

2025 Waka Ama New Zealand Elected Board Member Nominee Information

Te Māreikura Whakataka-Brightwell nominated by Toa Waka Ama Club

Nominee Profile:

Ko Te Māreikura Whakataka-Brightwell ahau.

He uri whakaheke tēnei mai i ngā kāwai rangatira o Tahiti Nui, Rongowhakaata, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa, Tūwharetoa, Tainui me Te Arawa waka.

Waka ama is in my blood – if you know, you know. Growing up in waka ama is a unique experience grounded in whakapapa, whānau, early morning trainings, endless summer weekends, lifelong friendships, and international competitions that shape you for life. I want to see waka ama continue to thrive for generations to come.

Ko Te Māreikura Whakataka-Brightwell ahau. When people ask “Māreikura Waka Ama” was named after me, the first waka ama club in the country, founded by my parents Matahi and Raipoia in 1985, I sometimes cheekily say yes. In truth, the club is named after my grandfather and namesake, Te Māreikura Brightwell. My whānau have been pioneers in the sport mai rā anō, contributing to waka ama technology, tikanga, and techniques that have helped place Aotearoa among the global waka ama leaders. I want to carry this legacy forward, adding my rourou to the many who have gone before me.

Over the years I’ve been a paddler, coach, and waka ama educator. From 2004 to 2012 I served as Head Coach of Toa Waka Ama, guiding generations of paddlers to success nationally and internationally. I developed the Waka Ama Level 4 and 5 certificates at Whitireia Polytechnic in Porirua, creating education pathways for our community in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. I have also taken teams to world championships, bringing home medals – but more importantly, strengthening bonds and building community.

I wish to join the Waka Ama New Zealand Board to support the incredible mahi of our kaimahi, leadership, and volunteers. I bring specialist knowledge in waka ama techniques, training programmes, and innovation, backed by lived experience and history in the sport. Professionally, I am a specialist in communications and engagement, business analysis, kaupapa Māori frameworks, and facilitation. I am fluent in te reo Māori me ōna tikanga, French, and Tahitian, enabling me to connect across diverse communities and cultures beyond Te Moananui-ā-Kiwa.

I am ready to give back to our waka ama whānau and contribute to a strong, sustainable future for our sport.

Nō reira e te whānau, he moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka – a choppy sea can be navigated.

Mauri ora,
Te Māreikura Whakataka-Brightwell

Reason for Nomination: (completed by Member Club / Region)

Māreikura Brightwell served as Head Coach of Toa Waka Ama from 2004 to 2012, working closely with our community and whānau to coach tamariki, rangatahi, pakeke, and kaumātua. His vision and leadership propelled our club to success at regional, national, and international levels, leaving a lasting impact on generations of paddlers. Having grown up in waka ama, Māreikura cares deeply about its future and is committed to progressing the sport for generations to come. We believe he will bring fresh energy, strategic thinking, and his unique style of leadership to the Waka Ama New Zealand Board, supporting its goals and strengthening its connection with communities across the motu.

Ngāti Toa Waka Ama was founded as an iwi-based kaupapa, bringing mana and pride to Ngāti Toa Rangatira through excellence on and off the water. Māreikura's ability to weave cultural integrity, tikanga, and whakapapa into every aspect of our waka ama journey was profound, strengthening identity and connection while achieving competitive success. His leadership ensured that paddling was not only about racing, but also about upholding the mana of our iwi and passing these values to future generations.

Nominee statement: Why you wish to be a Board member of Nga Kaihoe o Aotearoa (Waka Ama New Zealand)?

Being on the Board of Ngā Kaihoe o Aotearoa is a privilege – one that requires hard work, vision, and leadership to help our waka ama communities thrive. For me, it's about creating a legacy that uplifts our paddlers on and off the water.

My vision builds on the strong foundations already laid by our Board. I want to see regions and clubs have greater access to waka ama technology and systems that will help them achieve success. Strengthening clubs and regions will, in turn, lift the sport as a whole and make it even more competitive. I am committed to understanding the current funding model and exploring ways to maintain and grow financial support for waka ama. I want to analyse our systems to ensure growth and vitality across the motu, and look closely at how international competitions are organised and supported so we can further enhance our capabilities, competitiveness, and resourcing.

My lifelong connection to waka ama gives me a unique perspective on its future. I remember when midgets, intermediates, and juniors all paddled in the same category, and when we held opening parades like the Olympics – moments that shaped the sport we love today. Seeing waka ama grow and thrive over the decades has been inspiring. Now, I am ready to bring my skillsets to support the Board in future bold endeavours and opportunities.

Please identify below the key skills from the Board Skills Matrix (below) which you believe you will bring to the role, and provide evidence of those skills in the space below:

Whole of Board Skills Matrix (for reference)

Leadership	Financial literacy and analytical ability	Outcomes focused
Marketing & Communications	Inter-personal communication skills	Ethical, open, honest, trustworthy, high levels of integrity
Ability to understand and relate to stakeholders	Ability to work as a team player	Business acumen
The Sport of Waka Ama knowledge	Strong local and national community connection, credibility and networks	Ability to establish quality relationships
A knowledge of Tikanga Māori, Te Reo Māori and the Values of Waka Ama NZ	Knowledge and application of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in governance	Commitment to diversity and inclusion
Strategic Thinking	Knowledge of legal issues relating to business or the not for profit sector	Good understanding of the principles of Governance and Management

Key Skills and Evidence

Leadership – I have led kaupapa at both community and professional levels. As Head Coach of Toa Waka Ama (2004–2012), I guided our community to national and international success while fostering excellence and participation across all age groups.

Marketing and Communication – My professional expertise lies in developing and delivering communications and engagement strategies for iwi, government, and private sector organisations. This includes brand development, stakeholder engagement, and campaign delivery.

Stakeholder Understanding – I have been a waka ama stakeholder since childhood, giving me deep insight into the diverse challenges and opportunities our communities face. My approach is grounded in listening, respect, and finding shared solutions.

Waka Ama Knowledge – As the son of Matahi and Raipoia Brightwell, founders of modern waka ama and Hall of Fame inductees, my understanding is both lived and historic. I have an acute awareness of the sport's journey and its future potential.

Tikanga Māori Knowledge – Raised through kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa, with a degree in te reo and Māori Studies, I have embedded tikanga Māori into my professional practice. I design kaupapa Māori frameworks for public and private sector initiatives.

Strategic Thinking – As a Business Analyst, I specialise in analysing systems to build efficiency, sustainability, and measurable outcomes. I apply this same thinking to sport and community development.

Interpersonal Communication – Known for my approachable style and ability to engage across diverse groups, I value clarity, kindness, and respect in all interactions.

Teamwork – I believe collective effort produces the strongest results. My leadership style prioritises collaboration and ensuring all voices are heard.

Community Connection – I have strong relationships across local and national waka ama communities, built over decades of involvement.

Te Tiriti Knowledge in Governance – In my kaupapa Māori framework work, Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles are central. I understand their practical application in governance and decision-making.

Outcomes Focus – I work backwards from desired outcomes to ensure systems, processes, and actions lead to tangible results.

Integrity and Ethics – I value transparency and honesty, believing trust is the foundation of effective governance.

Business Acumen – My business analysis expertise enables me to balance sustainability with growth, ensuring sound financial and operational decisions.

Relationship Building – I pride myself on building quality, respectful relationships that enable collaboration and trust.

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion – Of Tahitian, Māori, and European heritage, I champion tikanga Māori as a foundation for inclusive participation.

Governance Knowledge – I have served on the Manutūkē Marae Committee and completed the Institute of Directors wānanga, gaining practical knowledge of governance principles and their application.

Please identify how you would apply the Values of Waka Ama New Zealand at a governance level:

I believe my attributes align strongly with the needs of the Waka Ama New Zealand Board. My leadership and outcomes-focused analytical ability will support sound decision-making and effective governance, ensuring that strategic goals translate into tangible results.

With marketing and communications as my professional wheelhouse, I can strengthen how waka ama is represented, promoted, and connected to communities across Aotearoa, the Pacific and the world. My ability to understand and relate to stakeholders, combined with a team-oriented approach and strong business acumen, will help build and maintain meaningful relationships with paddlers, clubs, regions, and partners.

Having grown up in waka ama, I bring deep kaupapa knowledge and lived experience of the sport at every level. Being fluent in te reo Māori me ōna tikanga enables me to uphold and integrate cultural integrity into all board decisions. As a business analyst and strategic thinker, I will contribute to long-term planning and innovation, ensuring waka ama remains vibrant, competitive, and culturally grounded.