



TE AO TŪROA

# Whakarite mai taku waka rangahau

Preparing our research waka for working in partnership

**SUSTAINABLE SEAS NATIONAL SCIENCE CHALLENGE**

Te Ao Māori Synthesis Programme:  
Waka Taurua



JUNE 2024







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## SUSTAINABLE SEAS NATIONAL SCIENCE CHALLENGE

**Te Ao Māori Synthesis Programme:**  
Waka Taurua

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S3: Synthesis of Tangaroa phase one research

S7: Ki uta ki tai: Estuaries thresholds and values

## Whakarite mai taku waka rangahau

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# Nō hea te kaupapa?

## Introduction

### THE SUSTAINABLE SEAS NATIONAL SCIENCE CHALLENGE

The [Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge](#) (the challenge) is a programme of research that has occurred from 2014 to 2024. Its focus is to “enhance utilisation of our marine resources within environmental and biological constraints”.



### FOCUS OF THE WAKA TAURUA ACTIVITY

As part of that work, the Te Ao Māori (TAM) Synthesis programme focuses on pulling together the key insights and lessons from the research within the challenge that were:

- completed within the Tangaroa theme
- were kaupapa Māori led
- worked specifically with whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori businesses.

This research and the researchers involved were collectively referred to as the Puna Kōrero.

Waka Taurua is one of the four activities that make up the TAM Synthesis programme, and is specifically focused on developing the theory for the Waka Taurua Framework. Please see the [He Waka Taurua](#) for more information about the framework and its application within the TAM challenge research. Please see the [Rūruku mai taku waka taurua](#) report for examples of waka taurua and factors contributing to their success.



# Analogy of the Waka Taurua

This report is the third within the Waka Taurua activity.



## This report:

- 1 — Focuses on understanding the lessons that the work completed by the Puna Kōrero within the challenge have highlighted.
- 2 — Explores some of the realisations shared by the Puna Kōrero.
- 3 — Looks at some of the ways to prepare for future research waka taurua, to enable continued successful collaborations working to implement these lessons moving forward.

As outlined in the [He Waka Taurua Report](#), the concept of Waka Taurua is that individual and otherwise separate waka can come together for an agreed purpose and a greater community benefit.

## EACH WAKA NEEDS SPACE AND ENOUGH TIME FOR PREPARATION

When thinking about applying this concept into spaces like research, marine management and governance, and then into localised hapū-based economy building, two critical components become clear.

- Each waka needs the space to assess an opportunity to enter into a waka taurua, to agree on the purpose of their taurua, and to contribute equally throughout the engagement in the taurua.
- Each separate waka needs to be adequately prepared before entering into a waka taurua.

These components sit alongside the idea that, at times, a waka may decide to not lash into a taurua. This is true no matter who is onboard the waka.

Preparation is vital to the success of any waka, whether using waka to fish, navigate to new unknown spaces or travel from place to place. Not only does the waka need preparing, the tools and implements which the people onboard need to do that activity also need preparing. This is a perfect analogy for how our project teams prepared their research waka, management waka, or governance waka.

## CONTINUAL PREPARATION OF WAKA IS ESSENTIAL FOR MOVING FORWARD

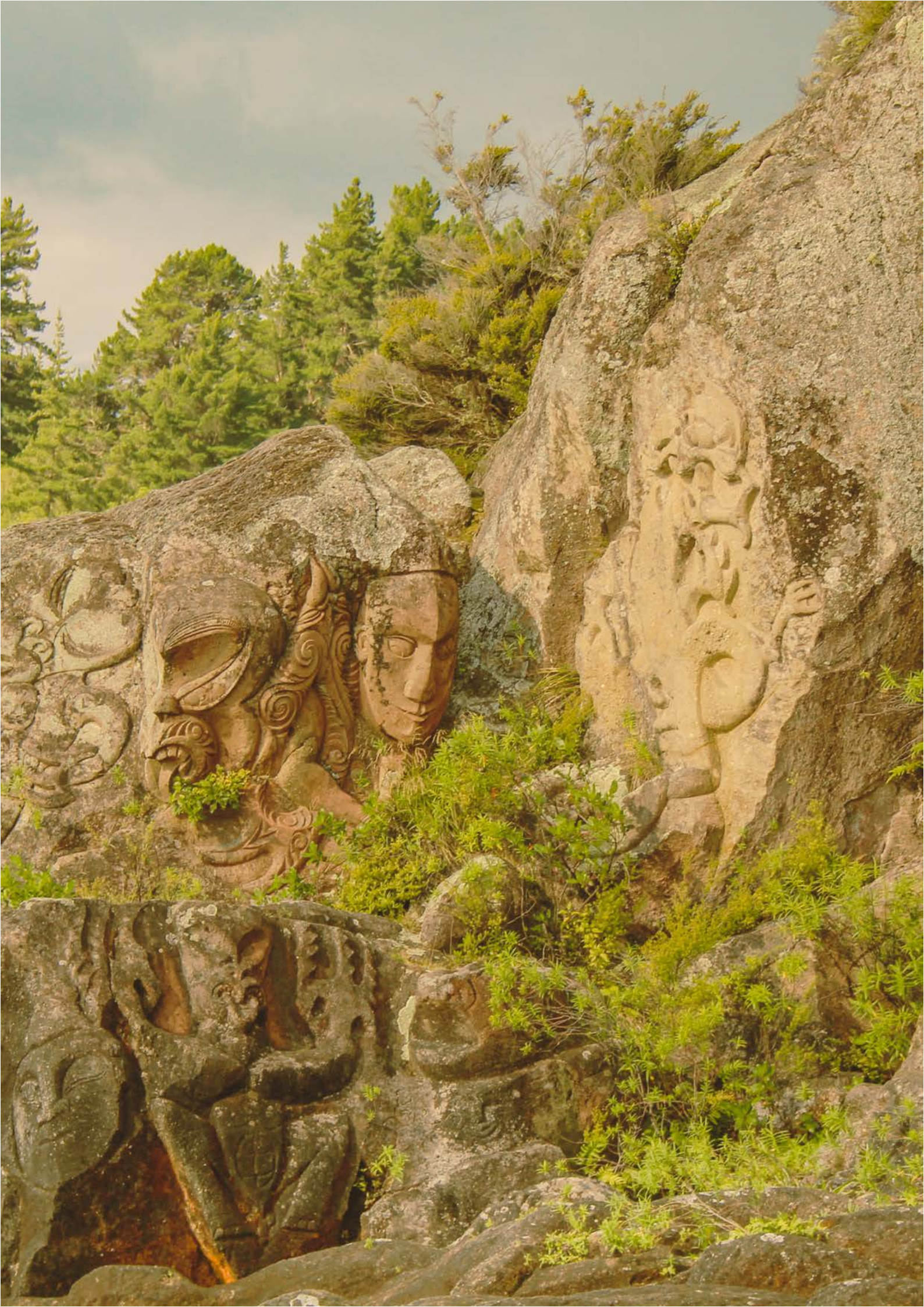
10 For some time now, the waka Māori has been working to repair, recover and reclaim the foundational knowledge, values and practice of this waka. Māori have been reinvigorating the practices and tools needed to implement these approaches as practitioners and growing as individuals on that waka, including reclaiming te reo and reconnecting with both knowledge and practice. Discussions with the Puna Kōrero reinforced this point, and it was suggested that continuing to prepare the Māori waka is essential to moving forward.

“In the mainstream space there’s so much depth right? Because it’s so common, there’s institutes of research and innovation, there’s engineering, there’s all of it... and I think the best part of our waka taurua is to have real strong authentic Māori origins. Because that’s the point of difference that we bring to the taurua.”

Note: Unless stated otherwise, all quotations in this report are from the Puna Kōrero of the Te Ao Māori Collective (TAMC) 2023.









# Reflections from the Waka Māori

The Puna Kōrero conducted research in waka taurua of many different kinds. Each of the research projects provided an opportunity for the people involved to experience and learn from, which then further prepared them for any future research partnerships. As a collective, the Puna Kōrero highlighted a range of reflections from this experience. Puna Kōrero researchers with our projects spanned across both 'Waka Māori' and 'Waka Taiwi', each highlighting some unique factors for their waka as well as shared learnings across both waka.

Below are some reflections from the Waka Māori.

## **FOCUS ON RESEARCH THAT IS SUCCESSFUL, RESPECTFUL, AND USABLE**

Some reflections from the Puna Kōrero members noted a heavier focus on successful, respectful, and usable research. This was due to the often personal nature of research partnerships (that is, working alongside their own communities).

## **FOCUS ON RESEARCH THAT IS SUCCESSFUL, RESPECTFUL, AND USABLE**

Other reflections noted that there was difficulty in delivering meaningful outcomes for the communities they worked with given the restrictive timeframes and resources to do that research. Some members even felt whakamā when meaningful outcomes could not be achieved.

"In many cases, those research ideas and results don't accrue back to them [the whānau]...and that's why... after our days with them... I felt like I was ripping them off... I really needed to actually spend time... whether it was at my own cost. But just to actually give assurance that I wasn't there just to take from them as part of an output. I did feel a little bit of whakamā that I may have been perceived in that way with them."

## RECOGNITION OF SKILLS, NETWORKS, KNOWLEDGE, AND PRACTICE IS VITAL

In addition, some felt that there can sometimes be a lack of recognition for the many skills, networks, knowledge and practice which whānau, hapū and iwi researchers in particular bring to a partnership.

Some of the Māori researchers in the Puna Kōrero also reflected on this, and identified that their experiences in 'mainstream' research space was a key to their desire to prepare and enter into space where genuine recognition for the pūkenga (experts) involved was reflected in the approach, resourcing and time given to their research partners. This insight was reiterated as an important factor for the successful and meaningful engagement of whānau, hapū, and iwi in research across the Puna Kōrero.

"When you're bringing in Māori into this space, they wear all of these pōtae (hats) and... there's no sort of clear qualification for it. It's just who we are as people... so I think it's important to understand who we are as Māori researchers."

"I think it's really important for us to outwardly bring to equal reckoning the expertise of the people in our communities. The ones who hold our ancestral knowledge, and for it to be considered with the same kind of mana as people operating in the scientific academic space." While these reflections may seem contrary to the success experienced by many of the TAMC, it is important to note as it can help to guide preparation of both waka for future waka taurua.



# Reflections from the Waka Tauwiwi

Some reflections from the researchers who placed themselves on the waka tauwiwi, included recognising the value of experience in their own personal preparation.

## LEARNING TO BUILD TRUST AND WORK IN PARTNERSHIPS IS INVALUABLE

Some researchers expressed feeling uncomfortable in their waka taurua, but that this was an important part of learning how to better work in partnerships. Many found that trust built up and increased through working together in their waka taurua, which was sometimes an uncomfortable, negotiated or shared space. The ultimate result was increased comfort moving forward.

“Coming into a place like the Sustainable Seas Challenge, feeling a little bit uncomfortable...”

“It’s definitely a personal journey for every researcher... and you know there’s an increased degree of comfort and operating in the space.”

## ONGOING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES ARE INVALUABLE

Some reflected on the ability to navigate shared and complementary knowledge systems allowed deep and continued relationships with community. In contrast, others identified that, despite their best intentions, circumstance disallowed the building of meaningful relationships.

“They now know who we are, the researchers involved, who they kind of trust and can call on some of us to help provide advice or contribute to complement some of their own knowledge as well, to work out how to deal with something.”

“We were hoping that the legacy we would leave behind would help them navigate those injustices, but we were just never able to stay around long enough to do so. So that was really unfortunate.”

“We didn’t build deep relationships... which was not purposeful.”





## CREATING SPACE FOR TRUST TO DEVELOP IS IMPORTANT

Across the Puna Kōrero, two key factors were identified that supported waka tauīwi researchers. The first factor was that having place-based Māori researchers enabled a pre-established trust in the work among partner communities, and helped to create space for themselves to demonstrate their own trustworthiness.

## STAYING HUMBLE AND BEING OPEN TO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The second factor was that their experience highlighted that feeling unprepared was okay, suggesting that, in these instances, the only requirement was to remain humble and open to the learning opportunity.

“The fact that we had Māori researchers who were place-based, that was the huge leap ahead...Just the difference of having that level of trust already in relationships... those people were able to broker to bring other people to the story.”

“Whilst I said I was prepared, you always have a level of humility in terms of, can I actually do what’s going to be asked of me?”

“You can read but you can’t experience... and so for me it was about actually recognising that very, very early on and being humble.”







# Reflections from experiences in a waka taurua

In general, our Puna Kōrero reflected on a range lessons from their experience in a waka taurua that applied no matter which waka they were in. A summary of those key reflections are noted below.

Be prepared to ask questions, and to openly and actively listen to answers.

Know that no one person has all the answers, knowledge or practice, and that each person brings their own pūkenga (expertise).

Be comfortable in the uncomfortable, and practise humility.

Be willing to declare yourself in ways that support transparency and trust building.

Enter your waka rangahau, and therefore the waka taurua with a disposition and desire to discover understanding.

Understand that experience is the best teacher and each experience will better prepare you for your next waka taurua.

Across all these reflections we see that one of the most important components is preparing yourself as an individual wanting to enter into a waka taurua.



# Preparing for work in a waka taurua

The Waka Taurua activity had the objective of understanding the concept and implementation of the Waka Taurua Framework in research conducted by the challenge. Additionally, it sought to understand ways to better prepare research waka for future waka taurua.

Our work within the TAM Synthesis programme has highlighted the need to focus on the dual tasks of giving time and resources to prepare the waka as well as preparing, as individuals, to do waka taurua based research.

The Puna Kōrero identified that particularly for the waka Māori, this level of preparation reveals the need and an opportunity to reclaim both the deep knowledge and cultural practice that make up the foundations of the waka.

## SIX RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WAKA TAURUA RESEARCH INTO THE FUTURE

Below are six recommendations for waka taurua research into the future. These recommendations are based off the work completed in the Waka Taurua activity, the learnings and reflections from the Puna Kōrero, and the understanding developed alongside the mātāpuna (cultural advisory group).

### 1. Identify in the beginning what your kūpenga is trying to catch

Ensure shared goals, intentions and commitment exist, and discuss and agree on these before lashing together. Such agreement can help set the course for your research, and combat feeling unprepared or uncomfortable as you journey together. To help achieve this, seek genuine alignment with the needs and outcomes desired by the intended partner communities. This will also enable partners to make an informed decision when agreeing to enter into the taurua. This process does not begin after the research is funded. Ideally it should start before the proposal writing phase so that the shared goals are reflected in the whole programme.

“That pre-proposal stage... there was lots and lots of time committed to talking and... giving the whānau time to understand whether it is for them. Finding key lines of alignment...”

One action that supported this, as identified by the Puna Kōrero, was to re-centre the taiao (the natural flows of environment), te ao tūroa (the natural world) and atua Māori (the divine entities) as a focus for outcomes, with the aim of finding a shared aspiration.

“The key to our ... mana motuhake, is in the understanding of the practice of our tikanga. The whakatauki I give to that is ‘ko te wai te kaikawe i te ora’, me kawa e wareware i tērā. As long as those are being taken into any project creation space, I think the mahi will continue with all the tika points, and will always get to the right goal.”

“It was about what’s best for the moana will be best for all of us as a community.”

## 2. Recruit the right crew members

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Ensure the right team of people is involved in the research. The team may not always have the same people in it, but recognises the varied and vast expertise of all involved and values each person’s contribution. Take time to consider who is on your waka, as this can greatly increase the potential for success and complementarity of skills. Consider not only the capability and capacity of your team, but how prepared and open they are to participate. Having team members who you trust or can build trust with, and who possess various skills, helps bring perspectives and solutions to the inevitable and unique challenges of research.

“It’s the preparedness of us as Māori in the space, but also how we prepare our whānau, I think are all critical.”

“I think the reason our waka was prepared is that we had the right working team.”

## 3. Take time to build your papanoho

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Be intentional in the early stages of lashing your waka taurua and building the papanoho. This action was highlighted as an integral component to consider. This action speaks to the intentional investment in meaningful and genuine engagement to establish your projects shared space. It means that you are planning in time to build trust, capacity and a shared understanding of the research, and directly investing the resource required for this phase. It also means understanding the uniqueness of our communities. Investing in these initial engagements was the most common factor identified for success.

“One of the key components, I think, of that success, is the hard work that was done at the start of the project.”

“Some... were getting frustrated, because it took two years to get off the ground... but once you actually start, because you have made that... “investment”.. you’ve actually built genuine relationships, and come to understand people, their history with the place and things they think are important... So that two years spent investing, and building those relationships, and understanding of people in place, have proven really beneficial.”

#### 4. Make and maintain the right tools

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Once our waka taurua is lashed and the papanoho is built, ensure that both the deck and the tools are maintained. Continually invest time and resources into the relationships that make up the waka taurua, throughout the whole project. Also be intentional and deliberate in actively developing research systems and practice that support whānau, hapū, and iwi in the research. This action could be as simple as ensuring whānau input and leadership into research proposals, plans and delivery, prioritising kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) interactions, or using wānanga as the core methodology. Ensuring all tools are tailored to suit is vital.

“We have been working for a number of years towards developing research systems and practice that supports whānau and hapū... We have learned along the way.”

#### 5. Persevere through the rough seas

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Recognise that the moana can be turbulent or calm, which requires careful navigation. The Puna Kōrero identified that it is inevitable that internal and external challenges to the research will emerge. Sometimes things will take a different shape, completely change or take longer than anticipated.

Be adaptive and flexible in real time when working with communities. Some instances will require patience. Many things can impact on research, including the priority of the research in the lives of the project partners. Many whānau, hapū and iwi operate across multiple spaces, often voluntarily, and in addition to their daily jobs. Understanding, perseverance and commitment to the shared goals agreed to at the start will support in navigating these challenges together.

“Being adaptive and flexible with this research and responding in real time... I think is hugely important.”

#### 6. Understand who and how you are trying to feed your community

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Make sure you consider who you are trying to feed in your communities, and be intentional with how you are trying to serve them. We collectively identified that this key element is not discussed often enough. Insufficient consideration of this key element is highlighted through the lens of communications. Only when you are clear about the audience for the research outcomes can you be intentional with how any outputs, resources or products will be of service. Whānau highlighted how useful they found a variety of outputs (such as videos, posters, summary reports, and technical documents) in serving different audiences and purposes. Being intentional with the production of outputs that serve our communities will help us to see the impact of the research from those involved ripple out in meaningful ways.

“We did a comms and engagement plan... A big component of our research from the beginning has been about how do we disseminate information out to those who need to hear it.”



“Comms was a very important part more to look at how do we move the hearts and minds of wider Aotearoa.”

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These recommendations serve as a contribution to anyone considering waka taurua based research practice. The list is not exhaustive. It also is no guarantee of success. Yet, drawing on the benefit of experience from the Puna Kōrero, we hope these recommendations provide a new starting point for future research.

# Kōrero whakakapi

## Wrap-up kōrero

The Waka Taurua Framework is a helpful tool to conceptualise ways to view marine research, management and governance. This visualisation can take many forms – from how teams are set up and organised, through to the knowledge systems used, and the kaupapa of the research.

This report has specifically drawn on key reflections from the Puna Kōrero to identify some ways to prepare ourselves and our research waka to work within a waka taurua more successfully into the future.

Our team hopes that the research in this report offers some guiding stars by which to navigate while working to continually improve research systems, approaches and responsiveness to the needs of our communities.





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