

# MĀTAURANGA MĀORI MĀORI KNOWLEDGE

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Mātauranga Māori is a dynamic and evolving knowledge system referring to the observations, experience, study, and understanding of the world from an indigenous cultural perspective. To many this is often equated with 'cultural wisdom'. It encompasses the physical, such as 'use values', including mahinga kai (food gathering sites), through to the metaphysical, such as 'principles', including logic (whakaaroaro), ethics (tikanga), epistemology (whakaponotanga), resource management (kaitiakitanga), and spirituality (wairuatanga). A consistent theme from much of the literature on mātauranga Māori is the multifaceted nature of this knowledge system. As with 'Western' knowledge (i.e. knowledge brought to Aotearoa New Zealand by the settler European cultures), mātauranga Māori has both qualitative (verbal data) and quantitative (numerical data) aspects.

Some core Māori values that guide the management and monitoring of repo (wetlands) include whakapapa (genealogy), tikanga, rangatiratanga (right to exercise authority), mana whenua/hau kāinga (indigenous people with primary rights and responsibilities over an area), whanaungatanga (sense of family connection), kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga (hospitality), whakakotahitanga (unity), arohatanga (expression of compassion for others), and wairuatanga. These form the heart of many Māori frameworks and models, and also provide a basis for kaupapa Māori (an approach underpinned by Māori values) assessment, evaluation, decision-making, and natural resource management. In terms of natural resource management of repo, whakapapa is useful for identifying values associated with place that can help inform freshwater objectives and limits.



## WHAKAPAPA A CULTURAL CONNECTION TO PLACE AND RESOURCES

To confirm value, and in recognition of the interrelatedness and the interdependence of all things in the world, Māori commonly begin by reaffirming cultural connection and relationship to a place, or a resource, and articulate and describe particular resources and places that are 'highly valued'. This usually starts by providing whakapapa; for example, connection can involve recitals of ancestral lineage, stories, narratives, verse, whakataukī (proverbs), mōteatea (laments), pepeha (formulaic expressions of tribal identity), waiata (songs), kōrero (conversations), mātauranga (knowledge), etc., which together validate:

- connection to the resource (e.g. whakapapa)
- spiritual attachment to the resource (e.g. wairua)
- use of the resource (e.g. mahinga kai)
- a sense of wellbeing based on the resource (e.g. mauri (life force), wairua, oranga (health), whaiora (pursuit of wellness), and whanaungatanga).

Whakapapa is an integral part of all traditional Māori institutions and is a major determinant of rights to use, access, and management of natural resources. The implementation of whakapapa is through kaitiakitanga – the expression of a two-way relationship that involves obligations to give, receive, and repay. The role of tangata kaitiaki (resource manager) reflects the individual and collective role to safeguard ngā taonga tuku iho (treasures handed down) for present and future generations.

Previous page: Tupuna salute, te tira hoe o Waikato, Waikato River, 2015.  
Photo: Waikato Rauapatu River Trust

Māori values can be expressed in the physical environment in tangible geographical locations and in plants, animals, and associated habitats. These may include, for example:

- **wāhi tapu** – traditionally referred to sites or places of ritual constraint or prohibition, defined as "a place sacred to Māori in the traditional, spiritual, religious, or mythological sense", and generally used to acknowledge sacred sites; they include urupā (burial sites)
- **wāhi tupuna or wāhi taonga** – these can include ancestral sites and sites of significance, including historic pā sites (fortified village), tracks (ara), kāinga (settlements), marae (traditional gathering places), rock carvings, mahinga kai, cave areas, archaeological sites, tohu (signs, marks), traditional occupation sites, rock formations, and significant stands of forest or trees
- **mahinga kai** – areas, habitats, and locations where food of any sort is gathered, grown or hunted, including forests, repo, lakes, rivers, and cultivatable soils
- **taonga** – culturally significant native plants – wātakirihi (watercress), kuta (giant spike sedge), and harakeke (New Zealand flax); fish – matamata (whitebait) and kōura (freshwater crayfish); birds – ruru (morepork) and kawau (shags); and invertebrates – noke (earthworms).



Repo rōpū (Waikato iwi representatives) wānanga with Manaaki Whenua for the Wetland Restoration Programme, Hopuhopu nursery, 2016.  
Photo: Yvonne Taura

This section explores in more detail the application of mātauranga Māori and whakapapa as important drivers and foundational approaches for the restoration of valued repo across the motu (country). It is important to note that each hapū, iwi, and even whānau has gained generations of experience and knowledge unique to their 'part of the universe'. In turn, they also have their own process for incorporating and expressing their mātauranga in ways that are meaningful to them, and which can often be very distinct from the approaches of other hapū, iwi, and whānau – even within the same region. As with all other sections in this handbook, it is important that relationships are appropriately established with mana whenua/hau kāinga; and in doing so, that their knowledge is accorded the respect it deserves as a precondition for effective environmental restoration.



Te tira hoe o Waikato, Te Pūaha o Waikato, 2015.  
Photo: Waikato Raupatu River Trust

Te tira hoe o Waikato, Waihi Marae, 2015.  
Photo: Waikato Raupatu River Trust



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