and the river is me.’ Today’s honorary graduand, Professor Jacinta Ruru, has played a central role in this creative and globally significant use of the law. As she writes in one of her many publications on the topic, such an arrangement demonstrates how ‘a more

sturdy framework for environmental law is more apparent' when we accept that 'humans are part of, rather than, separate from land and water.'

Those of you who have taken Newcastle's Environmental Law module may recognize this point. All of you here today will recognize how Jacinta's commitment to social and environmental justice aligns with the value our University places on these things, and on equality, diversity, and inclusion. Indeed, the Newcastle Law School's efforts to decolonise its curriculum and research agendas and to recognize the achievements of scholars from under-represented groups share much with Jacinta's own activities at a global and national level. At present, she leads the 'Indigenising Legal Education' project, which aims to transform legal education and the legal profession throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, ensuring that it is more compliant with te Tiriti o Waitangi (bicultural), more te reo Māori competent (bilingual) and more inclusive of Māori laws (bijural). Jacinta is perfectly placed to lead such work: the Dean of the Law Faculty at Otago, Mark Henaghan, speaks of how she has 'a tremendous love and compassion for her subject' and 'really believes in what she's teaching'. She was the first ever Māori professor of law and received the Prime Minister's supreme award for tertiary teaching in 2018. Teaching for her is a mechanism for connection.

And the ability to connect is one of Jacinta's great skills. She can bring people together with purpose. Take, for example her: *Te Takarangi: Celebrating Māori Publications* project with Jeanette Wikaira and Angela Wanhalla. This project responds to a pernicious notion, the idea that there is little in the way of scholarship by Māori researchers. Crucially, it does so in a highly positive mode by offering up a list of one hundred and fifty non-fiction publications by Māori writers. The curated titles testify to the variety of Māori authorship as well as its depth and richness.

This celebratory list marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Royal Society Te Apārangi and the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, the Māori Centre of Research Excellence. Jacinta became one of the co-directors of this centre in 2016, having led a successful bid for its renewal. The centre brings together Māori researchers from all disciplines. One of them spoke of how Jacinta ‘takes on a role and brings people with her’, how she ‘lifts people up’, and how she ‘will not let you go’ but will instead ‘do everything she can to encourage you to achieve the potential she sees’.

With her co-director, Linda Waimarie Nikora, Jacinta edited *Ngā Kete Mātauranga: Māori Scholars at the Research Interface*. In this book, twenty-four Māori scholars share their personal journeys through a sector where, in 2020, only 5% of academic staff were Māori. Jacinta’s own story is here too, from her schoolgirl reading of a Witi Ihimaera tale of anti- Māori prejudice, to her interest in studying law and learning how to make an argument ‘to support a cause in a forum that had to seriously consider it: the courts’. She soon realized that the legal system itself was not free from prejudice, yet stayed with it, becoming, in the late 1990s, the ‘lonely only’ Māori law academic at the University of Otago and working to make positive change.

In that book of Māori scholars, there is also a picture of Jacinta holding a *kete*, a woven basket, on the Pūrākaunui inlet, near to where she lives and where she likes to collect cockles, to swim, to kayak and to paddleboard. She still does these things now, both close to home and further abroad, and has even been known to squeeze in some paddleboarding before giving a guest seminar. Today, however, Jacinta is the first Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Māori) of Otago University, and the university itself has a new Māori name: *Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka*. These words describe the prow of a canoe cutting through the water and make the institution’s name into a metaphor meaning a place of many firsts.

It is not easy to be the first, the lonely, the only, the one who helps to bring about change. It is not easy to work in a discipline, like law, so often used to restrict and harm. It is not easy to be a part of a world still shaped by racist structures and behaviours. Yet every video of Jacinta shows her smiling. She draws her positivity from her parents, from her family (some of whom are here today), from her mentors, and even from those who challenge her. She meets challenge in what a Māori colleague of hers described as a *mana*-enhancing way: not breaking down or persecuting her antagonist but working instead to demonstrate a way forward that they might also embrace. With Jacinta's help the Māori and the Crown understanding of the mountain, the land, the river, are meeting upon the bridge of 'legal personality'; with Jacinta's help, legal curricula are expanding to become bicultural, bilingual, bijural; and, with Jacinta's help, the academic community and others are growing richer and more inclusive.

Professor Day, for her leadership, her creativity, and her capacity to assert the need for social, cultural, and personal growth and transformation, I present to you Professor Jacinta Ruru as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

*Citation by Dr James Harriman-Smith, Public Orator*

*9<sup>th</sup> July 2024*