

Listening to the voices of our harbours: Kāwhia, Manukau and Whangarei

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Mai Hawaikinui ki Whangaparāoa, huri ki Tāmaki, ki Whangarei, ka hoki anō ki Tāmaki. Whiti atu ki te Mānukanuka o Hoturoa. Ka haere ki Mōkau, ka taka te punga. Ka hoki ake ki Kāwhia kai, Kāwhia tangata, Kāwhia moana. Ka tū ko Hani rūa ko Puna. This kōrero hikoi, wordsmithed by Hukiterangi Muru for our recently awarded Marsden project, traces the harbour routes travelled by the Tainui waka, which is said to have been guided into the Kāwhia Harbour by Paneiraira, a taniwha water creature and kaitiaki. The English translation is ‘From Hawaiki to Whangaparāoa, then to Tāmaki, then to Whangarei and returning to Tāmaki, crossing over to the Manukau Harbour. Continuing on to Mokau, Turning to Kāwhia, Kāwhia the waters, Kāwhia the sustenance, Kāwhia the people. The resting place of Hani and Puna, the prow and stern of the Tainui canoe’.

Our research focuses on ‘kaitiakitanga’ and on ‘harbours’, stemming from the intersection of these in the Manukau Harbour claim, led by the late Dame Nganeko Minhinnick, which was central to kaitiakitanga becoming a key concept in law and policy. We will investigate kaitiakitanga as an ethic and flaxroots politic, emphasising the work of community activists at multiple levels, from the shores and waters of their harbours to the steps of Parliament.

The word kaitiakitanga was mobilised by Māori rights activists in the 1980s, in strategic campaigns to defend their lands and waters from environmental desecration. The inclusion of kaitiakitanga in legislation and policy developed in the context of increasing neoliberal and Third Way politics, where the government sought to devolve many of its responsibilities to ‘stakeholders’. Central and local government tend to use the term kaitiaki as a convenient Māori shorthand for stakeholder, recognising Māori ‘interests’ and requesting their labour without relinquishing power or offering reward. This project will provide a fuller description of kaitiakitanga, including its evolution since the 1980s, and the impact of law and policy on its practice today.

Our aim is to focus on the critically important and threatened environment of harbours. When the first voyagers arrived in Aotearoa they sought whaanga: sheltered bays in which to draw up their waka and come to land. Hundreds of years later, the first Europeans did the same. Aotearoa’s harbours are and have always been coveted and contested sites for navigation, industry, fishing, recreation and settlement. Historically they are important places of meeting, negotiation and exchange. They are where land, sea and people come together. Yet there has never been a comprehensive study of harbours and their significance to New Zealanders or to Māori. Most written histories of individual harbours, if they mention Māori history at all, sail over it swiftly and shallowly before moving on to a narrative about Pākehā industry. What are the stories Māori tell about their harbours and their relationships with harbours? How do kaitiaki understand these places and how to best use and care for them?

This project arose from conversations with flaxroots Māori. Despite the prevalence of kaitiakitanga kōrero in the literature, the voices of those with daily responsibilities for it are seldom heard. Our case study approach, building from our established

relationships with Māori communities in Waikato and Tai Tokerau, is necessary to explore the diverse local expressions of kaitiakitanga. Through our collaborations with tangata whenua from the harbours, we will investigate ways in which mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga (and related terms) interact with local and central government ways of knowing and treating the environment. We will explore kaitiakitanga as a political movement and a network of concepts and relationships, varying between places and communities, and changing over time.

We will listen to, and gather, stories of the Kāwhia, Manukau and Whangarei Harbours. These harbours cover a representative range of ecological states and threats, economic uses, and inter-iwi relationships. This project is not a comparative study, but an in-depth study of kaitiakitanga over harbours based on detailed case study analysis. The three sites will be put in national context by analysing documentary resources on kaitiakitanga across the motu. Our project builds on and broadens the important precedent set by Merata Kawharu in her 1998 PhD thesis on kaitiakitanga and subsequent publications, as well as work undertaken by Māori Marsden, Nganeko



Kāwhia Harbour (Photo: Gerald Lanning).

Minhinnick, Margaret Mutu, Angeline Greensill, Jacinta Ruru and others. Our focus on harbours allows us to look at dynamics of land and sea kaitiakitanga, as well as the multiple human relationships that are drawn together through harbours.

The narrow bureaucratic space in which central and local government allow for kaitiakitanga often hinders its full exercise, and fails to cater for the wider obligations, rights and spiritual dimensions that are fundamental to it. The first kaitiaki were atua, taniwha and other natural phenomena. Local meanings of kaitiakitanga come from its interplay with other Māori concepts such as mauri, rāhui, taniwha, mātauranga, rangatiratanga, mana, kotahitanga, whanaungatanga and whakapapa. Our study recognises that these terms are interpreted and practiced differently by different iwi, hapū, whānau and marae. We seek to learn how people have enacted kaitiakitanga in their daily lives, in continuation of tradition and in response to environmental degradation and appropriation. Kaitiakitanga today takes various forms, from upholding tikanga in interactions with the environment and passing knowledge on to future generations, to political work in conversation and contest with the state, such as letter writing, submission writing, legal action and protest.

Our study will go beyond the dominant voices of tribal spokespeople who are given preference by the Crown, government and iwi authorities. We are committed to including the full range of community voices, including the kōrero of kaumātua, rangatahi and particularly wāhine Māori. Women's leadership is especially important as it is underrepresented in existing literature.

Strong Māori women such as Nganeko Minhinnick, Tuaiwa Hautai (Eva) Rickard, Angeline Greensill, Carmen Kirkwood, Dayle Takitimu, Pania Newton and others less well-known have played a fundamental role in the activation of kaitiakitanga in relation to harbours. Furthermore, there is a rich history of tūpuna wāhine associated with harbours, including Whakaotirangi at Kāwhia; Puhihuia and Te Ata-i-Rehia at Manukau; and Kuiawai, Reitū and Reipae at Whangarei. The time for this research is now: harbours are under accelerating environmental pressure and Māori communities living on harbours are increasingly affected by climate change. Harbours around the country are the subject

of multiple claims under the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011, and Waitangi Tribunal claims over harbours are yet to be settled and are at the forefront of the next wave of Treaty settlements.

Our research project will reveal, for the first time, the complex and diverse nature of relationships that Māori have with local harbours. Our research seeks to demonstrate that the wholeness of kaitiakitanga can only be fully understood when applied in context with other Māori concepts used by tangata whenua in specific places. This study reclaims the political nature of kaitiakitanga and the work of the women and men who have fought to protect the environment and to be recognised as kaitiaki. It explores how the codification of kaitiakitanga into law and policy has hindered or assisted Māori in their exercise of kaitiakitanga over harbours.

Our Research Aims are:

- 1) To develop a fuller description of kaitiakitanga. We ask: what does kaitiakitanga mean now and how do Māori communities living around harbours understand their role as kaitiaki? Our project will examine the practice of kaitiakitanga and the way the concept operates in interaction with other Māori concepts such as mauri, rāhui, taniwha, mātauranga, rangatiratanga, mana, kotahitanga, whanaungatanga and whakapapa. At present, kaitiakitanga is referred to in political discourse as if it is a generic 'Māori' practice. Our project seeks to show there is a diversity of kaitiakitanga practices and knowledges, specific to places and the communities that live alongside those places. Communities notice and experience changes intimately, in a way that scientists cannot replicate. We also seek to document the evolution of kaitiakitanga in the face of environmental change like rising sea levels, biodiversity loss and plastic pollution.
- 2) To investigate how kaitiakitanga interacts with law and policy. Since Aotearoa was colonised, kaitiaki have had to interact with the colonists' laws and policies in order to influence decisions over their environments. Today's kaitiaki are forced to become experts in the Resource Management Act, the workings of the Environment Court, the Takutai Moana

claims process, letter and submission writing. Community leaders must attend numerous meetings with local government authorities and agencies. Whole lives are spent in this work. Our project seeks to honour these lives by laying out the complexity and challenges of being kaitiaki in modern legal and bureaucratic environments. We look to capture the fiercely political nature of kaitiakitanga. In bureaucratic discourse kaitiakitanga has been stripped of its teeth; it has become a catchphrase for Māori 'stewardship' and 'guardianship' of the environment, when kaitiakitanga has in fact been an urgent fight to stop the destruction and despoliation of sacred places and traditional food gathering sites. By documenting the obstructions Māori face in exercising kaitiakitanga our project will inform future legal and policy change in Aotearoa and potentially abroad.

- 3) To record the history and honour the visions, strategy and work of Māori activists in protecting Papatūānuku, her lands and waters. Māori activists have fought long and hard, and our project looks at their legacies. Central to this aim is the celebration and acknowledgment of wāhine Māori as kaitiaki.
- 4) To facilitate the recording of mātauranga for the benefit of participant communities. Importantly we will organise an international symposium, which will be a space for local and international experts to engage with local kaitiaki in order to share and disseminate knowledge. We will create a special environment breaking down barriers between scholars and community activists.
- 5) To advance Kaupapa and Tikanga methodologies and theories into new disciplinary areas and institutions. While these methods have flourished in education and public health they remain underdeveloped in anthropology, history and legal studies.

In achieving our research aims our project will contribute to the empowerment of Māori, advance human-environment, anthropological and oral history scholarship, and challenge narrow accounts of Māori history that neglect the full chorus of flaxroots voices.