

Top tips: Salvaging Water-Damaged Kete & Piupiu

Following these steps will minimise the loss of flood-damaged kete and piupiu, preventing further damage.

Mould can develop within 72 hours, but with quick and deliberate action you can increase the chance of a successful recovery.

1. Take stock

Worn, well-used, and old kete and piupiu may be fragile, and even more so when wet. Both kete and piupiu are vulnerable to structural damage, fibre weakness, and deformation from shrinking and expanding. Different fibres react differently to water – plant fibres tolerate water better whereas wool, feathers, and fur are extremely absorbent and are more likely to soak up contaminants.



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2. Control the environment

The first 48 hours after a flood are the most critical. High temperatures and humidity will promote mould growth. Mould is a hazard to human health and causes physical damage to the structure of taonga materials. The first step is to control the environment – install dehumidifiers and fans to aid moisture removal and promote air circulation.

3. Prioritize, then proceed

Prioritizing your taonga will ensure you treat them efficiently and safely. Treat fragile, wet items before sturdier or damp taonga. Completely wet piupiu or kete that shows movement of dyes or staining should be rinsed with clean water. Do not wring out taonga. Begin the drying process immediately using blotting material to promote drying, prevent colour transfer, and further dye movement.

4. Handle with care

Kete and piupiu are not self-supporting and heavy when wet. Sides of kete, ties, and handles will be prone to fracture. Always provide full support, cradling taonga with

support trays, plastic lids, or large towels before moving. Be especially careful of kete or piupiu that is made from flax fibers or muka. Handles, structural fibers, ties, and pōkinkini of piupiu can easily break, catch, and tear. Handle them as little as possible.

5. Air-drying piupiu

Cover surfaces with absorbent materials (e.g., cheesecloth, blank newsprint) and change them as soon as they become saturated. Piupiu that is loosely packed and wet can be laid out flat. Do not undo any ties. Blot off excess water. Cover piupiu in any available absorbent material and carefully roll it up in towelling to remove excess water.

6. Air-drying kete

Use soft nylon, curtain netting, or absorbent paper to promote support and retain its shape. Pad fragile, brittle handles and rims with additional support. Prop up the handle to reduce strain. Isolate feathers and decorative elements with absorbent material or pre-cut ziplock bags to prevent further absorption and dye bleed. Place strips of absorbent material around the edges to wick away moisture and aid drying of fragile surfaces. Surfaces with running dye can be covered with absorbent material to draw dye away.