

Sleepyhead, iwi sign partnership

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DOMINICO ZAPATA/STUFF

The Comfort Group has signed a partnership agreement with Waikato-Tainui. From left: Waikato-Tainui executive member Donald Turner, Te Riu o Waikato chair Tawera Nikau, Waahi Whaanui Trust Huirama Matatahi, Ngā Muka Development Trust Glen Tupuhi and Comfort Group Director Craig Turner.

Sleepyhead has signed an agreement with Waikato-Tainui to work together on the company's billion-dollar manufacturing and housing project in Ohinewai.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Sleepyhead (The Comfort Group and Ambury Properties) as well as representatives of different arms of Waikato-Tainui, including Nga Muka Development, Waahi Whaanui Trust, Te Riu o Waikato and Waikato-Tainui executive.

They gathered on Sleepyhead's 176-hectare site in Ohinewai yesterday, where kaumatua opened with a karakia and leaders spoke about the project.

Company director Craig Turner thanked iwi for welcoming the company on to the land and settlement.

"This is what partnership is all about," he said. "We see an opportunity for our family business and for the people here to set a new standard of manufacturing in New Zealand."

Turner referred to an arrangement that has already started with Tainui's economic development arm Te Riu o Waikato, where Waikato-Tainui workers from Huntly are getting employed in Sleepyhead's factory.

"That's been some of our proudest moments already to see the young people coming up from Huntly start working in our factory," Turner said.

Te Riu o Waikato chair Tawera Nikau said the job opportunities coming with Sleepyhead's plan were "really exciting".

New housing for Sleepyhead staff was a "fantastic" opportunity for Maori, and will involve many discussions with the company as to how that will take shape.

Each arm of Waikato-Tainui that signed the agreement is primarily responsible for different areas: Nga Muka Development focuses on the environment, Waahi Whaanui Trust on social services and Te Riu o Waikato on economic development.

Sleepyhead bought 176 hectares of rural land in Ohinewai in August, with a plan to build a 100,000-square-metre factory and 1100-home affordable housing community. The company has said the project will house 3000 residents and create 1500 jobs.