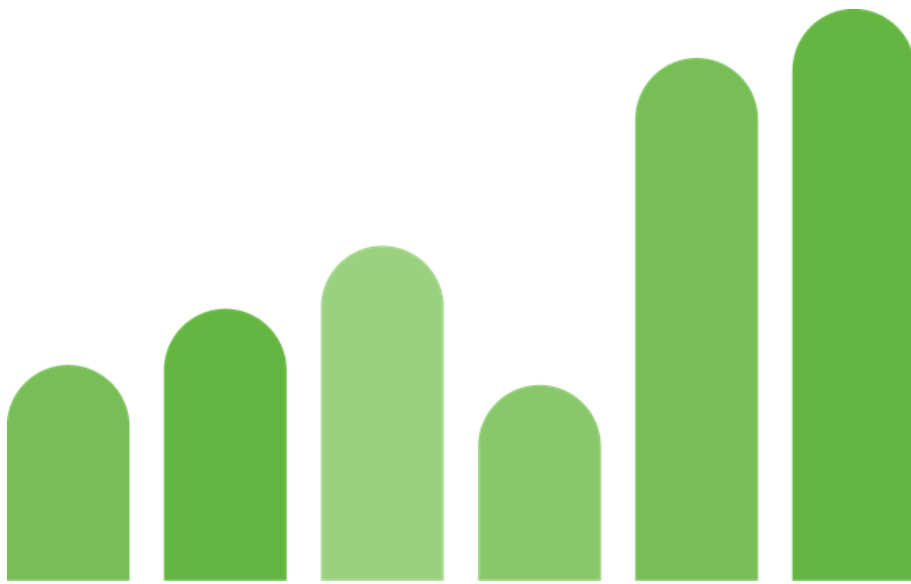


Voices of Support

Findings from the SS *Ventnor* Heritage Survey 2025

A community survey conducted in support of the New Zealand Chinese Association's application to list the SS Ventnor wreck and wreck site as a Category 1 Historic Place on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangi Kōrero

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This research was undertaken by Kōtātā Insight Limited on a pro-bono basis. Kōtātā Insight Limited has no commercial interest in the outcome of the heritage listing application.

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We would also like to acknowledge:

- the 13 crew and passengers who died, and the 499 men whose remains were lost when the SS *Ventnor* sank off the Hokianga coast on 28 October 1902.
- the iwi and hapū of Te Tai Tokerau who lifted the kōiwi from the tide and cared for them as their own, and the relationships of manaakitanga that have grown since. We particularly thank Te Roroa Mana Whenua and Whatu Ora Trust, Mātihetihe marae, and Te Hua o te Kwariki Trust.
- the Chinese descendant associations and families who have carried this kaupapa forward: the Poon Fah Association, the Tung Jung Association, and the Sew Hoy and Ng / Wu family representatives.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the SS *Ventnor* Heritage Survey 2025, conducted by Kōtātā Insight Limited on behalf of the New Zealand Chinese Association (NZCA) to evidence community support for the listing of the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site as a Category 1 Historic Place on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangi Kōrero.

The SS *Ventnor* was chartered by the Chinese New Zealand community group, the Cheong Shing Tong 昌善堂, in 1902 to return those who had died in New Zealand to their ancestral villages in China. The ship struck a reef off Taranaki shortly after leaving Wellington and sank off the Hokianga coast on 28 October 1902. Thirteen crew and passengers died, and the remains of 499 men were lost.

In the months that followed, some of those remains (kōiwi) floated to shore and were cared for by the iwi who lived along the Hokianga coast. It was not until 2007 that Chinese descendants became aware that their ancestral bones had been cared for in this way. Since then, sustained relationships have been built between Chinese and Hokianga Māori descendants — relationships now central to the wreck site's continuing significance.

The NZCA is applying to Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) to have the SS *Ventnor* wreck and the area around it placed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangi Kōrero as a Category 1 Historic Place. The List is Aotearoa New Zealand's national record of place-based heritage and contains almost 6,000 sites of national historic interest.

This survey was undertaken over a ten-week period beginning 20 June 2025 and was open to all New Zealanders aged 11 years and over. It was promoted as an invitation to show community support for the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga listing application. This invitation was shared through Chinese early settler descendant groups, via the national and regional Chinese Association network, with an invitation to share the survey with friends and allies including associated iwi.

Key findings at a glance

There were 227 respondents to the survey endorsing the statement “I support the New Zealand Chinese Association application to have the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site placed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero.”

The findings evidence the wide breadth, depth and character of support within and across the communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

- Endorsements were received across all regions of Aotearoa New Zealand except Te Tairāwhiti and from 13 New Zealanders living overseas (Australia, the United States, Singapore and the Netherlands).
- Respondents spanned the full age range from those aged 11-14 years to 75 years and over.
- Most respondents (80.2%) identified as Chinese, with just under two thirds (62.1%) from the early settler Chinese New Zealand community — the descendant community most directly connected to the kōiwi aboard the SS *Ventnor*.
- Among the early settler Chinese respondents, most (78.0%) trace whakapapa to one or more of the three counties most represented by the kōiwi aboard the *Ventnor* — Poon Yue 番禺, Fah Yuen 花縣, and Jung Seng 增城 demonstrating continuing whakapapa significance.
- Twenty respondents (8.8%) identified as Māori, of whom 14 have whakapapa to the Hokianga — the iwi rohe where the kōiwi came ashore and were cared for.
- There were 47 respondents (20.7%) who identified as New Zealand European and 20 (8.8%) who selected “Other” ethnicity and specified a diverse range of ethnic identities evidencing cross-community support beyond descendant communities.

Beyond ethnic ancestry and whakapapa, respondents described a wide range of connections to the SS *Ventnor* kaupapa and legacy. The breadth of these connections demonstrates that the *Ventnor* kaupapa is **actively held, carried and transmitted** across cultural, intellectual and creative life in Aotearoa.

These included historians and archaeologists researching Chinese New Zealand history, and artists, authors, and filmmakers who use the narrative to explore cultural identity. Additionally, educators and community organisers have kept the history alive through engaging with the school curriculum, educational trips and pilgrimages reflecting a story that is increasingly deeply integrated into New Zealand's cultural landscape.

Respondent voices present deeply personal accounts of whakapapa, manaakitanga, kaitiakitanga and grief with strong calls for the protection of the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site as a wāhi tapu and gravesite. Key themes are summarised below.

Cultural, spiritual, social and traditional significance	That the SS <i>Ventnor</i> wreck and site is held as a wāhi tapu and gravesite and that its cultural significance is shared and sustained across two distinct descendant communities. It embodies a more-than-century-old Māori–Chinese relationship that is contemporary and lived.
Importance to tangata whenua	Testimony from respondents with Hokianga whakapapa, including descendants of the marae and communities that cared for the kōiwi, evidences a place of continuing importance to tangata whenua.
Community association with, and public esteem for, the place	Responses show that the SS <i>Ventnor</i> wreck and site is actively shaping community identity, belonging and intergenerational connection in 2025.
Importance in NZ history with symbolic and commemorative value	Respondents articulate the SS <i>Ventnor</i> wreck and site as the focus of remembrance for the 13 who died, the 499 lost, the Chinese communities that organised the venture, and the iwi who cared for the kōiwi.
Potential for public education	Respondents emphasise the value and importance of including the kaupapa in the NZ school curriculum. The breadth of existing creative, scholarly and educational work evidences a place already actively shaping public understanding.

Conclusion

The survey provides clear evidence of the contemporary cultural, historical, spiritual, social and traditional significance of the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site to descendant communities, iwi partners and allied audiences in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. The findings contribute to the broader pool of evidence to support that the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site merits listing as a Category 1 Historic Place under the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014.

1. Introduction

The SS *Ventnor* was chartered by the Chinese New Zealand community group, the Cheong Shing Tong 昌善堂, in 1902 to return those who had died in New Zealand to their ancestral villages in China. The ship struck a reef off Taranaki shortly after leaving Wellington and sank off the Hokianga coast on 28 October 1902. Thirteen crew and passengers died, and the remains of 499 men were lost.

In the months that followed, some of those remains (kōiwi) floated to shore and were cared for by the iwi who lived along the Hokianga coast. It was not until 2007 that Chinese descendants became aware that their ancestral bones had been cared for in this way. Since then, sustained relationships have been built between Chinese and Hokianga Māori descendants — relationships now central to the wreck site's continuing significance.

The NZCA is applying to Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) to have the SS *Ventnor* wreck and the area around it placed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero as a Category 1 Historic Place. The List is Aotearoa New Zealand's national record of place-based heritage and contains almost 6,000 sites of national historic interest.

Purpose of the survey

The survey was conducted as a community endorsement initiative to:

- document the breadth and depth of community support for the heritage listing among descendant communities, iwi partners and allies
- capture qualitative voices from descendants, iwi, and other supporters of the kaupapa
- provide an evidentiary base to accompany the NZCA's listing application, including the contemporary social, cultural, spiritual and historical significance of the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site.

The survey was framed as an "*opportunity to support our community's application*". In completing the survey, respondents consented to their responses being used to support the heritage application.

Background timeline

➤ The SS *Ventnor* and the loss of the 499

The wreck of the *Ventnor* and the loss of the kōiwi of 499 men in 1902 is a singular event in Aotearoa New Zealand's maritime, migration and cultural history.

➤ Manaakitanga from the Hokianga

When kōiwi washed ashore on the Hokianga coast, local communities, particularly the people of Te Roroa and Te Rarawa, looked after them as if they were their own. They lifted them from the tide, cared for them in the traditional manner, and watched over them across generations.

➤ Rediscovery and the building of relationships

From 2007 onwards, Chinese New Zealand descendants became aware of the care given to their ancestors. Since then, an enduring relationship has grown between Chinese descendant communities and Hokianga iwi, with descendant communities visiting the Hokianga to pay their respects; iwi extending their manaakitanga, including use of their land for memorials to the shared history; and shared kaupapa.

➤ Discovery of the wreck and current legal protection

In 2014, a group of divers found the wreck of the SS *Ventnor* and retrieved a number of artefacts. This raised concerns within the Chinese descendant community, many of whom regard the wreck as a gravesite and wāhi tapu.

At the request of descendant families and their traditional county organisations, the New Zealand Chinese Association formally took governance of the community's *Ventnor* work and lobbied for the wreck to be legally protected. In May 2014 the New Zealand Government made the *Ventnor* wreck and the area around it an archaeological site under section 9(2) of the Historic Places Act 1993. This means it is unlawful for any person to destroy, damage or modify any part of the site, including by removing artefacts.

However, where artefacts are moved off the site by natural means (such as tide movements) or accidental disturbance (such as fishing nets), the level of protection is less clear. A heritage listing would strengthen national-level protection of the site and the artefacts and support the position that any artefacts should remain in Aotearoa New Zealand in public ownership.

➤ **Community position on the kōiwi**

The community position — first established when the wreck site was confirmed, reaffirmed in a 2020 NZCA member survey, and again in this latest survey through qualitative responses — is that **the remains should remain as they are** at the wreck site. The NZCA's heritage listing application is **not associated** with any private venture to recover the remains.

➤ **Endorsement by descendant groups and iwi partners**

The following descendant groups and iwi partners endorse the NZCA's initiative to have the SS *Ventnor* site listed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero:

- Chinese descendant groups: Poon Fah Association¹ and Tung Jung Association (the Ventnor descendant county associations), Sew Hoy and Ng / Wu family representatives. Hokianga iwi partners: Te Roroa Mana Whenua and Whatu Ora Trust, Mātihetihe marae committee, Te Hua o te Kōwhiri Trust

¹ Note that the Poon Fah Association is the successor organisation to the Cheong Shing Tong which was the original organising body.

2. Methodology

Survey questionnaire

The survey was a short online questionnaire beginning with a background to the kaupapa and a single support statement to endorse. It then collected closed-question demographic and connection data, with three optional open-text questions inviting qualitative voice. The opening and closing of the survey included a trilingual greeting — te reo Māori, Cantonese / Chinese and English — reflecting the bicultural and cross-cultural nature of the kaupapa. (See Appendix A for the questionnaire content.)

Eligibility

The survey was open to New Zealand citizens and permanent residents aged 11 years or over. Built-in disqualification logic excluded respondents who reported being under 11 or not New Zealanders. Participants were asked to only participate once in the survey.

Survey fieldwork

This survey was undertaken over a ten-week period from 20 June to 27 August 2025. It was promoted as an invitation to show community support for the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga listing application. This invitation was shared through early settler descendant community groups (national and regional Chinese Associations) with an invitation to share the survey with friends and allies including associated iwi. (See Appendix B for an example of promotional content.)

Consent and confidentiality

Respondents read an explanatory background that set out how their responses would be used and gave consent by proceeding with the survey. Individual responses are confidential to the research and NZCA Ventnor Heritage Project Team. Names and email addresses were collected for administrative purposes only. Findings are reported in aggregate form and qualitative quotations are anonymised.

The descendant communities most connected to the *Ventnor* kaupapa — the early settler Chinese New Zealand community and the Hokianga marae communities to the north and south of the Hokianga Harbour, are small. Even where a quotation does not name a person, distinctive details such as generation, county, marae, family configuration, profession, life event, can make a respondent identifiable to people inside those communities. The following editorial conventions have therefore

been applied in line with the consent given by respondents to address identification risks:

- *Italicised text in inverted commas* indicates a verbatim quotation from the survey responses.
- An ellipsis (...) indicates that words have been omitted from the quotation, either to shorten it or to remove identifying detail.
- Square brackets [] indicate that words have been substituted for the original wording — for example, replacing a specific placename with a more general one, or replacing a specific family relationship with a broader one.
- “[paraphrased]” indicates that the editors have summarised the substance of a respondent’s contribution rather than quoting it directly, where verbatim reproduction would carry high identification risk.

Achieved sample and data cleaning

The survey achieved a sample of 227 fully completed and submitted responses (N = 227). These responses were used as the basis for the survey analysis and findings reported here.

There were 25 respondents who endorsed the support statement but only partially completed the survey and did not submit their response. These were excluded from the analysis. A duplicate-detection check based on contact information identified that some of these respondents who began the survey returned later to complete it in full. Including the 25 partial submissions would risk double-counting individuals already counted among the 227. Checks were also undertaken of the 227 submitted response with no duplication identified. There were eight disqualified respondents excluded as ineligible.

Quantitative analysis uses descriptive statistics (counts and percentages) for closed questions, with percentages reported against the relevant base for each question.

Qualitative analysis of the three open-text questions used thematic analysis. 113 of the 227 respondents (49.8%) contributed at least one open-text response, with a total of 189 written contributions across the three open-text questions:

- “Are there any comments you would like to make about your support for the Heritage listing?” — **84 contributions**
- “Are you interested or connected in ways other than ethnic ancestry / whakapapa?” — **96 contributions**
- “If you would like to share more detail about your affiliation / connection to the Ventnor kaupapa...” — **9 contributions.**

These themes were grouped under heritage-value categories aligned with section 66(1) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014.

3. A diverse profile of supporters

A total of **227 respondents endorsed the following statement:**

"I support the New Zealand Chinese Association application to have the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site placed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero."

Taken together, the 227 endorsements demonstrate community support that is:

- **National** in geographic reach, with 11 of 12 regions of Aotearoa and the diaspora represented
- **Intergenerational**, spanning every adult age band from 15–24 to 75 and over, plus rangatahi
- **Whakapapa-anchored**, with 78.0% of early settler Chinese endorsers tracing whakapapa to one or more *Ventnor* counties, and 70.0% of Māori endorsers tracing whakapapa to the Hokianga
- **Cross-community**, with Chinese (across early settler, post-1987 migrant, Colombo Plan-era and Chinese Fijian communities), Hokianga Māori, NZ Europeans, Cook Islands Māori, and other communities all represented
- **Sustained**, building on community positions first established in 2007 and reaffirmed through the 2020 NZCA survey and now in 2025
- **Active and lived**, evidenced by the 189 qualitative contributions from 113 respondents and the breadth of connection to the SS *Ventnor* kaupapa through creative, scholarly, educational and community work.

3.1 Age distribution

The age profile is strongly intergenerational. The largest single age band is 55–64 years (23.3%). Those aged 55 and over together comprise just over half (125 of the 227, 55.1%) of the respondents, reflecting the depth of attachment to the kaupapa among descendant elders. At the same time, the kaupapa engages younger New Zealanders: respondents aged under 45 comprise 76 of the 227 (33.5%), including 15 rangatahi aged under 25 (6.6%).

Table 1. Age profile of SS Ventnor Heritage Survey 2025 respondents

Age (Years)	Number	Percent
11–14	2	0.9%
15–24	13	5.7%
25–34	43	18.9%
35–44	18	7.9%
45–54	26	11.5%
55–64	53	23.3%
65–74	43	18.9%
75 or over	29	12.8%
Total	227	100.0%

3.2 Region

Respondents came from **all regions of Aotearoa New Zealand apart from Te Tairāwhiti – Gisborne**. There were 13 respondents who were New Zealanders living overseas.

Table 2. Regional location of SS Ventnor Heritage Survey 2025 respondents

Region	Number	Percent
Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland	87	38.3%
Te Upoko o Te Ika a Māui – Wellington	67	29.5%
Ōtākou / Murihiku – Otago / Southland	17	7.5%
Waitaha – Canterbury	16	7.0%
Te Tai Tokerau – Northland	6	2.6%
Waikato	6	2.6%
Manawatū – Whanganui	6	2.6%
Te Moana-a-Toi – Bay of Plenty	4	1.8%
Te Matau-a-Māui – Hawke’s Bay	2	0.9%
Te Tau Ihu / Te Tai Poutini – Top of the South / West Coast	2	0.9%
Taranaki	1	0.4%
Te Tairāwhiti – Gisborne	0	0.0%
Living overseas (specified country)	13	5.7%
Total	227	100.0%

The strongest representation is in the major urban centres of Auckland and Wellington, consistent with the historic and contemporary settlement of Chinese New Zealand communities. Notably, the survey reached respondents in Te Tai Tokerau (the rohe where the kōiwi came ashore).

The participation of overseas New Zealanders, ten of whom are of Chinese descent, evidences the ongoing significance of the *Ventnor* wreck site to the global Chinese New Zealand diaspora.

Table 3. Where the 13 overseas SS Ventnor Heritage Survey 2025 respondents lived

Country	Number
Australia	9
United States of America	2
Singapore	1
The Netherlands	1
Total overseas	13

3.3 Ethnicity

Ethnicity was a multi-select question (respondents could choose more than one ethnic group). Of the 227 respondents, **224 (98.7%) answered the ethnicity question**. Three respondents did not select any ethnic group.

The ethnic profile shows:

- **Strong representation of the Chinese descendant community** — the community at the heart of the kaupapa
- **Meaningful representation of Māori** including those with Hokianga whakapapa
- **Cross-community support** from New Zealand Europeans, Cook Islands Māori and respondents identifying with a wide range of other ethnicities, indicating that the kaupapa speaks beyond descendant communities to the wider New Zealand public.

Table 4. Ethnic identity of SS *Ventnor* Heritage Survey 2025 respondents

Ethnic group	Number	Percent ¹
Chinese ²	182	80.2%
New Zealand European	47	20.7%
Māori	20	8.8%
Cook Islands Māori	1	0.4%
Samoan	0	0.0%
Tongan	0	0.0%
Niuean	0	0.0%
Indian	0	0.0%
Other (specify)	20	8.8%
Missing response	3	1.2 %

Note 1: Percentages sum to more than 100% as multiple ethnic groups could be selected.

Note 2: Three respondents who did not also select “Chinese” for ethnicity and only selected “Other” specifying New Zealand Chinese or Cantonese are not included in this count.

The “Other” category captured the following further self-identifications:

- New Zealand Chinese
- Cantonese
- Malaysian Chinese
- Taiwanese
- Hong Kong
- Southeast Asian
- Thai / Cambodian (Khmer)
- Japanese
- Lebanese
- Dutch
- Irish
- English
- Spanish
- other European
- South African
- New Zealander.

3.4 Chinese community heritage

The **predominance of early settler Chinese New Zealanders** (77.5% of Chinese respondents; 62.1% of all 227 completed respondents) is directly significant as support for the heritage listing application. This is the descendant community most directly connected to the men aboard the SS *Ventnor*, and the community whose forebears’ kōiwi were on the ship. The presence of more recent

migrant communities also evidences the continuing significance of the kaupapa to today's wider Chinese New Zealand community.

The 182 respondents who selected Chinese for their ethnicity response were asked about the context of their own or their ancestors' migration to Aotearoa New Zealand. The sub-community profile of the 182 respondents who identified as Chinese is presented in the table below. Respondents could select more than one option.

Table 5. Migration context for SS Ventnor Heritage Survey 2025 respondents (n=182)

Migration context	Number	Percent ¹
Early settler Chinese NZ community (1840–1950s)	141	77.5%
Post-1987 immigration policy migrant communities	22	12.1%
Colombo Plan / church-sponsored / occupational priorities (1950s–1970s)	6	3.3%
Historic Chinese Fijian community (migrated to Aotearoa from Fiji)	5	2.7%
Samoan Chinese	0	0.0%
Other ²	11	6.0%
Not sure	5	2.7%

Note 1: Percentages sum to more than 100% as multiple responses could be selected.

Note 2: 'Other' included references to studying, Church sponsorship, as "zero generation" and as New Zealand born.

3.5 County of origin (early settler Chinese respondents)

Most of the men aboard the SS *Ventnor* were from **Poon Yue** and **Fah Yuen counties**, with a smaller number from **Jung Seng**. Table 6. presents the county affiliations reported among the 141 early settler Chinese respondents. **Most of the early settler Chinese respondents** (110 out of 141 - 78.0%) trace whakapapa to one or more of the three counties most represented among the men on the *Ventnor* — **Poon Yue, Fah Yuen and Jung Seng**. This direct connection shows that the wreck site has continuing **whakapapa significance to specific descendant communities** in Aotearoa today.

Table 6. County affiliations of the 141 early settler Chinese SS *Ventnor* Heritage Survey 2025 respondents

County	Number	Percent - early settler Chinese ¹
Jung Seng 增城 (Tung Jung Assoc)	68	48.2%
Poon Yue 番禺 (Poon Fah Assoc)	55	39.0%
Seyip 四邑 / Toishan 台山 (Seyip Assoc and The Kwong Cheu Club)	27	19.1%
Not sure	12	8.5%
Chung Shan 中山 (Zhongshan Assoc)	6	4.3%
Fah Yuen 花縣 (Poon Fah Assoc)	5	3.5%
Dung Goon 東莞 (Tung Jung Assoc)	4	2.8%

Note 1: percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents could select multiple counties (reflecting mixed county whakapapa).

3.6 Hokianga Māori whakapapa connection

Of the 20 respondents who identified as Māori, 14 indicated that they had Hokianga whakapapa connections. The qualitative responses showed that several of these respondents whakapapa directly to **Mātihetihe marae** and to **Mitimiti, Panguru, Waireia, Rangi Point, Lower Waihou** and surrounding communities.

This direct line — between the kōiwi cared for in 1902 and respondents to a 2025 survey — is **continuing and intergenerational evidence** of the place's traditional and spiritual significance.

3.7 Other connections to the kaupapa

Beyond ethnic ancestry and whakapapa, respondents described a wide range of connections to the *Ventnor* kaupapa. The breadth of these connections demonstrates that the *Ventnor* kaupapa is **actively held, carried and transmitted** across cultural, intellectual and creative life in Aotearoa. These included the following:

- **Researchers, historians, scholars and PhD candidates** working on Chinese New Zealand history, archaeology, and the SS *Ventnor* story itself

- **Authors, poets, playwrights, screenwriters and librettists** whose creative practice draws on the *Ventnor* story to explore identity and belonging for Chinese New Zealanders
- **Filmmakers, broadcasters and journalists** who have documented the kaupapa, including a one-hour radio special for Radio New Zealand commemorating the 110-year anniversary
- **Visual artists and theatre makers** including those whose work has featured the *Ventnor* story in the International Festival of the Arts and at Circa Theatre
- **Community organisers** who have led pilgrimages and community group visits to Te Roroa's Waipoua Forest, Mātihetihe marae in Mitimiti, and the Manea Tapuwai ā Nuku Footprints of Kupe cultural centre sometimes involving up to 100 people
- **Educators**, including Chinese language and culture teachers who have taught at Panguru School and led student trips
- **Chinese community members** of the New Zealand Chinese Association and its regional branches, the Poon Fah Association and the Tung Jung Association
- **Whānau, partners and friends of descendants**
- **Mokopuna and grandchildren** who visit the Arai Te Uru reserve on the Hokianga Heads when they come home to Aotearoa.

4. Voices of support (qualitative)

Themes are presented below reflecting s.66(1) heritage values in the following order — cultural, protection-related, historical, relational, social, and educational.

4.1 Cultural and spiritual significance — the wreck as wāhi tapu and gravesite

The strongest theme across the qualitative responses is the recognition of the SS *Ventnor* wreck site as a **gravesite and wāhi tapu**, and the imperative to protect the dignity of the kōiwi.

“I believe the ship and sacred remains should be left alone so they may rest in peace in this wāhi tapu.”

“A heritage [listing] needs to recognise Chinese tikanga for the dignity of ancestors — [protecting] the remains and any displaced funerary [objects] from being treated as curiosities.” [paraphrased for anonymity]

“From a deep cultural point of view, for both Māori and Chinese, it is culturally insensitive to disturb these remains. We honour the story in many other ways.”

“That resting place is sacred. It should not be disturbed.”

“The extra protection is needed in a world that violation of sacred spaces is on the increase.”

This theme evidences the **continuing spiritual and cultural significance** of the place to descendant communities — a significance that is currently held, articulated and acted upon in 2025.

4.2 Protection, stewardship and concern about disturbance

A directly related theme was respondents articulating **specific concerns about the disturbance, removal or commercial recovery** of the wreck and artefacts, and connected the heritage listing directly to stronger protection.

“It concerns me that this site has been of interest to people who have retrieved parts of the ship. If it was listed as a Heritage site, such retrieval would not be allowed.”

“I support the preservation of this historic site and would like to stop treasure-hunters from diving to plunder the site.”

“The Heritage listing is required to protect the remains of the wreck and our ancestors from being violated by persons who have little or no respect

for the remains. Also the listing would record in perpetuity this event as part of NZ history.”

“I believe a heritage listing will strengthen protection of the site and the remains, and help ensure any artefacts remain in Aotearoa New Zealand in public ownership.”

“This listing is very important to protect the site.”

This qualitative evidence directly aligns with one of the core purposes of the application — to strengthen the protection currently afforded by the 2014 archaeological site designation, particularly in relation to artefacts displaced by natural or accidental means.

4.3 Historical significance — a singular event in Aotearoa’s history

Respondents consistently described the SS *Ventnor* as a **unique and important event in Aotearoa New Zealand’s history**, central to Chinese New Zealand history and to the wider national story.

“Such a tragedy should not be forgotten and the poor souls who never had their bodies returned to their families and homeland should be remembered.”

“This is an important milestone in NZ Chinese history and it needs to gain wider recognition in our society.”

“It is an important part of NZ history. The early Chinese gold miners made a big contribution to the NZ economy.”

“This chapter of Chinese history holds great significance, especially for new immigrants like myself.”

“This action honours my [forebears], those who perished, those who were saved, those who have watched over the remains since, and all those who have worked to keep this story alive.”

The story is consistently framed as one of national, not minority, history.

4.4 Relational significance — Te Tiriti partnership and Māori–Chinese manaakitanga

A distinctive theme — and one that strongly differentiates the SS *Ventnor* site from other heritage places — is its embodiment of an **enduring relationship between Chinese New Zealanders and Hokianga Māori**, founded on an act of manaakitanga sustained across more than a century.

From respondents with Hokianga whakapapa:

"... my connection to the Ventnor kaupapa is through my tūpuna. When the bodies from the SS *Ventnor* washed ashore, it was our people who cared for them — lifting them from the tide, burying them with dignity, and honouring them as if they were our own."

"... a beautiful place with a special wairua ..." — a respondent describing a Ventnor site, where their own tūpuna also rest.

"[We] have supported the kaupapa, and welcomed our Chinese whānau to our marae." — from a respondent affiliated with a Hokianga marae.

From the Chinese descendant community:

"The acceptance and continued care, as their own people, by local iwi for the remains of those unknown washed ashore is a profoundly moving story. The story and relics are important and significant as part of the heritage of both Chinese and Maori."

"I support this Heritage History as a reminder of what the Chinese have done for New Zealand, and as a site for future generations to remember the Chinese and Maori participation in treating each other with respect."

"Recently visited the Ventnor Memorial at Opononi — very grateful to the local community there in the Hokianga for caring for our people."

"Thank you for your good work in fostering the friendship between the NZ Chinese and the Māori communities."

The wreck site is held by descendants on both sides as a place that **embodies Te Tiriti partnership in living form** — a continuing relationship grounded in tikanga, manaakitanga and shared responsibility.

4.5 Social and community significance — identity, belonging and intergenerational meaning

The kaupapa carries deep meaning for **identity, belonging and intergenerational connection** across the Chinese New Zealand community.

"As a [later-generation] Chinese New Zealander living in Aotearoa, I believe that the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site is a national taonga for Chinese New Zealanders and all New Zealanders... a deep relational anchor for intergenerational sense of belonging for Chinese in Aotearoa."

"... Although our ancestral roots are in China, for many generations our home is New Zealand. This ship is an important link to our past but belongs in our home."

"For [our teenage children], the setting and significance of this site is one of the few things that seems deeply meaningful to them every time. I

would very much like to still be bringing grandchildren and great-grandchildren back in years to come.”

“Movements like this help everyday New Zealanders broaden their idea of who gets to be considered a New Zealander/Kiwi.”

“[My forebear came to NZ during the Poll Tax era and was charged the Poll Tax]. He worked hard as they all did from that era and we need to honour those who were lost on The SS *Ventnor* as it is an important part of NZ history.”

The site supports identity formation across **multiple generations and across multiple Chinese communities** in Aotearoa — early settler descendants, post-1987 migrants, and rangatahi who hold mixed heritage.

4.6 Public esteem, education and cultural transmission

Respondents repeatedly underlined the **educational value** of the kaupapa and its role in cultural transmission.

“It is very important that we take control of our own stories and histories. Having a heritage listing will enable us to formally protect this intangible history so that future generations of storytellers, historians and descendants will also have access to this history.”

“Include this in the school curriculum.”

“NZ education curriculum used to teach (not sure if still do) early settlers related to gold miners and innovative methods used by Choie Sew Hoy, by making this a heritage site will strengthen the historical journey these early settlers endured.”

“In recent times often after children had read the School Journal [*Ventnor* story] they then speak about it with their families.”

“I have visited the site where the SS *Ventnor* was washed ashore and [been] told stories by [teachers from a Hokianga school].”

“These important milestones in historical heritage should be appropriately remembered and celebrated, and be a focus of ongoing research for the enrichment of the community and broader Aotearoa history.”

The breadth of creative and scholarly engagement — playwrights, poets, librettists, filmmakers, broadcasters, visual artists, archaeologists, historians, language teachers — evidences a place that is already actively shaping public understanding and cultural production.

5. Conclusion

The SS *Ventnor* Heritage Survey 2025 provides a structured community-endorsement evidentiary base for the NZCA's heritage listing application. There were 227 New Zealanders who endorsed the listing and took the time and effort to complete and submit the survey.

The whakapapa specificity of those endorsements (78.0% of early settler Chinese endorsers tracing to one or more SS *Ventnor* counties; Māori endorsers with Hokianga whakapapa) and the breadth of the wider supporting voices gives this evidentiary base its weight. The substantive qualitative contributions provided by half of the respondents (113) provides depth, meaning and context to their endorsements. Together they show a kaupapa held simultaneously as a gravesite, a wāhi tapu, a site of national history, a foundation of and contemporary reflection of Chinese New Zealand identity, an enduring expression of Te Tiriti partnership, and a place actively shaping the cultural, scholarly and creative life of Aotearoa today.

The results from this survey contribute to the broader pool of evidence to support that the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site merits listing as a Category 1 Historic Place under the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. This would represent a next step in a long arc of community-led care, partnership and protection that began with the manaakitanga of Hokianga iwi in 1902 and continues through the work of the NZCA, descendant associations and families, iwi partners, and the New Zealanders whose voices are gathered here.

Appendix A — Survey questionnaire

This appendix presents the SS *Ventnor* Heritage Survey 2025.

- The survey was developed using *Alchemer* survey software and shared through a link for online completion accessible via desktop and mobile devices.
 - Mandatory questions (marked *) were Q1 (support statement), Q2 (age), Q3 (New Zealander), Q4 (region), Q5–Q7 (name and email).
 - Q9–Q15 were optional and included branching display logic so that respondents were only asked questions relevant to their identified ethnicity or whakapapa connection.
 - The instrument was bilingual / trilingual in greetings (English, te reo Māori, Chinese) but the substantive content was presented in English.
 - Disqualification at Q2 / Q3 ended the survey for any respondent who indicated they were under 11 years of age or not a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident.
 - Question wording, response options and branching logic are presented as administered.
-

A.1 Welcome page

Tēnā koe, 你好 nei5 hou2 / néih hóu, greetings

Show your support for the SS *Ventnor* history

The New Zealand Chinese Association (NZCA) is applying to Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga to get the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site placed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangi Kōrero. This survey is your opportunity to support our community's application to further protect the SS *Ventnor* wreck site and promote its history.

The survey is open to all New Zealanders aged 11 years and older. We ask that you only complete the survey once.

Use of your responses

In completing this survey, you consent to your responses being used to support our heritage application. Your individual response is confidential to the NZCA *Ventnor* heritage project team (Richard Leung, Kirsten Wong, Murray Wu, Meng Foon, Tiana Marshall Wong and Bev Tso Hong).

You will not be personally identified in the reported survey results. The results will be attached to our heritage listing application and may be published on the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga website as part of their consultation process.

You can contact the team at: <survey email address>

Please use the buttons at the bottom of each survey page to move through the questionnaire. *Using the browser arrows will take you out of the survey.*

A.2 Background information page

Background

The New Zealand Chinese Association (NZCA) has led a series of initiatives to gain wider acknowledgement of the importance of the story of the SS *Ventnor* to our community's history and the partnerships that have been developed with local iwi in the Hokianga who, more than a century ago, discovered the remains of our ancestors and gave them a proper burial.

In order to gain national recognition and protection, the NZCA is applying to Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga to have the SS *Ventnor* wreck and the area around it placed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero (the List). The List is Aotearoa New Zealand's national record of our rich and diverse place-based heritage and has almost 6,000 sites of national historic interest. We believe a heritage listing and our survey findings will strengthen protection of the site and the remains, and help ensure any artefacts remain in Aotearoa New Zealand in public ownership.

A listing will mean more support for our work to promote SS *Ventnor* stories; bring communities together through a history shared by descendants throughout the country; and foster the strong links that the SS *Ventnor* has enabled the New Zealand Chinese to forge with iwi in the Far North.

Work to date

The NZCA has consulted with each of the descendant groups associated with this history about the application.

- On the Chinese side: the Poon Fah and Tung Jung Associations, and the Sew Hoy and Ng / Wu family representatives.
- On the Māori side: Te Roroa Mana Whenua and Whatu Ora Trust, Mātihetihe marae committee and Te Hua o te Kawariki Trust.

These groups support the NZCA's initiative to have the SS *Ventnor* site join the New Zealand Heritage List.

The SS *Ventnor*

The SS *Ventnor* was a ship chartered by the Chinese New Zealand community in 1902 to return those who had died in New Zealand to their families in China. The ship had only just left Wellington when it struck a reef off Taranaki. On 28 October 1902 it sank off the coast of the Hokianga. Thirteen crew and passengers died and the remains of 499 men were lost.

Over the following months, some of these remains (kōiwi) floated to shore where they were cared for by the different iwi who lived along the coast. It was not until 2007 that the Chinese descendants became aware that their ancestral bones had been cared for. Since then, Chinese and Māori descendants have built strong relationships.

In 2014 a group of divers found the wreck of the SS *Ventnor* and retrieved a number of artefacts. This raised concerns within the Chinese descendant community, many of whom regard the wreck as a gravesite. At the request of the descendant families and organisations, the NZCA formally took governance of the community's *Ventnor* work, and lobbied for the wreck to be legally protected.

In May 2014 the New Zealand Government made the *Ventnor* wreck and the area around it an archaeological site under section 9(2) of the Historic Places Act 1993. This means it is not lawful for any person to destroy, damage, or modify any part of the site. This includes removing artefacts from the site. However, if artefacts are moved off the site by natural means — such as tide movements or accidental disturbance (e.g. fishing nets) — the level of protection is less clear.

What of the remains of ancestors?

When the site of the SS *Ventnor* was discovered, the NZCA asked its members for their views on what should be done with the human remains at the wreck site in deep ocean. Individual identification would be impossible. The majority of Chinese New Zealand descendants said they wanted the remains to be undisturbed. This position was confirmed in a survey in 2020.

As the *Ventnor* wreck is an archaeological site, any attempts to move the remains or any other artefacts requires the permission of the New Zealand Government. The NZCA is aware of a private venture to recover the remains and return them to China. This survey and application for heritage listing is not involved in that venture.

A.3 Section 1 — Support, eligibility and region

Q1. Statement of support *

Please show your support by ticking the box below and completing the 4 required questions.

☐ I support the New Zealand Chinese Association application to have the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site placed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero.

Q2. What is your age? *

Single choice

- 10 years or under
- 11–14 years
- 15–24 years
- 25–34 years
- 35–44 years
- 45–54 years
- 55–64 years
- 65–74 years
- 75 years or over

Q3. Are you a New Zealander? *

That is — a citizen or permanent resident of New Zealand. Single choice.

- Yes
- No

Disqualification logic: if Q2 = “10 years or under” OR Q3 = “No”, the survey ends with the message: “Thank you for your interest in this survey, however, it is only for New Zealanders (citizens and permanent residents) who are aged 11 years or older.”

Q4. Which region in New Zealand do you live in? *

Single choice

- Te Tai Tokerau — Northland
- Tāmaki Makaurau — Auckland
- Waikato
- Te Moana-a-Toi — Bay of Plenty
- Te Tairāwhiti — Gisborne
- Te Matau-a-Māui — Hawke’s Bay
- Taranaki

- Manawatū — Whanganui
 - Te Upoko o Te Ika a Māui — Wellington
 - Te Tau Ihu / Te Tai Poutini — Top of the South / West Coast
 - Waitaha — Canterbury
 - Ōtākou / Murihiku — Otago / Southland
 - New Zealand area outside these regions
 - Do not live in New Zealand — please specify country where you live:
-

A.4 Section 2 — Contact details

Name and email address. This information is for administrative purposes only. *

Q5. First name *

Q6. Last name *

Q7. Email address *

Q8. Would you like to be updated on progress, or sent a copy of the survey results?

Single choice

- Yes please
 - No thanks
-

A.5 Section 3 — Optional profile and connection questions

We are also asking a few extra questions to gain a better profile of the people who complete this survey. It is totally up to you if you want to answer these.

Q9. Which of the following ethnic group or groups do you belong to?

Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Māori
- ☐ New Zealand European
- ☐ Samoan
- ☐ Cook Islands Maori
- ☐ Tongan

- ☐ Niuean
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Other (such as Dutch, Japanese, Tokelauan) — please specify:

Q10. Are you or your Chinese ancestors from the...

Shown only if “Chinese” is selected at Q9. Please select as many as apply to you.

- ☐ Early settler Chinese NZ community (i.e. you or your ancestors arrived in New Zealand from 1840 to 1950s)
- ☐ Communities that came as Colombo Plan students, church-sponsored orphans or refugees, or arrived under the occupational priorities list (1950s–1970s)
- ☐ Post-1987 immigration policy migrant communities
- ☐ Samoan Chinese
- ☐ Historic Chinese Fijian community (migrated to Aotearoa from Fiji)
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other — please specify: _____

Q11. As someone from the early settler Chinese community, do you know your county or counties of origin?

Shown only if “Early settler Chinese NZ community” is selected at Q10. Please select as many as apply to you.

Note that most of the men on the *Ventnor* were Poon Yue and Fah Yuen. There were also a small number of Jung Seng men on board.

- ☐ Jung Seng 增城 (represented by the Tung Jung Assoc)
- ☐ Poon Yue 番禺 (Poon Fah Assoc)
- ☐ Seyip 四邑 or Toishan 台山 (Seyip Assoc and The Kwong Cheu Club)
- ☐ Chung Shan 中山 (Zhongshan Assoc)
- ☐ Fah Yuen 花縣 (Poon Fah Assoc)
- ☐ Dung Goon 東莞 (Tung Jung Assoc)
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other — please specify: _____

Q12. Were your Māori ancestors from the Hokianga?

Shown only if “Māori” is selected at Q9. Single choice.

- Yes
- No

Q13. If you would like to share more detail about your affiliation / connection to the Ventnor kaupapa you can say this here.

Open text. Shown only if “Yes” is selected at Q12.

A.6 Section 4 — Other connections and final comments

Q14. Are you interested or connected in ways other than ethnic ancestry / whakapapa?

Open text.

Q15. Are there any comments you would like to make about your support for the Heritage listing?

Open text.

A.7 Closing page

Ngā mihi nui · 好多謝你 hou2 do1 ze6 nei5 · Thank you for your support and completing this survey.

Appendix B — Recruitment / promotional text

This appendix presents an example of the recruitment / promotional text used to invite participation in the SS *Ventnor* Heritage Survey 2025.

Show your support for the SS *Ventnor* history

Opening of the NZCA Ventnor memorial in ~~Opononi~~,
April 2021. Image Dr King Tong Ho



We are asking for your support for the New Zealand Chinese Association's (NZCA) application to get the SS *Ventnor* wreck placed on the New Zealand Heritage List/ Rārangī Korero: the Government's official list of national historic sites.

The SS Ventnor was a ship that sank off the Hokianga Harbour carrying the remains of Chinese gold miners and others in the early Chinese New Zealand community. Its wreck is significant to our history and the NZCA would like your support to help preserve the site and the stories that accompany it for future generations of Chinese New Zealanders.

Please take a few minutes to complete our survey by clicking on this link [SS Ventnor Heritage Survey 2025](#) or using the QR code below.



*On Behalf of the New
Zealand Chinese Association
Ventnor Sub Committee*

**Thank you for your
contribution!**