

NGĀ TOHU

RECLAIMING AND PRESERVING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE OF
COASTAL AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS



Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge - Tangaroa Programme
Project T3 Nga Tohu o te Ao: Utilising Maramataka as a Framework for
Marine Management

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Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge
Tangaroa Programme
Project T3 Nga Tohu o te Ao
Utilising Maramataka as a Framework for Marine Management

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TE PIRINGA

OUR STORY

HOW WE CAME TOGETHER

"Building relationships is not difficult, it's a natural and normal thing, we do it every day, its not a single event, it takes time, it takes genuine intention and true commitment, it is life..."

Across Aotearoa whānau are actively reclaiming traditional knowledge and practices regarding maramataka. More and more we see maramataka being used to realign everyday living with the natural energies of the environment. Ngā Tohu is a research project that aims to reclaim and preserve traditional knowledge of maramataka to inform transformative practice in marine monitoring and management.

The Ngā Tohu Research Collective is made up of three case study groups, an advisory group and Manaaki Te Awanui research group. The research collective will work together over a series of wānanga throughout the program, to support development of maramataka knowledge and practice in each of the case study areas. This collective approach provides the foundations for the Ngā Tohu project and will underpin all research activities. Fundamental to this collective approach is engagement and relationship building. This report will explore some key features of engagement that have allowed us to come together as a research group and will identify some of the core principles that have guided us throughout the program so far.

This report will not attempt to prescribe a proven method for engagement nor will it propose how to engage, rather it will share our story and experiences, and will describe how our learnings have shaped the project and how we intend on developing relationships into the future. The report will share kōrero and experiences from our research collective, gathered through semi structured interviews and kōrero during wānanga. It will draw out learnings that have helped guide our interactions and engagement practices.

NGĀ POU

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT



HONO: Connection

"Engagement is about building relationships, and relationships in this case is about people, we're all just people and we have to make connections and build those relationships.."



HĀNGAI: Alignment

"You cant go to a place with a kaupapa and think that everyone is going to be on board, you cant set up a kaupapa and assume that whānau will be willing to tick your boxes. You need to work together to find alignment..."



TIKA: Prioritise

"Spending more time with the whānau without even discussing the projects, but just establishing that trust and relationship..."



TIAKI: Safety

"Not only physical safety but, spiritual and emotional safety, we have too consider safety of not only the people but their history, their korero their culture...."



ĀTA: Commitment

"We think about engagement at the beginning and at the end. But actually, engagement has to happen the whole way through with everybody who comes in and out of kaupapa. Engagement is never ending...."

HONO

Connection

Connection or Whakapapa is a fundamental principle of Te Āo Māori. Connection to the people, land, sky and water is embedded in every part of Māori culture. Connection is the basis of Māori culture, it is the source of Māori cultural identity, health, wellbeing, strength and resilience. It is through whakapapa that we are able to connect.

"Engagement is about building relationships, and relationships in this case is about people, we're all just people and we have to make connections and build those relationships..."

When looking to build the Ngā Tohu research collaborations we took cautious and considered steps. It was important to make connections to whānau and kāinga (ancestral home) areas that we were connected to not only through whakapapa but through lived experiences and interaction.

Connecting to people who were either whānau, friends, or mentors, meant there was already an established relationship based on trust. This naturally opened the first lines of communication and allowed for further engagement with the case study groups.

"I guess the biggest benefit of having those establish connections is an element of trust with the whānau, but with that comes responsibility...."

HĀNGAI

Alignment

When engaging we can't assume that our kaupapa is going to be of value, or of benefit to whānau. If we want to work alongside whānau we need to find alignment.

"You cant go to a place with a kaupapa and think that everyone is going to be on board, you cant set up a kaupapa and assume that whānau will be willing to tick your boxes. You need to work together to find alignment..."

In the early stages of Ngā Tohu development, it was important that we had a good understanding of the mahi that was already being done in the different areas. We didn't want to create a new kaupapa rather we wanted to establish Ngā Tohu as a space to enhance already existing kaupapa. It was important that we found the right fit, the right alignment.

Because our team had established whānau connections to the case study areas, there was already a general understanding around what kaupapa were current and important. The next stage involved lots of kōrero, around priorities and broader aspirations. In doing so we were able to identify alignment with the collective Ngā Tohu project.

We also visited the case study groups in their rohe, this helped to not only intellectualise the project alignments, but we were able to connect to the people, moana and whenua on a more personal level.

"..Going back to kanohi ki te kanohi and that being the first stage of engagement and going out and meeting whānau in their place.... it's not till you get there and you get to feel the issues. You can see the issues. You can hear the issues. And I think that's the biggest part of engagement, being there, and understanding what the real problems are..."

Takapoukura, Te Hiku

TIKA

Proritise

Tikanga acknowledges that nothing exists in isolation; our actions are bound by a network of layers linking to the past, present and future. Tikanga are practices that acknowledge and strengthen connections, and they help us to prioritise our interactions and engagement behaviours and processes.

In the initial stages of the project, we spent time getting to know the case study groups as individual groups. The next stage focused on creating spaces so that the whole collective could connect in safe culturally appropriate ways. We turned our efforts to the whole collective and focused on whakawhānaungatanga, building relationships first.

During the lock down we attempted to utilise online platforms to connect as a collective, and although these forums provided us with helpful tools that we will continue to utilise throughout the project, they were limited in their ability to connect on a personal level.

Post lockdown we prioritised whakawhanangantanga in our first kanohi ki te kanohi wānanga (face to face gathering). This wānanga saw the whole research collective come together for the first time. Guided by kawa and tikanga we were able to connect, share and come together on a more personal and spiritual level, grounding Ngā Tohu collective and solidifying the foundations for the project.

"Having the ability to spend more time with the whānau without even discussing the projects, but just establishing trust and relationships..."

"We all started hanging out without having any discussion about research. And become friends through being there and doing the mahi. Creating relationships both in mahi and outside of mahi building trust ...and then the research became just the research..."



TIAKI

Safety

Tiaki is a holistic approach to care and recognises the importance of protecting the whole being; physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional. Care must be taken to ensure that whānau feel safe and supported to direct their own knowledge development journey.

As mentioned earlier, Ngā Tohu is wānanga based. During wānanga the research collective come together in a safe environment to learn, share and create. These wānanga are marae based and allow whānau to connect with people, korero and taiao in comfortable and familiar spaces.

“Having wānanga at a marae always gives me a feeling of safety...”

In the initial set up of the project our researchers were able to connect with people from their kāinga, who naturally drew in other people keen to be involved. At this level of engagement there was a feeling of security and trust, however when we moved towards connecting with the wider Ngā Tohu research collective, there were feelings of apprehension and concern throughout the collective.

In feeling this unease, each researcher without formal organisation or pre-planned expectation, took on the responsibility for the safety of their own whanau case study group. Each researcher assumed the role of kaitiaki for their whānau. Through this conduit role we were able to create safe spaces for kōrero between whānau and the larger collective.



Waipa, Tauranga

ĀTA

Commitment

Āta is a commitment to building and nurturing relationships. Āta incorporates humility, care and planning. It reminds people of how to behave when engaging in relationships with people, kaupapa and environments. Āta takes into consideration time, it acknowledges the past, present and future and demands flexibility and fluidity in project development and delivery.

You can't fast forward engagement, it isn't an event in the project's timeline, it is the project. It generally starts years before the project kicks off and if done well it will continue for years after.

We will continue to nurture the collective relationships throughout the Ngā Tohu project, keeping connected, fostering open lines of communication, ensuring there are pathways for discussion, cultivating safe spaces for collective kōrero and creative thinking.

At our most recent wānanga it was decided by the collective that each case study whānau would host one of the five wānanga scheduled throughout the project. This practice of tonono, is a beautiful expression of whanaungatanga and collective commitment to the Ngā Tohu kaupapa. Through this practice each case study whānau will not only have the chance to express manaakitanga for people and kaupapa, in their own unique way, but as a collective we will have the opportunity to connect on a more personal level to the places and people that make up the Ngā Tohu project.



Tokomaru Bay, East Coast

WĀNANGA

CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR COLLECTIVE ENQUIRY AND LEARNING

Wānanga is a kaupapa Māori method of inquiry that acknowledges and upholds traditional Māori values and practices, allowing collective exploration of knowledge in a unique Māori way. Ngā Tohu is wānanga based, we aim to hold 5 collective wānanga throughout the duration of the project, each one in a different case study area.

We acknowledge that as the Ngā Tohu wānanga moves from place to place, it will continue to form and develop, based on the kawa and tikanga of that place. In our first kanohi ki te kanohi wānanga, we identified some key elements of wānanga that helped to create a safe space for the people and kaupapa. These learnings have been collated, summarised, and presented here, and will continue to guide us throughout our future wānanga.



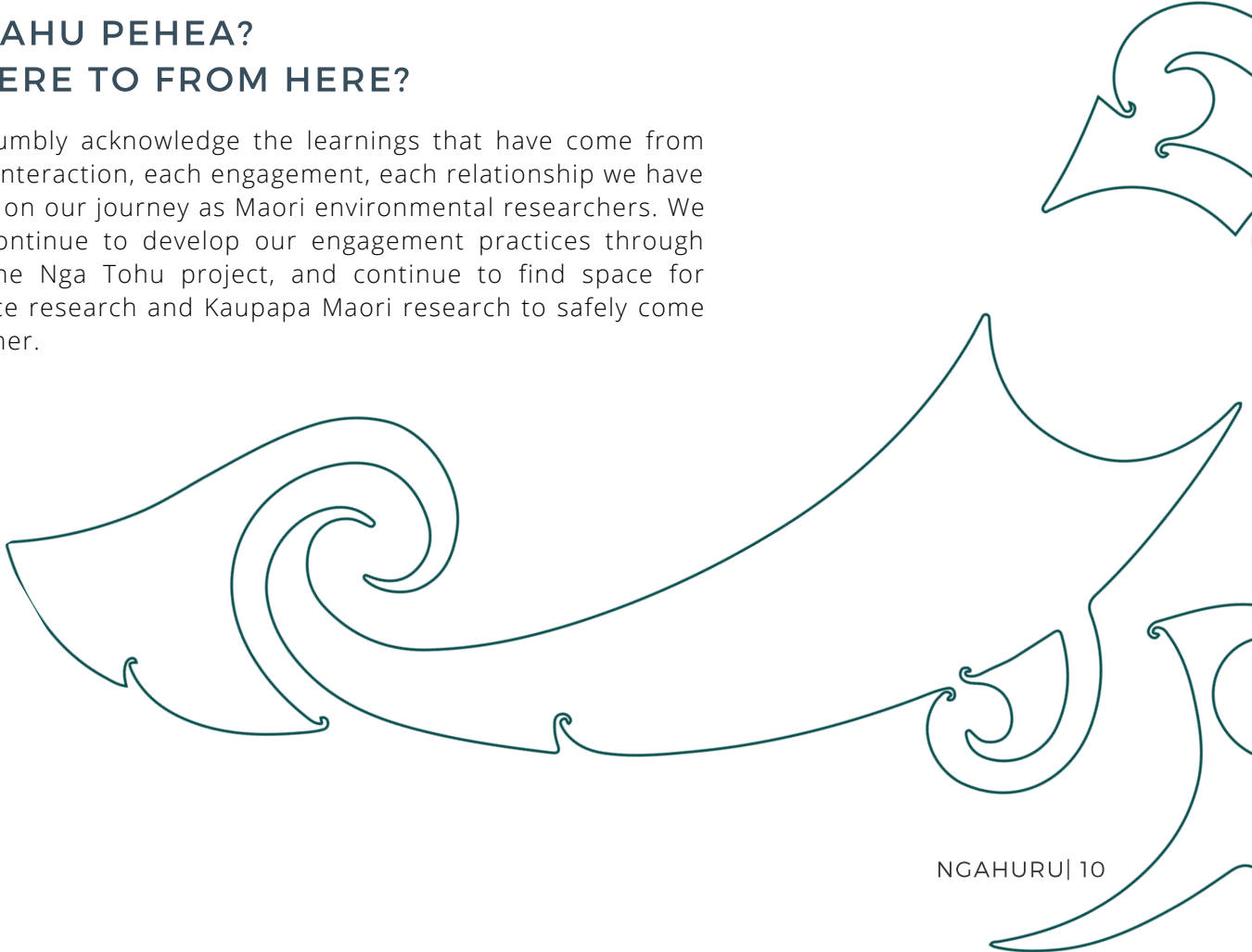
"Ko te mea nui, ka noho marae tātou. Ka āta wetewete, āta wānanga ngā kōrero maha i roto i te haumaruru o ō tātou nei tikanga..."



Motuhoo, Tauranga

**ME AHU PEHEA?
WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

We humbly acknowledge the learnings that have come from each interaction, each engagement, each relationship we have made on our journey as Maori environmental researchers. We will continue to develop our engagement practices throughout the Nga Tohu project, and continue to find space for science research and Kaupapa Maori research to safely come together.





Takapoukura, Te Hiku



*Te Waiotu Stream,
Tokomaru Bay, East Coast*