

TE PIRINGA

COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND
MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP BUILDING



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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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, it’s not a single event; it takes time, it takes genuine intention and true commitment”
(Rameka, 2020)*

Across Aotearoa, Māori communities are actively reclaiming traditional maramataka knowledge and practices, which are increasingly 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 consists of three case-study groups, an advisory group and Manaaki Te Awanui research group. The collective will work together over a series of wānanga throughout the programme in order to support the 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 approach is engagement and relationship building.

The report does not attempt to prescribe a proven method for engagement, nor does it propose how to engage; rather, it shares our story and experiences and describes how our learning has shaped the project and how we intend to develop future relationships. It explores some key components of engagement that have enabled us to work together as a research group and identifies some of the core principles that have guided us in the programme thus far. It also shares experiences and kōrero from our research collective, gathered through semi-structured interviews and kōrero during wānanga. Finally, it draws out learning that has 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 it's about people; we're all just people and we have to make connections and build those relationships..." (Taiapa, 2020).



HĀNGAI | ALIGNMENT

"You can't go to a place with a kaupapa and think that everyone is going to be on board; you can't set up a kaupapa and assume that whānau will be willing to tick your boxes. You need to work together to find alignment..." (Fairlie, 2020).



TIKA | PRIORITISE

"Having the ability to spend more time with the whānau without even discussing the projects, but just establishing trust and relationships..." (Fairlie, 2020).



TIAKI | SAFTEY

"Not only physical safety but spiritual and emotional safety; we have to consider safety of not only the people but their history, their korero their culture..." (Tuterangiwhiu, 2020).



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..." (Ratana, 2020).

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. This is the basis of Māori culture, and the source of Māori cultural identity, health, wellbeing, strength and resilience. It is whakapapa that enables us to connect.

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 to which we were connected through lived experiences and interaction as well as whakapapa..

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

"I guess the biggest benefit of having those established connections is an element of trust with the whānau, but with that comes responsibility..." (Fairlie, 2020).

HĀNGAI ALIGNMENT

As researchers, when engaging with whānau we cannot assume that our kaupapa is going to be of value or benefit to them. If we want to work alongside whānau, we need 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 undertaken in the prospective areas. We did not want to create a new kaupapa; rather, we wanted to establish Ngā Tohu as a space to enhance what already existed. It was important that we find the right fit and alignment.

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

We also visited the case-study groups in their rohe. This not only helped to better understand the project alignments but it enabled us 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..."
(Fairlie, 2020).



TIKA PRORITISE

Tikanga acknowledges that nothing exists in isolation: our actions are bound by a network of layers linking 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 Ngā Tohu collective could connect in safe, culturally appropriate, ways. We turned our efforts to the whole collective and focused on whakawhanaungatanga, building relationships first.

During the lockdowns, we attempted to utilise online platforms to connect as a collective; although these forums provided us with helpful tools that we will continue to utilise, they were limited in their capacity to allow more personal connections

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

"We all started hanging out without having any discussion about research. And we 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..."
(Fairlie, 2020).



TIAKI SAFETY

Tiaki is a holistic approach to care which recognises the importance of protecting the whole being: physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional. We must take care to ensure that whānau feel safe and supported in order to best enable them to direct their own knowledge-development journey.

As mentioned earlier, Ngā Tohu is wānanga based. During wānanga, the research collective meet in a safe environment to learn, share and create. Being marae-based, these wānanga allow whānau to connect with people, kōrero and taiao in comfortable, familiar spaces.

In the initial stages of setting up the project, our researchers were able to connect with people from their kāinga (home), who naturally drew in others who were 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 responding to this unease, each project researcher, without any formal organisational or pre-planned expectations, took on responsibility for the safety of their own whānau case-study group, assuming 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.

*“Having wānanga at a marae always gives me a feeling of safety...”
(Pewhairangi, 2020).*



ĀTA COMMITMENT

Āta is a commitment to building and nurturing relationships that embraces humility, care and planning. It reminds people how to behave when engaging in relationships with other people, kaupapa and environments. Āta also takes account of time, acknowledging the past, present and future, and demands flexibility and fluidity in project development and delivery.

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

At our most recent wānanga, the collective decided 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 ways but, as a collective, we will have opportunities to connect on a more personal level to the places and people that make up the Ngā Tohu project.



“...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” (Ratana, 2020).

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 uniquely Māori way. Ngā Tohu is wānanga based; we aim to hold five collective wānanga over the duration of the project, each 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 each place.

In our first kanohi ki te kanohi wānanga, we identified some key elements of wānanga that help to create a safe space for the people and kaupapa. This learning has been collated, summarised, and presented here, and these values will continue to guide us in our future wānanga.



"Ko te mea nui, ka noho marae tātou. Ka āta wetewete, āta wānanga ngā kōrero maha i roto i te haumaru o ō tātou nei tikanga..." (Pewhairangi, 2020).



MOTUHOA, TAURANGA

ME AHU PEHEA?

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

We humbly acknowledge the learning that has come from each interaction, each engagement, each relationship we have made on our journey in the Nga Tohu project. We will continue to develop our engagement practices throughout the project and continue to find space for scientific research and Kaupapa Māori research to safely come together.



Takapoukura, Te Hiku



*Te WaioTU Stream,
Tokomaru Bay, East Coast*