

Māori freshwater values

Tangata whenua (people of the land) hold an inherited responsibility through whakapapa (genealogical relationships) to ensure the health and wellbeing of their ancestral awa (rivers and streams) and other interconnected aspects of te taiao (the natural environment).

Over centuries of occupation, local iwi and hapū relied on te taiao to provide physical and spiritual sustenance. The awa, ngutuawa (estuaries) and repo (wetlands) provided important areas for mahinga kai (resource gathering practices) and other tikanga (cultural and spiritual practices). Awa, particularly, are a very important source of identity for tangata whenua who maintain an intimate relationship with their ancestral wai (water).

Māori freshwater values and mātauranga Māori (traditional Māori knowledge systems) recognise the

interconnectedness and interrelationships of all living and non-living things and have guided the sustainable use of the many resources that the awa of the region have provided to tangata (people) for centuries. This relationship will help to ensure that the health and wellbeing of present and future generations can be sustained in a way that balances the needs of te tangata and te taiao.

A key part of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM) is to incorporate cultural understandings and mātauranga Māori by empowering tangata whenua to be involved in the management and monitoring of wai māori (freshwater).

What we know

A range of kaupapa Māori approaches for monitoring and reporting on the health and wellbeing of wai have been developed in Aotearoa, many of which are complementary to scientific monitoring techniques. The tools can be used to account for the state of the environment through a te ao Māori lens and provide knowledge and wisdom for all New Zealanders to improve our understanding of New Zealand's unique freshwater environments.

In the coming months, the Council will work collaboratively with tangata whenua to identify Māori freshwater values and enable the development of monitoring tools that will provide meaningful insight into the health and wellbeing of freshwater.

Mahinga kai

Mahinga kai was elevated to a compulsory value under the NPS-FM. This gives greater recognition to values that Māori hold for freshwater and provides an opportunity for tangata whenua to meaningfully exercise their freshwater interests and obligations.

Mahinga kai is about people, their connections to places including the places where natural resources are obtained, the resources themselves and the principles and values that inform how these resources are harvested and managed. A literal definition of mahinga kai is 'food-gathering place' and includes the cultural practices associated within this context. However, the concept within te ao Māori is much deeper and broader and is more than just fishing or collecting kai. Mahinga kai is inclusive of other natural resources including stones, wood, tools, clay used for dyes, rongoā (medicinal plants), flaxes for weaving, birds and fish that were utilised for a variety of purposes. Mahinga kai is also concerned with sustainability, subsistence, prosperity, upholding the tikanga of past generations and ensuring current and future generations will be physically and spiritually sustained by te taiao.

Other Māori freshwater values

Wai tapu is also identified in the NPS-FM. While this value is not compulsory for inclusion, it must be considered. Wai tapu represent the places where rituals and ceremonies are performed, or where there is special significance to tangata whenua. Rituals and ceremonies include, but are not limited to, tohi (baptism), karakia (prayer), waerea (protective incantation), whakatapu (placing of rāhui), whakanoa (removal of rāhui), and tuku iho (gifting of knowledge and resources to future generations). In providing for this value, the wai tapu are free from human and animal waste, contaminants and excess sediment, with valued features and unique properties of the wai protected. It may also be important there is no artificial mixing of the wai tapu and that identified taonga in the wai are protected.

Tangata whenua may identify other Māori freshwater values and collaborative work will establish how these values can be monitored to enhance our community's understanding of the state of our freshwater ecosystem. This may include wai tapu, tauranga waka (canoe landing places) and other values of importance to tangata whenua.

The Council will work collaboratively with, and enable, tangata whenua to identify any Māori freshwater values and to be actively involved in decision-making processes relating to these values. Tangata whenua will also be actively involved to the extent they wish to be in developing and implementing mātauranga Māori monitoring approaches relating to the identified Māori freshwater values.

Council and
8 iwi authorities

have an agreement to work in **partnership** to support freshwater policy development

Kaupapa Māori approaches for environmental monitoring will **complement scientific monitoring techniques**



Empowering
tangata whenua involvement

in monitoring and management of wai māori is a key part of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater

What we're doing

The Council is working toward enabling the application of diverse systems of values and knowledge. It recognises that mātauranga Māori has a rightful place alongside scientific methods when it comes to informing our communities about the health and wellbeing of our freshwater ecosystems. Councils are required to work in partnership with tangata whenua to develop monitoring approaches that include measures of mātauranga Māori. This will be particularly important in areas where there are freshwater values that have been identified by tangata whenua, including mahinga kai.

Iwi management plans

An iwi management plan is a document that is developed and approved by hapū and/or iwi. These plans are generally prepared as an expression of rangatiratanga (self-determination) and are written statements by hapū/iwi identifying important issues regarding the use of natural and physical resources in their rohe (tribal area). Iwi management plans provide the opportunity for the Council and the greater community to gain insight into the perspectives of ngā iwi o Taranaki.

The plans provide knowledge and understanding about what is important to iwi and hapū, what 'sustainable management' means from a tangata whenua perspective and how the environment could be managed and respected in a way that is consistent with their tikanga and mātauranga. Among other useful and insightful information, the plans can assist in developing a preliminary understanding of Māori freshwater values and Te Mana o te Wai, which is a central component of the NPS-FM.

The Council is working to build a better understanding of iwi management plans to assist freshwater policy development and to inform consenting processes. This will ensure meaningful consideration is given to tangata whenua objectives, goals and/or aspirations. Improving our understanding of iwi management plans is supplementary to meeting kanohi te kanohi (face to face) as we work to

understand issues and aspirations iwi have and how we can work together on behalf of our communities.

A partnership approach

In 2022 the Council and eight iwi authorities put in place a three-year agreement to support freshwater policy development for the region. This agreement ensures the Council and tangata whenua can work in partnership by giving effect to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) to inform an understanding of Te Mana o te Wai, the incorporation and recognition of mātauranga Māori, the identification of Māori freshwater values and to enable tangata whenua to be involved in decision-making processes.

Where we're heading

The Council is developing a new Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and Natural Resources Plan (NRP) for Taranaki that will give effect to the NPS-FM. Te Mana o te Wai is a fundamental concept within the NPS-FM. The Council is working with iwi to understand the meaning and application of this concept from a local perspective.

The NPS-FM outlines a hierarchy of obligations (right) under Te Mana o te Wai that the Council must follow when developing policy. When managing freshwater, the hierarchy prioritises the health and wellbeing of the water to be protected, followed by human health needs. It then accounts for all other uses of the water, which encompasses cultural, social and economic wellbeing. By protecting the health and wellbeing of freshwater, we also protect the health and wellbeing of the people and environment.

The NPS-FM represents a step-change in freshwater management for New Zealand. In addition to reviewing our approach to managing the use of freshwater, we will also work alongside tangata whenua and our community to establish limits on resource use to ensure that water quality is maintained, or enhanced where it is degraded.



Ngāti Mutunga and the Mauri Compass



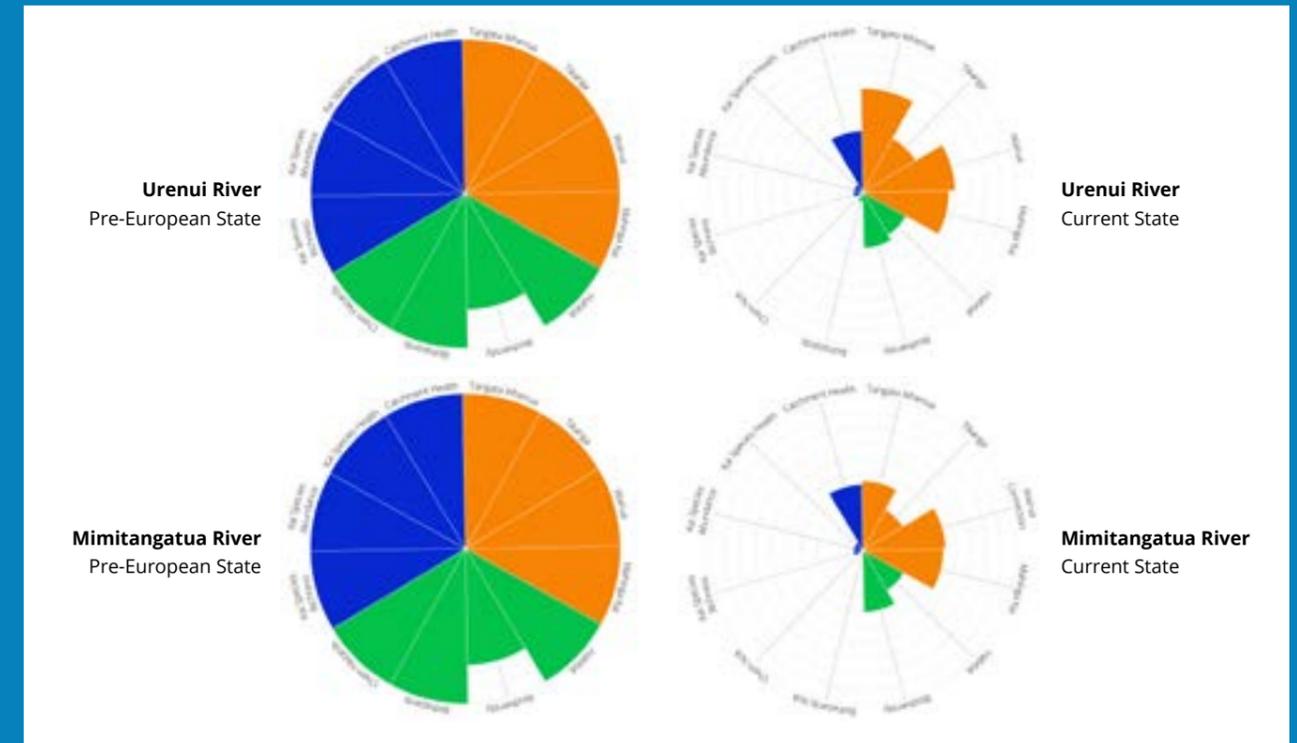
Ngāti Mutunga had been looking for a monitoring tool to assist them in fulfilling their kaitiaki responsibilities and enable them to play a proactive role in environmental management. This was particularly around the priority area of freshwater governance.

Ngāti Mutunga Environmental Officer Marlene Benson says that at times the iwi had been unable to participate effectively in the Resource Management Act process because of a lack of useful data about taonga species. There was also no recognised tool to monitor the effect of consented activities on the mauri (life force) of its awa. They chose the Mauri Compass, developed by Ian Ruru of Te Rūnanga o Turanganui a Kiwa and the Gisborne District Council, because they felt it had a good balance of mātauranga Māori and science data collection.

They like that it:

- Is by Māori for Māori
- Is holistic and inclusive -acknowledges te ira tangata (the human element) as part of our ecosystem
- Includes and prioritises Māori values and tikanga
- Provides an avenue for whanau/iwi to connect with ancestral lands through participation
- Provides measurable and comparable outcomes for use in a colonial system
- Has been implemented and influential within other iwi/ council bodies

With the support of Te Ohu Kaimoana and Te Wai Māori Trust, Ngāti Mutunga engaged the services of Ian Ruru and his sons Manawa and Riaki to apply the Mauri Compass tool to assess the historical and current state of mauri on two of the Ngāti Mutunga tupuna awa - Urenui and Mimitangiatua.



The Compass uses 12 indicators of a waterbody across three key areas: Te Ao Maori, Nga Tini a Tangaroa and Te Ao Taiao and involves both wānanga (space of learning) and fieldwork.

During the wānanga sessions topics discussed by tangata whenua included historic practices and kōrero tuku iho (information passed down) including mahinga kai, ceremonies, wāhi kainga (place of dwelling), and wāhi tapu (sacred place) sites, taniwha (supernatural guardian) and tauranga waka (canoe landing place, safe anchorage).

Ngāti Mutunga carried out the original taonga species survey in 2020 on four sites on each awa with the focus on tuna. As predicted, they found the mauri of both awa had declined since European settlement.

“Three of the 12 Mauri Compass indicators focus on the health and wellbeing of our freshwater sentinel taonga, the tuna. Species richness, tuna abundance and tuna health had each fallen 80%, which is a talisman for the decline in Ngāti Mutunga connection, tikanga, mahinga kai practices, and overall wairua of our tupuna awa,” Mrs Benson says.

“While a bit depressing, the assessment provided a tangible and visual reminder of the work that we have to do immediately, before it’s too late.”

She says Ngāti Mutunga whānau aged from 2 to 70-plus had been involved with the process.

“It will be easy to engage the wider Ngāti Mutunga whānau during any future mahi we do. This will increase everyone’s skills in the collection of scientific data while recognising and affirming the cultural knowledge, expertise, and experience of Ngāti Mutunga whānau participating in this work.

“It also helps to reconnect us and strengthen our relationships as tangata whenua to our whenua, our awa and ngā mātua tupuna (ancestors before us). We believe this to be important in enhancing and maintaining the mauri of the environment and the health and wellbeing of our people.”

Since the original survey Ngāti Mutunga has used the Mauri Compass to monitor resource consents at the Urenui and Onaero Campgrounds and to inform Cultural Impact Statements provided to the New Plymouth District Council.