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Session name: ***Ko ngā wero: Barriers to Domestic and International Repatriation***

Session proposer: Dr. Te Herekiekie Herewini and Dr. Holly Cusack-McVeigh

Presenter 1

Name: Dr. Te Herekiekie Herewini

Organisation: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Position: Head of Repatriation

Primary email: teherekiekie.herewini@tepapa.govt.nz

Biography (max 50 words): Te Herekiekie is the head of repatriaiton at Te Papa, and is tasked with managing the repatriation of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains housed in international institutions. Since 2007 Te Herekiekie has ensured the safe return of over 600 Māori and Moriori ancestral remains.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words): Karanga Aotearoa – Calling our ancestors home to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Between 1769 to the 1970s at least 1300 Māori and Moriori human remains were spirited away from their homelands in Aotearoa New Zealand to private collectors, museums and institutions in Australia, the Americas and Europe. Since the 1980s, these ancestors started their journey home through New Zealand's National Museum and iwi (tribal communities). In 2003 Te Papa became the mandated government agent to repatriate Māori and Moriori ancestral remains. This presentation looks at the importance of repatriation from a Māori and Moriori perspective, and how Māori and Moriori values are foundational to seeking the repatriation of ancestral remains from international institutions, their care in Te Papa's wāhi tapu (sacred repository) and then return to their iwi/imi (tribal communities).

Presenter 2

Name: Holly Cusack-McVeigh

Organisation: Indiana University Indianapolis (IUI)

Position: Professor of Anthropology and Museum Studies, Visiting Scholar with the Repatriation Team at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Primary email: hmcusack@iu.edu

Biography (max 50 words): Holly is a Professor of Anthropology and Museum Studies at Indiana University, a Public Scholar of Collections and Community-Curation and Professor of Native American and Indigenous studies. She has worked in the cultural heritage field for decades in partnership with tribes, governments, and museums to address issues grounded in social justice.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words): Unraveled: Repatriating Toxic Heritage

This presentation introduces the complex history of museum chemical treatments and the associated hidden health hazards that create barriers to successful repatriation, unraveling the threads that bind communities to their ancestors and connect them to their cultural belongings. In the 1800's and well into the 1970's, museum collections were routinely treated with a range of pesticides (from arsenic and mercury to DDT), to prevent pest infestation and destruction. Especially impacted were objects made of skin, leather, wood, feathers, and other natural fibers. After years of fighting to reclaim their ancestors and cultural items, many Indigenous communities delay these important returns. Others reluctantly bring them home without proper storage or options for safe reburial in their homelands. In the wake of colonization, repatriation is an important form of restitution - a chance for community healing, but these toxic returns have an impact on living communities, the natural environment, and spirit world.

Presenter 3

Name: Susan Thorpe

Organisation: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Position: Pou Rangahau Rautaki Kōiwi/Repatriation Researcher

Primary email: Susan.thorpe@tepapa.govt.nz

Biography (max 50 words): Susan is an archaeologist with an interest in understanding cultural landscapes and bringing oral traditions into archaeological praxis. She joined the repatriation team at Te Papa in 2004 but stepped away for a decade to live on Rēkohu. She is back with the team, focussing on provenance research.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words): Twenty years ago, the barriers to repatriating human remains appeared pervasive. Legal inconsistencies, competing social, spiritual, and scientific interests, and power imbalances between Indigenous communities and holding institutions posed significant challenges. Today, however, a strong justice-oriented approach to repatriation has emerged, and ancestral remains are increasingly being returned to descendant communities, often with fewer institutional obstacles. My talk shifts the focus away from thinking about barriers to addressing the challenges presented by gaps in provenance records. Accession documentation is frequently incomplete or, in some cases, entirely absent, complicating repatriation efforts. In keeping with the core theme of this conference – tūhono – I will discuss solutions based on collaborative approaches to research.

Presenter 4

Name: Dr Lorraine Eade

Organisation: Tokomaru Research Center

Position: Pou Rangahau Matua

Primary email: lorraine.eade@ngatirarua.iwi.nz

Biography (max 50 words): Dr Lorraine Eade (Ngāti Rārua, Ngāti Toarangatira), has over 30 years experience in Iwi Māori strategy, policy, planning and operations. This has included the Manager of Ngāti Rārua Iwi Trust, Kaitakawaenga and Senior Advisor roles witnin Te Puni Kōkiri, Project Manager/Portfolio Managers within two District Health Boards, Marlborough Children's Team Director Ministry of Social Development and Oranga Tamariki, Westpac South Island Business Manager (Māori), Pou Rauemi of Te Kotahi o Te Tauihu Charitable Trust.

Most recently Lorraine has had the privilege of operationalising Tokomaru Research Centre, one of the very few solely owned iwi research companies in Aotearoa.

Lorraine has a passion for researching tribal histories, climate change and natural disasters. The presentation for ACHS will share the learnings from a deaccession of taonga from an international museum after 113 years.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

The repatriation of taonga from international museums is increasingly recognised as an important mechanism for the restoration of cultural heritage, the revitalisation of mātauranga Māori, and the strengthening of hapū and iwi identity. Building on discussions of taonga repatriation and deaccessioning by Pearce and Milosch (2019) and Ellis, MacDonald and Alemeida (2022), this presentation shares the journey to secure the return of a Kahu Kiwi from the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, England.

Gifted in 1900 to Dr George Cleghorn by Ngāti Rārua and Ngāti Toarangatira, Rangitāne rangatira Hapareta Rore Pukekohatu and Mere Te Hiko of Wairau Pā, the Kahu Kiwi carries significant cultural, historical and ancestral value. Following eight months of provenance research, relationship building with iwi, descendants of Dr Cleghorn, key stakeholders, a site visit to Pitt Rivers Museum, confirmation was received in August 2025 that the taonga would be formally deaccessioned and returned to Ngāti Rārua. A further period of engagement and dialogue with wider relatives of Dr Cleghorn ensured that the return process reflected collective aspirations.

The presentation examines the significance of the taonga, including the histories of its original owners, the cultural knowledge embedded within its materials and construction, and its potential to contribute to the revitalisation of traditional arts and practices at a hapū level. It also explores the challenges encountered throughout the deaccession process and the strategies used to navigate complex institutional, cultural, and relational pathways.

Drawing on the symbolism of the mangopare (hammerhead shark), this presentation highlights the determination, resilience, and relationship-building required to achieve successful deaccession. By sharing the provenance research process, lessons learned, and practical insights gained throughout the journey, this presentation aims to support and encourage other iwi, hapū, and communities seeking the return of their taonga from overseas collections.

Summary abstract (website)

These presentations explore the barriers and complexities of domestic and international repatriation. The authors will present case studies with a museological, academic and indigenous lenses.