

# The 13 Chiefs of 1831

## WHY THE 13 CHIEFS WROTE TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING IN 1831

**“We are a people without possessions. It is only thy land,  
which is liberal towards us”.**

In October 1771, Marion du Fresne set out from France to explore the South Pacific with two ships, the Mascarin and the Marquis de Castries, a 16-gun war ship. After leaving Tasmania, he sighted Mount Egmont/Taranaki on the 25 March 1772. While trying to locate fresh water he found the natives were hostile and with a storm approaching, decided to travel North to the Bay of Islands. In an encounter with the natives, one of his crew was pieced in the leg by a spear.

He landed at Kororareka (now Russell) in the Bay of Islands and became friendly with the Ngare Raumati tribe. Here he stayed for five weeks repairing his ships, gathering spars and trading with the natives. All went well until du Fresne broke tapu by fishing in a bay that a group of Ngare Raumati had been drowned a few years earlier. While he was warned of the tapu, he took no notice and the natives killed him and his party of 24.

As the ships had not been fully repaired and there were still spars to be collected, a party went ashore and drove off the tribe, killing 250 of them in the process and torching their village. A few years later Ngare Raumati was overrun by Napuhi and no longer exists.

In 1831, it was rumoured that the French naval vessel La Favourite intended to annex New Zealand to France in retaliation for the killings of Marion du Fresne and 24 of his crew. The natives decided to place a British flag on the mission flagstaff, reasoning if the French torn it down, the Missionaries would appeal to Britain for protection.

There was also a threat from a Baron du Theiry to declare French Sovereignty over New Zealand. He had purchased a large area of land at Hokianga and it was rumoured he had summonsed a French war ship to enforce his sovereignty as well as body guards of Tahitian trained natives to sustain it. The French government had also expressed interest to appoint du Theiry to the Office of French Consul to New Zealand.

It also became known, Ngati Toa of Kapiti had conspired with the Captain of the Elizabeth to raid and kill members of Ngai Tahu tribe of the South Island. They avoided punishment due to the uncertainties regarding British subjects in New Zealand. Northern Maoris were disturbed by the alliance of the Maoris and the British forces, fearing it could set a precedence for the now armed southern tribes Ngapuhi had slaughtered over the last ten years, killing an estimated 60,000 of their fellow country men for the fun of it and an easy meal.

After this, 13 powerful northern chiefs sent a letter to the King in Britain asking him to become their friend and protector of these islands.

**A letter from 13 Maori Ngapuhi chiefs asking King William for protection in 1831**

**New Zealand**

(Enclosure 2 in No.1.)

From William Yate, Esq, to the Colonial Secretary, New South Wales,

Waimate, New Zealand. November 16, 1831

Sir,

I have the honour to forward to you, by His Majesties Ship, "Zebra" the enclosed New Zealand document, with its translation, and to request that you will lay it before the Governor for his information. I have further to request that it be transmitted through His Excellency to the Secretary of State, in order to it being laid before His Majesty.

I have, &c,

(Signed) William Yate.

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(Enclosure 3 in NO.1)

To King William, The Gracious Chief of England.

King William

To King William, the gracious Chief of England. King William, we, the chiefs of New Zealand assembled at this place, called the Kerikeri, write to thee, for we hear that thou art the great chief of the other side of the water, since the many ships which come to our land are from thee. We are a people without possessions. We have nothing but timber, flax, pork and potatoes. We sell these things however to your people; then we see property of the Europeans. It is only thy land, which is liberal towards us. From thee also come the missionaries who teach us to believe on Jehovah God and on Jesus Christ His Son. We have heard that the tribe of Marian [the French] is at hand, coming to take away our land. Therefore we pray thee to become our friend and the guardian of these islands, lest the teasing of other tribes should come near us, and lest strangers should come and take away our land. And if any of thy people should be troublesome and vicious towards us we pray thee to be angry with them that they may be obedient, lest the anger of the people of this land fall upon them. This letter is from us, the chief's of the natives of New Zealand.

(Signed) William Yate,

Secretary to the Church Mission Society, New Zealand.

Wererahi Chief of Paroa.

Rewa Chief of Waimate

Patuone & Nene Two brothers, Chiefs of Hokianga

Kekeao Chief of Ahuahu

Titore Chief of Kororarika

Tamoranaga Chief of Taiamai

Ripe Chief of Mapere

Hara Chief of Ohaiawa

Atuahaere Chief of Kaikohe  
Moetara Chief of Pakanai  
Matangi Chief of Waima  
Taunai Chief of Hutakuta

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This is a very interesting letter for the following reasons,

1. Maori admit they had no possessions, "We are a people without possessions". It must be remembered this letter was from some of the most powerful and influential northern (Ngapuhi) chiefs at the time.
2. They admit, Britain was the only land liberal towards them, "It is only thy land, which is liberal towards us", therefore asked Britain for protection.
3. They were afraid the French would take away their land, "We have heard that the tribe of Marian [the French] is at hand, coming to take away our land".
4. They were also afraid the southern tribes, now that they were armed, would come and slaughter them for utu – revenge and take away their land. "Therefore we pray thee to become our friend and the guardian of these islands, lest the teasing of other tribes should come near us, and lest strangers should come and take away our land.

Four years later, the 1835 Declaration of Independence was signed, but was abandoned without one meeting taking place due to the inter-tribal fighting and tension, therefore was never

ratified. In 1840, over 500 chiefs agreed to cede their territories to Her Majesty the Queen and New Zealand became British soil, under British Rule and British Law with the signing of the Tiriti o Waitangi. Most of the 13 chiefs that signed this letter were prominent in getting their fellow chiefs to sign the Tiriti o Waitangi, they could see it was to their advantage as the Maori race was completely out of control and would become extinct if the British did not take control of the whole country.

We are told, New Zealand was a peaceful place before the coming of the settlers, but this is not true. At the signing of our Tiriti o Waitangi, an estimated 60,000 Maoris had been slaughtered and cannibalised in the Maori musket wars initiated by Hongi Hika (Ngapuhi) between 1820 and 1830. Hongi had exchanged all the gifts in Australia the King had given him on his return from England for muskets before going on his bloody rampage south. It's a fact; the Southern tribes were now arming themselves to travel North for utu- revenge. We are also told the Treaty was signed to bring the Europeans and the escaped British prisoners from Australian to heal, but what could this small number of "white people" do when the Maori tribes were at their strongest and bloodiest.

The first Europeans or *Pakeha Maori* as they were called, that settled in New Zealand were under the control of "their" Maori chief, they lived by his rules, their life was in his hands at all times. They lived by his rules and died by his rules. By breaking *tapu*, Marion du Fresne and his crew became dinner, no questions asked. As the European population slowly increased (only 2000 when the Treaty was signed in 1840) most tribes were fully armed, so they could hardly have been a treat. British Resident James Busby was never given troops in 1833 to protect the people of New Zealand, he was known as "A man o war without guns". Europeans could hardly have been a threat to Maori as Maori outnumbered them by about 50 to 1.

This is again shown by the slaughter of the 70 defenceless,

innocent men, women and children on the “HMS Boyd” before it was set alight in 1809 because it was alleged, the captain of the ship had mistreated a native crew member. These incidents gave the name “*Cannibal Islands*” to New Zealand (“*Lest the anger of the people of this land fall upon them*”). The 13 chief’s main concern for writing this letter, large areas of their country were being sold to purchase muskets, powder and balls to wage indescribable atrocities and genocide on their fellow country men and women. (Lest the teasing of other tribes should come near us). The Maori needed protect, not only from the French, but mainly from themselves.

The 13 chiefs that signed the letter above could see the Maori race was completely out of control and would soon become extinct, therefore asked Britain to intervene to become their guardian and protector. To do this legally, Britain had to take complete control of the country, **New Zealand and its people had to become part of the British Empire. This was achieved with the signing of the Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840; New Zealand became British Soil under British Rule and British Law.**

*“If you think these things are wrong, then blame your ancestors who gave away their rights when they were strong”.* ***The Treaty of Waitangi – An Explanation***, by Sir Apirana Ngata. 1922.

Prepared by the One New Zealand Foundation Inc. (C)

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