

THERE ONCE WAS AN ISLAND:  
TE HENUA E NNOHO

PRESS KIT TEXT FOR MEDIA

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## **The Film**

What if your community had to decide whether to leave their homeland forever and there was no help available?

This is the reality for the culturally unique Polynesian community of Takuu, a tiny low-lying atoll in the South Western Pacific. As a terrifying tidal flood rips through their already damaged home, the Takuu community experiences the devastating effects of climate change first hand.

In this verite-style film, three intrepid characters Teloo, Endar and Satty, allow us into their lives and their culture and show us first hand the human impact of an environmental crisis. Two scientists, oceanographer John Hunter and geomorphologist Scott Smithers, investigate the situation with our characters and consider the impact of climate change on communities without access to resources or support. Intimate observational scenes allow Teloo, Endar and Satty to take us on their personal journeys as they consider whether to move to an uncertain future in Bougainville or to stay on Takuu and fight for a different, but equally uncertain, outcome.

This film gives a human face to the direct impacts of climate change in the Pacific, challenging audiences everywhere to consider their own relationship to the earth and the other people on it.

## The Atoll

Takuu atoll is located about 250km North East of Bougainville and is part of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville which is in turn part of Papua New Guinea.

Takuu is made up of a string of islets on a reef around a central lagoon. A Polynesian community of 400 live on an islet called Nukutoa which has two points, each with a men's house, known locally as Taloki and Sialevu. This islet is approximately 57,900 square metres (0.0579 square kilometers) and 1 meter above sea level. The largest island in the atoll is just next door, and is known as Takuu. This is where the gardens are.

There are a number of clans on Takuu and one paramount chief (Ariki). Everyone on the island is closely related, usually more than once, especially if marriage or "in-law" ties are counted. There are strict rules about who a person can marry, according to clan membership.

The children of the atoll are all taught in English at the local school until the end of their primary education. At this point they must leave the island to complete high school. Given the difficulty of getting money to pay fees, this is a difficult thing to accomplish. Despite the challenges, the island has a large number of expatriates and can count three PhD graduates amongst them.

The participation of teenage students in off-shore education is probably contributing to the decrease in the numbers of people practising the traditional religion and culture, including dances and songs. There is now a strong church presence on the island and women in particular are adherents to the various denominations.

Takuu is part of a larger geopolitical context. Both Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville are largely still operating as a subsistence economy (some estimates say up to 80%). This means there is little available capital and very little of the kinds of infrastructure (phone lines, postal service, internet, plumbing, rubbish collection, regular delivery of goods for sale, free schooling) that people in the West are able to take for granted. Arguably the lack of tax income makes it very difficult for the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) to offer a regular service of any kind. This is one of the reasons that the local service boat is always delayed and sporadic in its

departures to Takuu (as well as the four other atolls in the region).

Climate change is making itself felt on the island in a variety of ways. Parts of the gardens are becoming salty and this means that many families are losing part of their giant taro crops, creating food security issues. The loss of taro also makes it difficult for families to participate in the many ceremonies that require a contribution of taro, which impacts on the reciprocal and egalitarian nature of the community.

The community have built up seawalls around the majority of the island to protect against erosion. However these walls are causing sand to be deposited into the lagoon instead of up onto the atoll, making the erosion worse. During the big flood of 2008, debris from inside the walls was washed out and over the rest of the island, creating mess and causing some injuries.

The flood was a terrifying experience for the people on the atoll – there was no early warning of the danger and it was some weeks before a boat with relief supplies could be sent. Oceanographer John Hunter has estimated that flooding will happen much more often as climate change progresses. Some community members are concerned that next time there is a disaster of this kind the island will be wiped out.

The ABG wants to move atoll dwellers to the mainland and make it possible for them to begin cash cropping on a local plantation. However the necessary land purchases and complex negotiations with local landowners following the Bougainville Crisis of the 1980s and 90s are making the process extremely slow. This, coupled with the 2008 flood has caused at least some members of Takuu's community to lose faith in the Government's plans. They remain stranded on the atoll, adapting to the vagaries of the service boat's schedule and waiting to see if they can relocate at the earliest opportunity. So far there is are no concrete plans to either move the Takuu community or help them remain safely on the atoll.

## The Making Of The Film

Briar March and Lyn Collie have been working on *There Once was an Island: Te Henua e Nnoho* since 2006. Our four-year journey to complete the film has involved contributions from many people and organizations, all pitching in to tell the story of Takuu and the plight of its community as climate change progresses. We have grown as filmmakers and as people through the challenges and opportunities that the project has offered, and are very pleased to finally present Takuu's story to a wider audience.

We began making the film after seeing an article about Richard Moyle, an anthropologist who has worked on Takuu every other summer for the last 16 plus years. He mentioned that the atoll appeared to be suffering the first impacts of climate change including salty gardens and coastal erosion. Richard was able to give us permission to make a film about the issue on behalf of the Ariki, or chief, of the atoll. We shopped the idea around a variety of production companies but had no takers, and were eventually thrust into the independent filmmaking mode when we received \$25,000 from the Screen Innovation Production Fund here in New Zealand (now discontinued). We then got an additional \$8000 from Robbers Dog Films and about \$1000 from Occasional Productions, plus in-kind support from Sony, Panasonic, Oxfam, Cinestuff and Flying Fish. Enough to go!

In under six weeks we had completed an extremely challenging pre-production period (including sourcing a technical support for Briar in the form of Zane Holmes). Suddenly the crew were off to shoot a film in a place with no electricity or shops, travelling on the less-than-reliable atoll service boat. You can read about our hair-raising experiences in pre-pro and on the shoot in our blog [here](#) and [here](#)

On returning home we struggled to locate the story. Like anywhere, Takuu is a complex society and the myriad of problems the community face are exacerbated by their poverty and political context. For an idea of what kinds of issues they face go [here](#). Expressing the core relationship between the impact of climate change and its impact on everything else wasn't going to be possible without recording the passage of time, experienced by specific characters. We made plans to seek further funding and return to Takuu.

After nearly two years of fundraising we had cobbled together approximately another \$90,000 from the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust and later on, Pacific

Islanders in Communications – enough to make it back. During the first shoot the community asked for scientists to come and look at the atoll, so this was something we felt strongly about. Briar located two scientists, oceanographer John Hunter, and geomorphologist Scott Smithers, who were interested in coming to Takuu to study the various issues being experienced by the community. We now had a crew of five, including our sound recordist Jeffrey Holdaway, Briar, Lyn, John and Scott.

The second shoot went smoothly as we were able to charter a boat for support and because Lyn was able to run the production office, taking the pressure off the rest of the crew. Not that this second shoot was without its dramas – you can read about the big flood that we captured on video here, and about our journey and antics [here](#). The flood and the presence of the scientists forced our three main participants to really consider their relationship to the atoll and its community and whether they should leave to find safety elsewhere or fight to stay.

On our return to New Zealand, we were privileged to be able to keep using Zane's offline edit suite, without which the film would not have been cut. The offline process was long and arduous and would not have been possible without the relentless dedication of editor Prisca Bouchet and assistant editor Andrew Chung, with translator Rose Tione and Briar working tirelessly alongside. The music for the film really takes it from a well-told story to something that still moves us when we watch it. Marshall Smith and Tom Fox of The Sound Room created the main score, with additional tracks from Mark Smythe. The story came together slowly and we screened the results for several test audiences before signing it off.

In post-production we received more funding from the Screen Innovation Production Fund and much later, from the New Zealand Film Commission. This, plus amazing support from Images and Sound, Toybox, Liquid Studios and Sony has allowed us to master up from our HDV shooting format to a gorgeous HDCAMSR master. We are very excited to be able to show the film to audiences at last and hope that you get a chance to screen it!

## **Filmmaker Bios**

**Producer, Director, Cinematographer, Editor: Briar March**

Briar is a documentary filmmaker and Fulbright scholar. Fascinated by polarizing and colorful subject matter, and angered by environmental and human rights issues her films are diverse in style, but consistently grounded in a passionate desire to communicate. *There Once was an Island: Te Henua e Noho*, is Briar's current project. She also directed the documentary feature *Allie Eagle and Me*, plus a number of music videos, magazine shows, and commercials. Briar has worked closely with filmmaker Annie Goldson, has a production company, *On the Level Productions*, with Lyn Collie and is currently completing an MFA at Stanford University in California.

**Producer: Lyn Collie**

An independent filmmaker and writer, Lyn Collie currently teaches video for the web and produces educational media at The University of Auckland's Business School. She was previously a tutor in Film, Television and Media studies at Auckland University, and a production co-ordinator at *Occasional Productions*, under Annie Goldson. Lyn has been a key creative on a number of short documentaries that screened in film and arts festivals around New Zealand. She has authored a number of articles and study guides on various New Zealand films and has a production company, *On the Level Productions* with Briar March. Lyn has an Honours degree in Social Anthropology and a Masters in documentary directing. *There Once was an Island: Te Henua e Noho* is her first feature documentary.

**Sound Recordist and Technical Advisor: Jeffrey Holdaway**

Jeffrey Holdaway has worked with sound and moving image for over thirteen years. His work includes location recording, mixing and sound design for documentary, feature and short film. He has directed music video, dance films, made several works for CD, and designed sculptural sound installation for several leading NZ artists. He has also taught workshops in recording and video production as technician at the Elam School of Fine Arts and the School of Music, University of Auckland. Jeffrey is based in Auckland, New Zealand and has a Masters in Sound Design and a Bachelors Degree in Visual Arts.

## Editor: Prisca Bouchet

Recently turned freelance, Prisca Bouchet worked until as an editor for Eyeworks in Auckland until 2009. She has also worked as a freelance editor and camera operator in both France and New Zealand and has shot documentary in China. In 2004 Prisca completed the first year of a masters in documentary filmmaking as part of a postgraduate exchange between The University of Auckland and the Université Lumière Lyon 2. She has a degree in media studies and is passionate about documentary as an artform that allows social commentary.

## Composers: Tom Fox & Marshall Smith

Tom Fox & Marshall Smith of The Sound Room write & produce music for documentary, film, artists, advertising, games and other emerging media. The Sound Room has composed and produced music for documentaries for the BBC, Animal Planet, BSkyB, Channel 10 (Australia), TVNZ, TV3 and SABC (South Africa) amongst others. Their tracks have been featured in the USA, UK and Europe on channels like MTV, Nickelodeon, VH-1, Discovery and Fox. They have composed music for advertising, games, ringtones and animation for high profile international clients and regularly write and produce music for artists and bands. Tom has been part of a number of chart-topping songs. His song Weeping was recently recorded by multi-platinum selling artist Josh Groban and produced by Glen Ballard. The album went to #1 on the US charts. Marshall has won a number of international songwriting awards along with being a finalist for song of the year in the APRA Silver Scrolls.

## Composer: Mark Smythe

Mark Smythe initially studied composition with Jack Body at the Victoria University School of Music, now the New Zealand School of Music. He now composes for a diverse range of clients and is a songwriter/producer for the electro-acoustic band Mute. In 2004 he commuted regularly to Sydney for a series of screen composition courses at the Australian Film, Television & Radio School (AFTRS), which ignited his passion for film music. He was accepted into the inaugural Graduate Diploma in Screen Composition at AFTRS Melbourne, graduating in December 2008. In September 2008 Mark received a Film Victoria Grant to fund a mentorship with renowned screen composer Burkhard Dallwitz (The Truman Show, Underbelly). The mentorship took place during Burkhard's work on the German feature The Interrogation of Harry Wind and season two of the seminal Australian

TV series Underbelly. Culminating in a review of his own work in March 2009, the experience equipped Mark with a wealth of creative, technical and screen industry insights.

#### Co-Producer: Kelly Anderson

Kelly Anderson is an award-winning American independent producer and director of documentary and narrative films/videos. She has been a key creative on the documentaries Every Mother's Son, Overcoming the Odds and Making a Killing. Kelly has also made additional documentaries and narrative films which have screened on PBS, at the Sundance Film Festival and on HBO. She is the recipient of fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Film Institute (NEA), and the New York State Council on the Arts and has received production grants from ITVS and the Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media. Kelly has a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Culture from Brown and is an assistant Professor at Hunter College, New York.

#### Co-Producer: Mark Foster

Mark Foster has been working in the film industry for 15 years. He founded, co-owns and runs successful film production company Robbers Dog, working as a producer on television commercials for many international brands, on music videos, on award-winning independent shorts and, more recently feature films. In 2001 he produced the short Beautiful with Adam Stevens (Director) which went on to screen at Montreal, Melbourne and New York & was in competition at Sundance & Toronto Film Festivals. In 2003 Beautiful won Best Short Film at the New Zealand Film Awards. Mark produced Delores in 2002, which went into competition at Berlin. In 2007 he produced his first feature – A Song of Good. This screened at Rotterdam, Melbourne & the New Zealand International Film Festival. A Song of Good also picked up Best Feature Film at the 2008 Qantas Media Awards.

#### Executive Producer: Annie Goldson

Annie Goldson has been producing and directing award-winning documentaries for 20 years. Her best-known titles include Punitive Damage, and Georgie Girl. Both titles have screened widely and garnered major awards in film festivals. Annie has also completed Sheilas: 28 Years On, Pacific Solution: From Afghanistan to Aotearoa and Elgar's Enigma: Biography of a Concerto. Her most recently completed title is An Island Calling, on the murder of a gay couple in Fiji in 2001. She is currently in postproduction on a new film

Brother Number One, which follows Olympic rower Rob Hamill whose brother Kerry was murdered by the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia in 1978. Annie received her PhD in Film and Television Studies from the University of Auckland and is currently Associate Professor in this department. She has published articles and books, and has been the director of the biannual New Zealand International Documentary Conference. She is the current president of the Screen Director's Guild of New Zealand and a DOCNZ trustee. In 2007, she received the Order of Merit (ONZM) from the New Zealand Government for her services to film.

### Associate Producer: Zane Holmes

Zane Holmes, Director of Photography during early production, has shot, produced and directed both documentary and drama in New Zealand for the BBC, Nickelodeon and Ragdoll productions (UK) amongst others. In 2002 an episode of New Zealand programme Being Eve that he co-produced and edited received an Emmy nomination for best international children's show. He has also worked in the film and television industry as an editor and post-production whiz-kid for the last 11 years.

### Oceanographer: John Hunter

John Hunter works as an oceanographer at the Antarctic Climate & Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre, which is based in the University of Tasmania. His current interests are the sea level rise induced by climate change, and the response of Antarctic Ice Shelves to global warming. Recent work has involved investigations of sea level rise in Australia, the U.S., and in the Indian Ocean and Pacific regions, and the way in which this rise increases the frequency of extreme sea level events. He has recently completed estimates of future high sea level extremes for Tasmania, by combining the present exceedance statistics with projections of the (uncertain) sea level rise for the 21st century. Other interests are the numerical modelling of shelf, coastal and estuarine marine systems, and problems in applied marine science. In 1996 he was a joint recipient of the CSIRO Chairman's Medal for his work on the Port Phillip Bay Environmental Study.

### Geomorphologist: Scott Smithers

Scott Smithers is senior lecturer at James Cook University, Townsville, Australia. His broad research interests are in coastal (reef, beaches, estuaries) and fluvial geomorphology, especially the Quaternary evolution of these environments and their palaeoenvironmental histories. Recent research includes reef and coral response to environmental change

(especially sea-level and climate), environmental histories reconstructed from reef and coral evidence, the geomorphology and management of north Queensland coastal streams, morphodynamics of meso and macrotidal beaches and estuaries, and the deposition and environmental significance of boulder deposits on the islands of the Great Barrier Reef

### Anthropologist: Richard M. Moyle

Richard M. Moyle is Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology and Director of the Archive of Maori and Pacific Music at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He has spent more than nine years in fieldwork in the Pacific and Aboriginal Australia, and is the author of fourteen books on the music of the region. He spent eighteen months on Takuu between 1994 and 2006 at the request of the Island's Chief and Council to provide an enduring record of their unique Polynesian culture for the benefit of both local and expatriate residents.

### Pacific Island Intern and translator: Rosevita Tione

Rose Tione is a Takuu native who has lived on the island for the majority of her adult life. She is familiar with the perspectives of both older and younger people on Takuu, and is conversant with the native religion, the Christian faith that is increasing in popularity on the island, and the position of women. Rose is keen to make sure that the representation of Takuu and its language is accurate. From March 2008 the production team will sponsor Rose to stay in New Zealand for a period of two months. During this time she will help to complete the translations of Takuu interviews into English and help with the organization of our second shoot to the island. She will also get the opportunity to improve her English by attending an English language course at Auckland University of Technology.