



# Culture of Waka Ama



**wakaama**  
Outrigger / Va'a / New Zealand





# He mihi

Ngā mihi nunui ki ngā kaihoe o Aotearoa.

One of the objectives of Waka Ama New Zealand is to develop and share the culture of the sport of waka ama, which is included in our strategic plan under: 'Maintaining the cultural identity of waka ama'.

The Culture of Waka Ama booklet and quiz is a learning tool for our members and for the wider waka ama community to learn about the culture of the sport of waka ama - the way we do things and why.

This booklet provides new and existing members with basic information about the history and cultural aspects of waka ama so that all feel included.

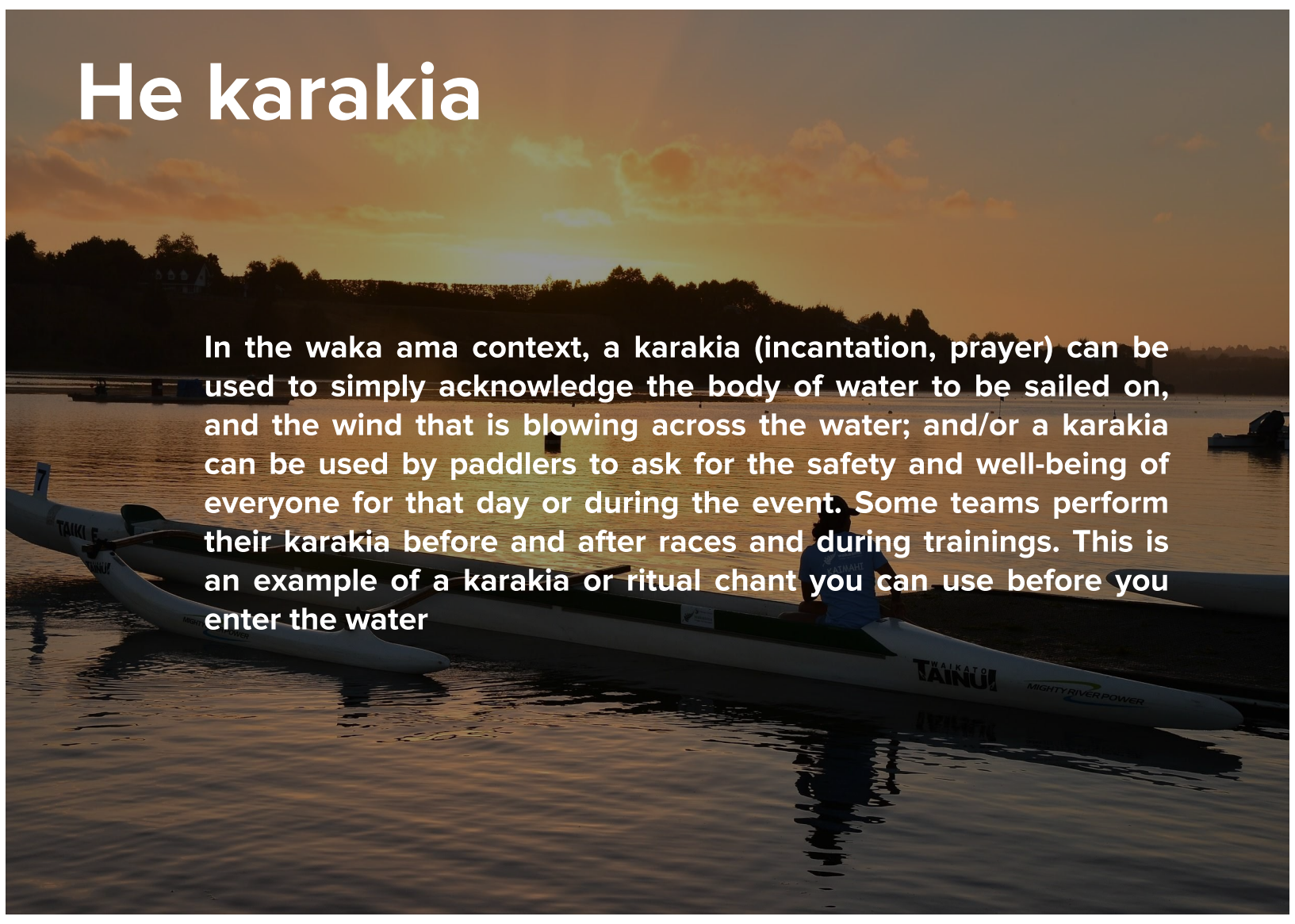
You can find more about the Culture of Waka Ama and our online learning tool at: [www.wakaama.co.nz](http://www.wakaama.co.nz)





# He karakia

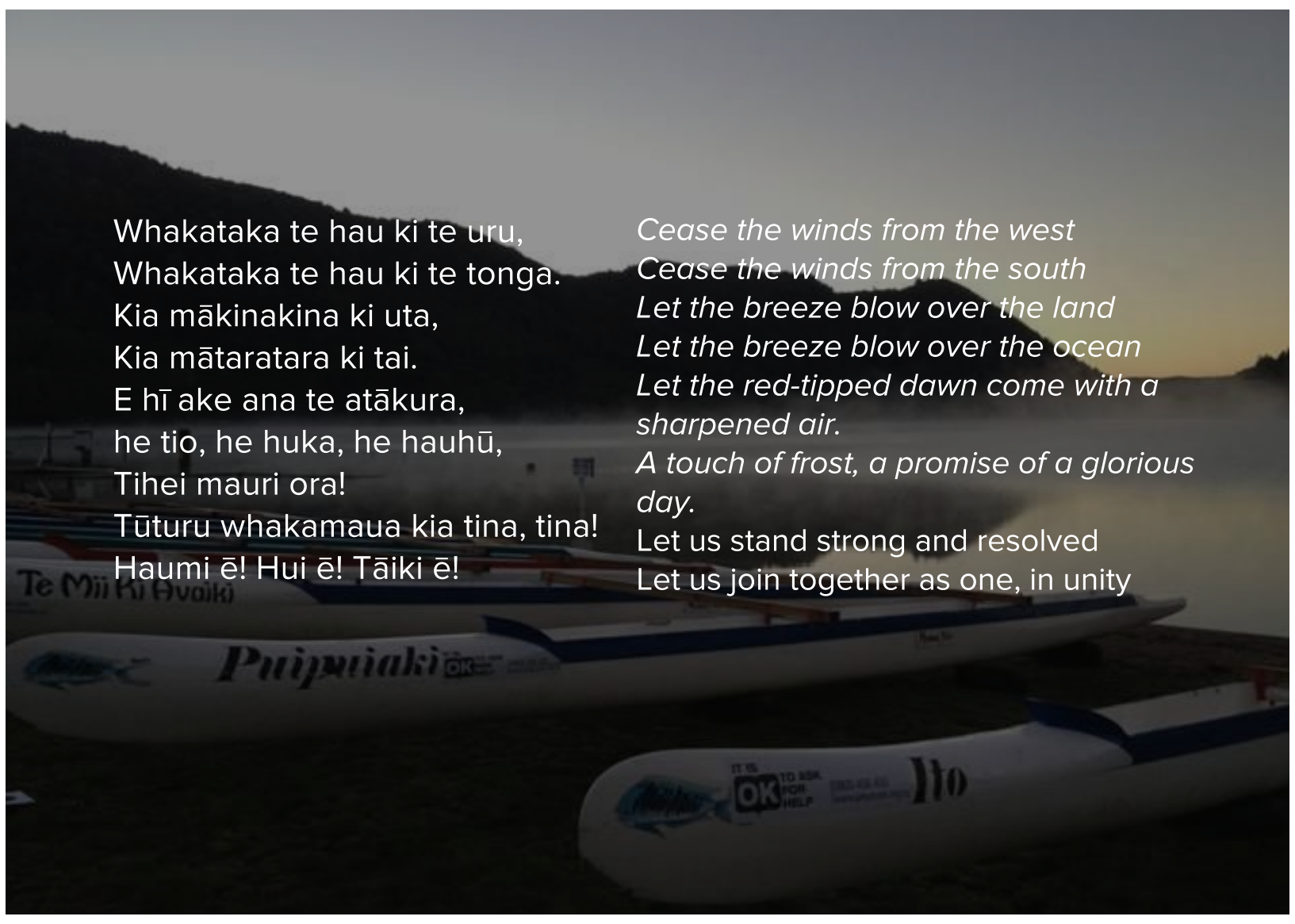
In the waka ama context, a karakia (incantation, prayer) can be used to simply acknowledge the body of water to be sailed on, and the wind that is blowing across the water; and/or a karakia can be used by paddlers to ask for the safety and well-being of everyone for that day or during the event. Some teams perform their karakia before and after races and during trainings. This is an example of a karakia or ritual chant you can use before you enter the water





Whakataka te hau ki te uru,  
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga.  
Kia mākinakina ki uta,  
Kia mātaratara ki tai.  
E hī ake ana te atākura,  
he tio, he huka, he hauhū,  
Tihei mauri ora!  
Tūturu whakamaua kia tina, tina!  
Haumi ē! Hui ē! Tāiki ē!

*Cease the winds from the west  
Cease the winds from the south  
Let the breeze blow over the land  
Let the breeze blow over the ocean  
Let the red-tipped dawn come with a  
sharpened air.  
A touch of frost, a promise of a glorious  
day.  
Let us stand strong and resolved  
Let us join together as one, in unity*



## What is the culture of Waka Ama?

Waka Ama culture refers to  
*“the set of beliefs and values associated with the practices and procedures to be followed in our sport”*

basically, the way and why we do things.





Unlike many sports, waka ama is steeped in the powerful history and traditions of waka sailing and voyaging. Waka ama is, therefore, not just a sport but also a vehicle for identity, pride and community. These are reflected in the values and **tikanga** that underpin it.

**Tikanga:** Practices and protocols, *the way we do things*





# Waka Ama in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Waka ama, or outrigger canoes, are a part of the culture of all Pacific people. After Aotearoa was settled by the first Polynesian voyagers, waka design and use went through a number of evolutionary stages. The different trees available here and their huge size meant that waka in Aotearoa eventually became single-hulled and did not need an outrigger float or ama to keep their hulls upright.





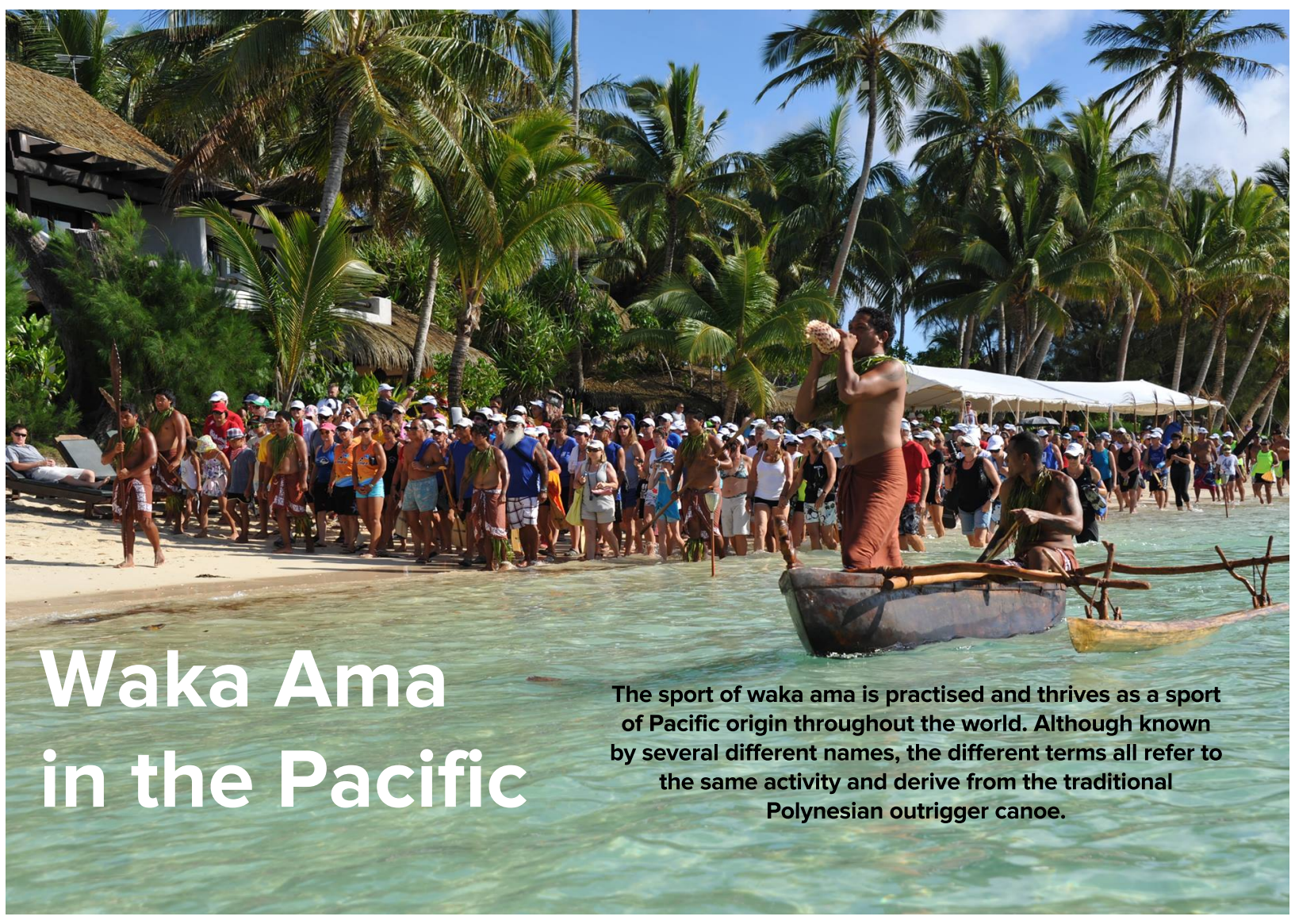
In 1981 Matahi Whakataka-Brightwell observed Va'a racing in Tahiti, became inspired, and the seed was sown for a revival of waka ama in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Matahi founded the Mareikura Canoe Club on the East Coast in July 1985. In January 1986, Okahu Bay Canoe Club was formed in Auckland, followed by Ngā Hoe Horo o Pawarenga and Mitamitaga o le Pasefika Vaa' Alo in the North in May 1987.

From these humble beginnings the national body, Ngā Kaihoe o Aotearoa (Waka Ama New Zealand) Inc., has grown into an organisation with six regions and over 85 clubs, spreading from Kaitia to Invercargill.








# Waka Ama in the Pacific

**The sport of waka ama is practised and thrives as a sport of Pacific origin throughout the world. Although known by several different names, the different terms all refer to the same activity and derive from the traditional Polynesian outrigger canoe.**



A person is seen from behind, standing in shallow, clear turquoise water. They are wearing a large, lush crown of white flowers and green leaves. In the background, several outrigger canoes with multiple rowers are visible on the water under a bright blue sky. A large blue circle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

**In Tahiti the sport of 'va'a' is an ancient practice and is today their national sport.**

**In Hawai'i, outrigger canoe or 'hoe wa'a' is the official state sport and was once called the "Sport of Kings", where ancient Hawaiian kings and queens would enjoy regular races.**

**In the Cook Islands 'oe vaka' is the term given to the sport of outrigger canoe racing**

# Māori Culture and Waka Ama

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Māori culture is deeply embedded into waka ama from the language to the protocols that we follow.

Our core Waka Ama New Zealand values are: **Manaakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Hauora** and **Tū tangata**.

By upholding these values, we aim to develop a culture of sharing, building and maintaining positive relationships with fellow paddlers, adopting a healthy and active lifestyle, and treating everyone with respect.





# Waka Ama New Zealand Values



**Manaakitanga**  
Reciprocity &  
Inclusivity

**Hauora**  
Well-being

**Whanaungatanga**  
Belonging,  
Identity &  
collective  
strength

**Tū Tangata**  
Accountability,  
respect, integrity &  
passion





# Waka Blessings

The launching and naming of a new waka is a significant occasion. Trees are the sacred children of the atua **Tāne-mahuta** (the god of the forest), and propitiatory rites were always offered when trees were felled for the purpose of creating goods for use, whether carved tools, weapons, or **waka**. The belief that the life force or '**mauri**' remains in the natural 'product' carries over to the function of current tools and waka, even though most are now not made from natural wood. It is for this reason that the 'naming' ceremony, with appropriate **karakia** (prayers) being offered in thanks, remains a significant element in the event of the launching of a new waka.



# Different types of waka

## **Waka Hourua**

A waka hourua is a double-hulled voyaging canoe rigged with sails

## **Waka Tētē, Waka Tiwai or Waka Kopapa**

A single-hulled canoe ranging in size from a single seater to upward of twenty. They carried goods, produce and people along many of the coastal and inland waterways

## **Waka Tangata**

A late 20th-century development has been the construction of canoes for educational purposes. Waka tangata means waka of the people so allows for women crew.

## **Waka Taua**

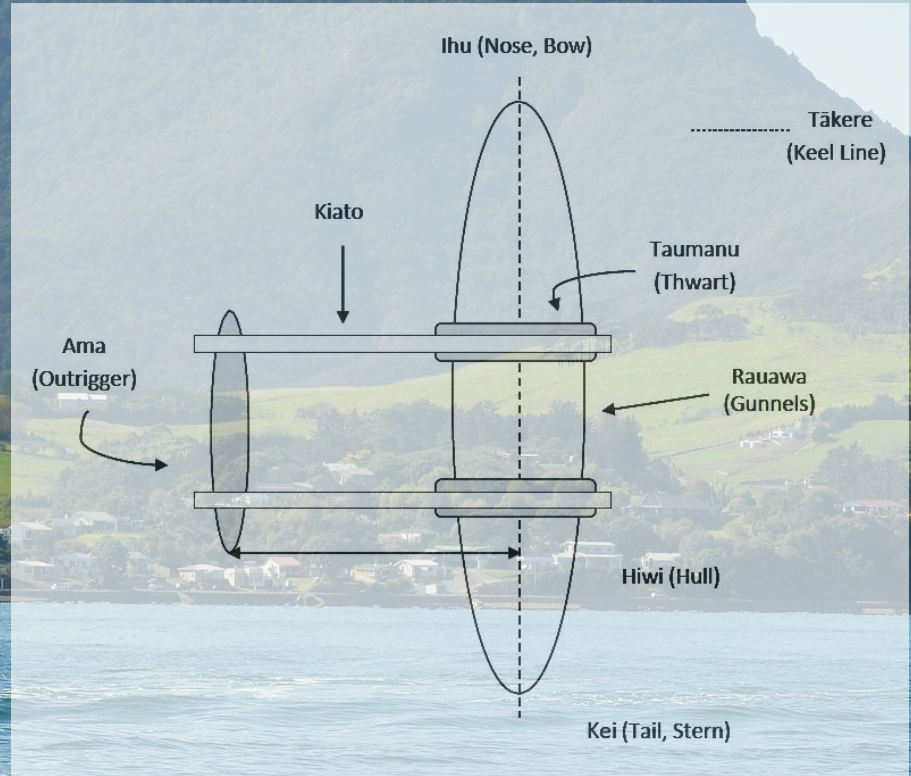
A waka taua was traditionally a war canoe paddled by men only. Today Māori still adhere to tradition and do not allow women to paddle waka taua.

## **Waka Ama/Waka Tere – outrigger canoe**

A waka ama consists of a hull with one or more outrigger pontoons (ama) rigged out to the side for stability and lashed to the hull with cross beams (kiato). The hull has a sealed bow (ihu) bulkheads and stern (kei) bulkheads. Adding a mast, a sail and customised ama makes it a waka tere.



# Waka Terminology





# Waka Tikanga

## Before heading out on the water

- Some events will hold a **pōwhiri** (formal welcome at a marae) or **mihi whakatau** (informal welcome at the race venue) before racing begins. This will be largely dependent on the **hau kainga** (home people) and their specific **tikanga** and **kawa** (marae protocol).
- Most events/races will start the day with a karakia. **Karakia** are Māori incantations and/or prayers, often but not always used to invoke spiritual guidance and protection (see pages 3 & 4 for an example).



## In and around the water

- **Always respect the environment** - Whether you paddle on the moana (sea/ocean) or awa (river) or roto (lake), take extra care to respect the area you are in and know the conditions
- **Respect waka and the waka equipment that you use.** Look after them, and they will look after you
- **Don't stand up in the waka, don't swear in or around the waka.** Treat the waka environment with respect, as you would a person you respect.
- **Respect the people you paddle with and against.**
- **Always enter the waka on the left-hand side (safety)**
- If not a karakia to finish, it is 'customary' to **thank your fellow paddlers** (e.g. with a high five or handshake) – not just those in your waka but also the other crews on the water.



# Ngā Mihi!

You have now completed the  
**Waka Ama New Zealand**  
culture of waka ama  
resource book.

Head to our quiz

<http://quiz.wakaama.co.nz/>

and test your knowledge!



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## Useful Terms and parts of the waka

English	Māori
Outrigger	Ama
Gunnels	Rauawa
Thwart	Taumanu
Cross beams	Kiato
Paddle	Hoe
Hull	Hiwi
Nose, bow	Ihu
Tail, stern	Kei
Paddle! (action)	Hoea!
Paddle your waka	Hoea tō waka
Hold up – Stop paddling	Kia mutu
Ease up	Kia ngāwari
The paddle	Te Hoe
Be strong, get stuck in, keep going	Kia kaha
Wow!	Ka mau te wehi!
Hold steady	Kia mau
Quick/Faster	Kia tere



Contact: [admin@wakaama.co.nz](mailto:admin@wakaama.co.nz)  
[www.wakaama.co.nz](http://www.wakaama.co.nz)