

2 The Maori Perspective: Customary and Traditional Freshwater and Riparian Values

2.1 Overview

The Maori perspective of land and water is, in some ways, quite distinct from that of New Zealanders of European descent, although increasingly the more holistic Maori view is being embraced by all New Zealanders. The spiritual significance of place and the interconnectedness of people and land (and water) are increasingly strong influences on our perception of place.

The Maori view of the world does not separate spiritual aspects from the physical practices of resource management. All elements of the natural environment (including people) possess a mauri or life force and all forms of life are related. Maori see themselves as part of the environment, belonging to it and complementing other entities. The interconnectedness of all things means that the welfare of any part of the environment will directly impact on the welfare of the people. Tamper with or destroy any part, and you weaken the whole. The primary objective of Maori environmental management is to maintain the integrity of the connective life force. Resource use and allocation decisions are measured against this objective.

2.2 Maori and freshwater resources

Maori have strong cultural, traditional and historic links with wetlands and inland waterways, including lakes, rivers, streams and springs. The lives of Maori were intimately connected to the quantity and quality of the freshwater that was available to them. These resources provide habitat and spawning grounds for indigenous plants, bird and fish life, building and weaving materials such as raupo and flax, and medicines and dyes used for seasoning timber and restoring precious artefacts. They are also a traditional source of foods such as tuna (eel), whitebait and watercress.

Modifications to waterways, riparian areas and the wider catchment have altered the relationship of Maori with these resources. The protection of the integrity of valued freshwater resources remains an important aspect of the responsibilities of Maori who are identified as the tiaki (guardians). Values (both tangible and intangible) that are assigned to specific water bodies include:

- the role of waterways in tribal creation stories
- the proximity of important waahi tapu, waahi taonga, settlement or other historical sites in specific waterways or found in the riparian areas adjacent to the waterways
- the use of waterways as access routes or transport courses
- the value of waterways and riparian areas as sources of mahinga kai and other cultural materials
- the continued capacity for future generations to access, use and protect the resources of the waterways and riparian areas.

Maori conceive that each waterway carries its own mauri, guarded by separate spiritual guardians and tribal caretakers and having its own status or mana. A water body with a healthy mauri will sustain healthy ecosystems, support cultural uses and mahinga kai (food sources), and be a source of pride and identity to the people. While the mauri ensures that that all flora and fauna supported by the water have continued life, the mauri is defenceless against and at risk of desecration from actions that are not part of the natural realm, such as removal of native riparian vegetation, contamination or drainage. Hence the interest of Maori in the issues being discussed in this document.

It is possible to identify the specific activities that are of concern to Maori. In addition to the issues of vegetation clearance, modification of water flow and contamination of freshwater resources, the mixing of water is of particular concern. The mixing of waters by unnatural means, the mixing of waters from different sources with separate mauri, or discharges of “used” waters or wastes to living waters that supply food are contrary to the Maori conception of a healthy environment. These activities are considered to degrade the mauri of the waters and may also offend the mana of different iwi who hold traditional rights and responsibilities with respect to the different waterways. Diffuse and point-source contaminants that enter stream water from farmland (and from urban land) therefore contribute significantly to the degradation of the mauri of streams running through agricultural land. Waters diverted (for irrigation, for example) from one river to another is also an activity that is not favoured.

2.3 Waterway management and restoration

Consistent with many of the principles outlined in parts of this report, restoring the ecological and spiritual integrity of degraded waterways is a very significant principle in modern Maori resource management. Restorative action, including the replenishing of water quantity, improving water quality, and habitat restoration, are seen as priorities, particularly with respect to resources of high ecological or cultural value. Maori have developed a complex system of practices, customs and rules for the management of water resources. Included amongst these are kaitiakitanga, wai tapu and wai taonga, and rahui.

Kaitiakitanga is the responsibility of specific appointed iwi representatives to carry out particular functions, to keep and guard iwi interests and taonga (treasures or prized possessions). Tiaki are responsible for this preservation and guardianship. The obligations of tiaki include enforcement of the practices of tikanga, or those customary practices established to nourish and control the relationship between people and the natural world. Tiaki are responsible for ensuring that taonga are passed on in as good as, if not enhanced, condition to future generations. For this reason, tiaki are likely to have an interest in the development and implementation of restorative programmes.

Wai tapu and wai taonga: Water may be considered to be tapu, or sacred, because of its properties in relation to other water, tapu places or objects, and its close association with the gods. In other instances, water bodies will have special taonga value because of special uses that are not restricted by the prohibitions of tapu. The tapu or taonga

status of a waterway is dependent on the preservation of their purity and the avoidance of unprotected contact with humans. Maori are likely to seek absolute protection of waterways with tapu status, and to protect the quality and quantity of waters whose uses are of special taonga value.

Rahui is an act of prohibition, often temporary, imposed to conserve or replenish a resource. When a rahui is placed upon a river, lake, forest or harbour, people are banned from using specific resources within a prohibited area.

- When management options are being considered for a waterway and its associated riparian zone, it is important to be aware that iwi patterns of usage vary throughout a catchment.
- Iwi have an interest in the whole water body from its source to the sea.
- Many mahinga kai species are migratory; therefore, the whole catchment needs to be considered, not just the sites where Maori gather mahinga kai.
- Iwi harvest different species in different locations and at different times of the year.

2.4 Values to consider

It is important for landowners, resource managers and others who are promoting restoration or enhancement programmes to have an understanding of the values that iwi are likely to want included in a waterway management plan or a specific restoration plan.

2.4.1 Mauri

Human activities (including many of the rural activities described here) have the potential to degrade or extinguish the mauri of the water body and as a result may offend the mana of those who hold traditional rights and responsibilities with respect to that water body. The mauri of the river is degraded if it no longer has the capacity to support traditional uses and values.

One of the principal indicators by which Maori will assess the mauri of a water body is its productivity and the food and other materials sourced from it. As noted earlier iwi, hapu and whanau have specific examples of rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands where the mauri is degraded. Further, if consulted, they can identify the activities that have adversely affected the mauri and help formulate a plan of action for restoring the mauri. In particular, waterway management for mauri should consider:

- water quality: contamination of a water body will diminish its mauri
- water quantity: mauri can be diminished by reduced and altered flows. A river cannot be a healthy river without sufficient amounts of flowing water
- flow variability: to protect the natural “moods” of the river. This should consider the daily, seasonal and yearly variations, low flows and flood flows, and minimum flow requirements
- flow variability to protect the normal river processes, such as sediment movement and river mouth closure

- mixing of waters from different rivers: mauri will be diminished where this occurs
- fitness for cultural usage
- life-supporting capacity and ecosystem robustness
- productive capacity.

It is essential that iwi are given the opportunity to identify those water bodies or reaches that need remedial or restorative action to maintain or replenish mauri. Only the iwi, as tiaki, can confirm if a particular river flow is sufficient to meet the metaphysical aspects of mauri. Because the mauri of each ecosystem will differ, the means by which the health and well-being of these ecosystems is to be restored, maintained and protected is also likely to differ. It may be advantageous for landowners, resource managers and scientists, together with Maori, to discuss and agree a plan of action.

2.4.2 Mahinga kai

Mahinga kai was and remains one of the cornerstones of Maori culture. In many instances the survival of iwi was dependent upon their knowledge of mahinga kai and their ability to gather resources. Healthy water bodies are valued because they continue to:

- be a direct source of mahinga kai
- provide ecosystem support for mahinga kai species
- support other significant mahinga kai environments such as forests, riparian habitats and coastal environs.

Maori are likely to accord special value to a water body (including its associated riparian areas) that:

- provides significant habitats for important food species and materials such as eels, watercress, flax, among others
- affords breeding and migratory environments for those species and the species they feed on in wetlands and lagoons
- has long-standing use histories for whanau, hapu and iwi
- deserves protection because it safeguards critical habitats, protects robust ecosystems, or represents degraded mahinga kai environments that are in need of restoration.

There are many examples throughout the country, however, where inappropriate riparian and water management has impacted on mahinga kai. Observable effects include:

- alterations to the abundance and distribution of species
- disturbances to the breeding cycles and patterns
- loss of access to water bodies
- the deterioration, reduction and removal of habitat.

Maori continue to voice their concern at the degraded state of many of the freshwater resources on which their survival and their cultural identity depended. The decline in both water quantity and water quality has impacted on the cultural values and traditional uses of catchments, in particular the mahinga kai resources.

Ensuring the health and well-being of freshwater resources is seen by Maori as a prerequisite for ensuring the continued health and well-being of mahinga kai resources and ultimately the improved health of Maori.

For Maori, participation in mahinga kai gathering is an important expression of cultural identity. Continuation of traditional practices is an important means of passing values down to children and grandchildren, ensuring their survival through the generations.

Where the maintenance and enhancement of mahinga kai is a management objective, iwi must be given the opportunity to identify those waterways or reaches of the water that are significant.

2.4.3 Waahi tapu

Waahi tapu are any places or features of such significance to whanau, hapu or iwi that protection is the objective.

Waterway management should give consideration to:

- identification of any waahi tapu that may be affected by changes in flow regime or changes in the wider catchment
- development of controls necessary to ensure waahi tapu are protected.

2.5 Integrated catchment management

Water has many different uses and different levels of significance for many parts of society. Effective water and riparian management requires that all of the diverse interests, including those of Maori, are recognised and given consideration before a restoration strategy is developed. This is especially so when managing water, because the effects of an action may be more significant downstream than at the site where the action is undertaken.

The Maori concept of the interconnectedness of land, water and people is very much consistent with the modern understanding of sustainability. Maori prefer a holistic and integrated approach to resource management because they understand and acknowledge that a river is not a collection of segments that can be managed as separate units.

The catchment approach to water and riparian management recognises that all activities in the catchment can and do have an effect on water. The catchment model also emphasises the importance of having the willing cooperation of all those

residing, or with interests, in the catchment if sustainable management of our water resources is to occur.

2.6 Participation of Maori

While it is recommended that resource managers and landowners consult with Maori, they need to recognise that there may be aspects of Maori's relationship with a catchment that will remain confidential. However, this should not prevent resource managers from encouraging the active participation of tiaki. Participation represents explicit recognition by landowners and resource managers that it is the responsibility of tiaki to protect a waterway.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

- tiaki be given the opportunity to participate in the development of water management plans, riparian management plans and restoration and enhancement programmes
- tiaki be actively involved in determining acceptable management regimes, especially the setting of minimum flows and water quality standards.

The active participation of Maori recognises that tiaki know the waterways for which they have traditional responsibility. They know why and how the rivers were valued and used by Maori. More importantly from a resource manager's and landowner's point of view, Maori can describe how the attributes of the waterway have changed over time.

