



THE MUTUALLY BINDING NATURE OF KAITIAKITANGA

STORYING KAITIAKITANGA: A KAUPAPA
MĀORI LAND AND WATER FOOD STORY



KAITIAKITANGA IS STARTING TO BECOME USED IN NEW ZEALAND LANGUAGE GENERALLY AND SOME OF THE KEY MĀORI CONCEPTS ARE STARTING TO MAKE THEIR WAY IN. BUT THEY'RE ALSO BECOMING CORRUPTED IN A WAY TOO. FOR EXAMPLE, KAITIAKITANGA GETS BLANDLY THOUGHT OF AS STEWARDSHIP OR GUARDIANSHIP BUT IT'S MORE THAN THAT. IT'S NOT ONLY THE WAY YOU CARE FOR SOMETHING, IT'S THE WAY IT CARES FOR YOU. IT'S THE INTERACTION, IT'S NOT YOU DOING SOMETHING THAT'S OUT THERE. (JOHN REID, 2018).

John Reid, Te Herenga Waka marae, 2018

HE KAUPAPA INTRODUCTION

How can understanding kaitiakitanga, in all its diverse dimensions, help shape new Māori food production practices? This quote from John Reid (Ngāti Pikiao) highlights the importance of understanding kaitiakitanga as a reciprocal and mutually binding relationship that has the potential to reshape how we understand Māori food production and consumption. John is currently a senior Research Fellow at the University of Canterbury whose work examines the role of historical trauma in shaping current conditions. With a background in Māori land development, John also contributes to sustainable tribal development, particularly for Ngāi Tahu, known for their mahika kai practices. John has a long-standing passion for the environment, encouraged in part by a childhood spent in the Hokianga with his grandparents who grew and hunted and fished for their own kai and who lived without electricity. As John recalls:

I just loved that way of life, how simple it was, how quiet it was and just having that sense of kaitiaki there, the forest and all that sort of stuff. There was that sense of being emotionally connected, embedded in place and a way of life that means you have a point in comparison about how you should treat people and land and water and so on. That sort of resonated with me.

John's work is underpinned by the healing powers of our connections with the whenua and the mutual obligations underpinning the relationship between tangata, whenua and awa.



Taramea growing in the high country

HE KAWA KAITIAKITANGA VALUES



Taramea products produced by Ngāi Tahu

John's research supports Māori land owners to develop projects that can enhance the mauri of both peoples and ngā taonga katoa. One project has involved helping Ngāi Tahu produce high value greenhouse-grown and certified organic products that can offer a competitive price-point at the same time as help regenerate the land. Another project has focused on helping consumers access the mahika kai of Ngāi Tahu (titi, eel, seafood etc.) via an online platform called Ahikā Kai. John's role was to help connect whānau food producers with a market that would be attracted by the food provenance story and the role of kai in Ngāi Tahu identity formation. A more recent project involves working with taramea, a high country spiky grass that Ngāi Tahu once used to make perfume worn in a pouch around the neck. Retrieving the

mātauranga Māori surrounding this grass is also an act of kaitiakitanga. As John notes:

We had to look up all the old recipes but all the knowledge had been lost. There were some people who knew generally about how their great grandfather or grandma used to go and harvest it. So we did some research into the history that was left. Exact ingredients we couldn't find. For example, there was a specific moss but we still had to make the taramea ingredient.

While a French perfume company was interested in partnering with Ngāi Tahu to take the product to international markets, Ngāi Tahu have decided to take it slowly, and to focus on making an oil before developing the perfume. The oil is available in Ngāi Tahu tourism stores.

KI UTA KI TAI THE WIDER LANDSCAPE

A key challenge related to ahika kai is how to maintain it in relation to the wider land and waterscapes they are connected to. John argues that you cannot think about koura, pipi or tuna without thinking about their relationship to coastal environments free of pollution. By extension, you cannot think about coastlines without thinking about the forested lands further inland and the rivers that run through farms. Maintaining ahika kai requires a whole of landscape approach that cannot be achieved by Māori alone. According to John:

[Māori] can do all these little projects but to actually maintain the culture that's embedded in mahinga kai, you have to work at a national policy level and regional levels all the way through to recalibrate the way in which the landscape is being managed. That's the way I tend to try and work at that scale with building standards for agriculture. I spent five years building scientific standards for these areas because they won't listen to anything that's not science based. We've been working with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations on their food sustainability standards. It's cascading down from an international level, all the way down.

This holistic approach to landscapes and food, and the mauri enhancing potential of this woven universe approach, runs counter to prevailing social practices that break elements into distinct parts. The severing of tangata from whenua is one such compartmentalised logic and John sees this logic as part of a longer and larger history of trauma born of

colonisation. The way to heal this trauma is through reconnection back to landscapes and waterways, which some call land therapies. According to John:

There's good research emerging suggesting land healing is absolutely key. Up in North America they'll even do a lot of the ceremonies and all the rituals that get built around connecting people with land, it's just integral psychology in healing and spiritual development, because they're one and the same thing. Separation from land becomes a separation from yourself, your identity is entwined with your other whanaunga, which is the land and your tupuna which are everything around you.

There are some good news stories about how Māori-led kaitiakitanga practices are having an impact. John relates the example of the Ngāi Tahu Kaikoura runaka who gathered together all those who had an interest in the local marine ecosystem to discuss the current exploitation of that coastal area. Drawing on the Māori concept of gifts and gains, all parties agreed to take less from the waters so that the ecosystem could revive. The government followed this initiative up a few years later with a change to legislation to implement this form of kaitiakitanga. John believes that iwi management plans are slowly starting to shift the perceptions of non-Māori. Underscoring the value of communicating kaitiakitanga, John says:

If you talk in the right way and you work in the right way whether they're farmers or whatever, they'll get it. If you get it in the right terminology in words they'll understand.



High country field work

ahikā**kai**
NGĀI TAHU FOODS



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See [our website](#) for more info on the Storying Kaitiakitanga project.

KO TE WHENUA TE WAIU MO NGĀ URI WHAKATIPU

THE LAND AND RESOURCES WILL PROVIDE SUSTENANCE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

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OUR LAND
AND WATER

Toitū te Whenua,
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