Napier: Te Herenga Waka Hourua pontoon opening hailed as first phase of transforming city’s inner harbour

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Te Herenga Waka Hourua, New Zealand's first purpose-built pontoon and jetty designed for double-hulled waka, has opened in Ahuriri.

The country’s first purpose-built pontoon and jetty designed for traditional double-hulled voyaging waka has been officially opened in Napier.

Iwi leaders, kaumātua, project partners and supporters gathered for a dawn karakia in Ahuriri on Thursday to bless Te Herenga Waka Hourua.

It’s the new permanent home of Te Matau a Māui, the 22m waka hourua owned by Ngāti Kahungunu and operated by the Ātea a Rangi Educational Trust.

It is also designed to accommodate additional visiting waka.

Ātea a Rangi Educational Trust administrator Michelle Smith said it would allow greater public access to Te Matau a Māui and support teaching of traditional celestial navigation and ocean voyaging.

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National and international waka exchanges might also be possible and waka hourua from across the Pacific could now gather in Ahuriri.

Smith said no local rates were used on the project, with Napier City Council and the trust securing funding from the Eastern and Central Community Trust and central Government.

A total of $5.5 million was allocated for the project in 2025 including $2.2m from the Government's Better Off Funding pool.

Council initially earmarked $3.3m for the project but was unable to continue its commitment.

Ātea a Rangi Educational Trust chairman Piripi Smith said the new home for the waka was an investment in future generations.

He said the pontoon was the first phase of the Ahuriri Inner Harbour Community Hub, with the next steps focusing on the completion of a Wharewaka building, which would be used for education and as a community hub.

"With the many infrastructural issues within the Inner Harbour at present, we see this as one of the first projects which turns the tide for the Inner Harbour Precinct.

"We want to bring people back down to the water's edge and make use of the Inner Harbour for our local community."