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**Māori Cosmology and Bio-Diversity Offsets**

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This discussion is about Māori cosmology or the Māori world view and how this may impact on the bio-diversity offsets policy. It's important to acknowledge that these concepts are complex and so I will speak to them to the extent that I understand them.

The presentation will focus on the Māori world view, including the difference between a Māori world view and the Western Environmental Management Paradigm; however, I will also touch on the inherent conflicts with bio-diversity offsets and some steps that may be taken to address these conflicts.

**What is the Māori world view?**

Traditionally Māori believe there is a deep connection between humans and the natural world. All life is connected. People are not superior to the natural order; they are part of it. This is similar to other indigenous cultures, which see all things as interconnected. In order to understand the world it is important to understand the relationships between different parts of this world. This is a holistic way of viewing the world that seeks to live within it as opposed to have dominion over it.

In contrast, the Western Environmental Management Paradigm, does not view the environment holistically, instead it seeks to isolate and compartmentalize nature into various areas. This can be seen in the legislation which is divided into various environmental areas like water, forestry etc.

Within the Māori world view we have some important concepts that help explain or guide this relationship to the environment. The most pertinent to the environment is the concept of kaitiakitanga. Kaitiakitanga means guardianship, protection, and preservation and it is a way of managing the environment, based on the traditional Māori world view.

The kaitiaki or guardians are those that exercise kaitiakitanga. The concept of kaitiakitanga encompasses ideas of obligation and responsibility that are inherent in the terms guardianship. Unlike management within the Western world view, a kaitiaki can be likened to a trustee. Trustees in their capacity as a trustee must exercise their authority in a way that is in the best interest of the beneficiaries of the trust. The kaitiaki exercise kaitiakitanga in relation to the environment and the beneficiaries are the future generations. Importantly, unlike western management, this responsibility is considered mandatory.

Kaitiakitanga is connected to the concept of whanaungatanga, which is often described as kinship. Whanaungatanga is about being part of a larger whole of the collective. Māori are

related to all living things and thus express whanaungatanga with their surroundings. Whanaungatanga is about knowing you are not alone, but that you have a wider set of acquaintances that you share a reciprocal relationship with. Whanaungatanga is the antithesis of western models of individualism, interdependence as opposed to independence is the goal of whanaungatanga.

Beneath these important aspects of the Māori world view lay the concepts of mana, tapu and mauri.

Mana can be described in a number of ways but a phrase often used is spiritual power. Everything has mana, varying levels of it, including the natural environment. The more abundant, the more mana, and so, the more bio-diversity, the more mana a place has.

Tapu is something sacred or holy and tapu refers to spiritual restrictions. The more tapu a place the more restrictions there will be. Tapu was used as a way to control how people behaved towards each other and the environment, placing restrictions upon society to ensure that society flourished. For mana to be expressed there must be restrictions in place.

Restrictions could include of use, which may be permanent or temporary. For example Kumutoto Stream was traditionally a birthing stream that was tapu (or restricted) for birthing practices. Men were not allowed to use the stream, nor was the stream to be used for food or drinking purposes. In a practical sense, a restriction could relate to seasonal fishing or water use. For example disallowing water to be taken from an area susceptible to drought in summer.

Mauri is the life force in all things. Everything possesses mauri. It allows things to grow, flourish, and be abundant. Mauri must be protected for mana to flow.

These concepts are all interrelated. The kaitiaki exercise kaitiakitanga in order to preserve mana. Tapu must be respected in order to preserve mana. Mauri must also be respected and preserved because a reduction in mauri reduces mana, which reduces the ability for the kaitiaki to exercise kaitiakitanga over the land. The kaitiaki do this because of the whanaungatanga and the individual responsibility placed on kaitiaki to protect the interests of the collective unit.

The reason the role of kaitiakitanga is so important because many elements of the natural world are central to the identity and mana of those who are connected to the land. This sense of identity and connection is explained through the concept of whakapapa.

Whakapapa is what binds or connects the relationships we have to the land and people. Whakapapa means that we are intimately linked to those we are related to, which extends to their mauri and mana. Thus a reduction in someone else's mauri or mana, or something else's mauri or mana, has an effect on our own.

Whakapapa is explained through kōrero (stories) and tātai (genealogies). Kōrero are passed down to teach us about the natural world and our place within it. They tell us how we should act in relation to it in order for it to be protected and preserved. Often the kōrero are

examples from the natural environment, such as interactions between species and interactions within ecosystems.

The reason whakapapa is important is because it allows people to locate themselves in the world, geographically, environmentally, and in relation to their human ancestors. It links them to ancestors who lived on the land and invested it with meaning. By recalling these events, people layer meaning and experience onto the land. While genealogy emphasizes our relationship to human ancestors, whakapapa encompasses blood relationships as well as environmental and spiritual connections.

### **Conflict with bio-diversity offsets**

How does this fit with bio-diversity offsets. From a purely practical point of view bio-diversity offsets is a perfect example of compartmentalizing nature. I can take one area and swap it for another. This fits within the Western Environmental Management Paradigm because it views nature in isolation.

Hopefully you can see how this does not fit with the Māori world view. To develop on a site that is of cultural significance essentially means reducing its mauri, not respecting its tapu, both of which reduces its mana, of not only the place but the people who whakapapa to it. This then effects the ability of the kaitiaki to exercise kaitiaki effectively, which is not honouring whanaungatanga.

In this way we can see how financial compensation, and establishing new locations to recreate the destroyed or affected habitat may replace the loss in bio-diversity but it will not be able to replace the spiritual and cultural connections to the land.

### **Steps to acknowledge the world view**

In modern living it is inevitable that we will have to develop in places that are of cultural significance. The most important thing that can be done is inclusion of the kaitiaki in policy design as well as in the decision-making process. It may be that the design can be changed and adapted to provide for cultural elements, which only the kaitiaki are able to contribute to the design process.

One thing that is being pushed for in Wellington is a naming of our drains that were once streams. These names are going to be visible and in that way we begin to restore the mana of the specific site. Names in the form of signage can also include elements of the history of the place in order to illustrate the sacredness or importance of a site.

Another step that can be taken includes diversion of stormwater and sewerage from streams. In Māori, the mixing of water depletes the mauri of the water body. Thus if any drainage systems are to be included in a development, a reduction in the mixing of water should be factored into the planning. Pipes could also be designed in a way that promotes fish passage.

If fish can migrate and thus survive in spite of piping, then their presence increases the mauri and thus the mana of the water.

Art is another avenue that can promote mana. Traditional sculptures and carvings can be used to tell stories and the history of a site, which is a further way of acknowledging the significance of an area.

Overall, when considering the cultural implications of development, it is important to be open minded and also be willing to be flexible and able to adapt to something you do not necessarily understand. What I mean by this is that there will be conventional practices that may not be appropriate from a Māori perspective because of the spiritual and cultural elements that are central to Māori. What I have found is that there are occasions where what is considered best practice in the area of conservation is not appropriate for Māori, or it may be that the practice is appropriate, but in order to respect the exercise of kaitiakitanga by the kaitiaki, they must be consulted before an action is carried out.

As part of my work with the Society for Conservation Biology, I have been involved in the restoration of Kumutoto Forest. Part of this has included learning about the concepts I have spoken about and how they relate to this site. In a practical sense it has meant engaging with iwi, talking to oral historians, and always seeking guidance before acting, even if from a Western view point the action is considered safe and minor. The Karaka tree provides a good example. Many ecologists would like to remove Karaka because its self-seeding capability means it can dominate unestablished areas and overtake other plants, particularly natives, reducing their ability to establish and survive. However, importantly the Karaka is of cultural significance to Māori. It was an important food source and large Karaka groves are evidence of the historical presence of mahinga kai (food gardens) that would have been used by early Māori. Thus, although ecologically and scientifically there are sound reasons for removing Karaka, from a cultural perspective we need to be more cautious and consider a number of essential factors before a decision is made. A decision that should include the kaitiaki.

### **Take home message**

My overall aim is to provide an insight into the Māori world view and the reason why including kaitiaki at all levels of the decision-making process is essential for respecting the spiritual components that are sacred to Māori. Although there is an inherent conflict between biodiversity offsets and the Māori world view; the challenges presented can be addressed as long as care and consideration are given to this view, which ideally will be identified and catered for in the final policy document.

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