TANGAROA ARARAU

National
SCIENCE
Challenges

SUSTAINABLE
SEAS
....
Ko ngā moana
whakauka

Policy position paper

Advancing marine governance in Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

In recent years, the increasing pressures on Aotearoa New Zealand's marine environment have exposed critical weaknesses in our current governance frameworks. The rising tide of environmental degradation, coupled with mounting public scrutiny on unsustainable practices, has made it clear that the way we manage and interact with our oceans is in urgent need of transformation. As the world shifts towards sustainability and a broader recognition of non-financial values in natural resource management, a compelling case exists for Aotearoa to revisit the principles that guide our relationship with the marine environment.

Globally and domestically, Indigenous peoples have long championed a holistic approach to environmental stewardship, rooted in deep cultural and spiritual connections to the natural world. In Aotearoa, the Māori connection to Tangaroa, the atua of the sea, is a powerful example of this worldview, where the ocean is not merely a resource to be exploited but a taonga, a treasure, to be respected and protected. This sense of responsibility, enshrined in tikanga Māori and guaranteed under Article II of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, compels us to explore governance models that place the health and wellbeing of Tangaroa at the centre of our decision-making.

Yet, despite these ancient and enduring values, the current system governing Aotearoa's marine environment remains heavily influenced by colonial-era norms that prioritise extractive rights over sustainable stewardship. The traditional tikanga-based governance system, once bespoke to the needs of Aotearoa's unique marine landscape, was displaced in favour of a Eurocentric, anthropocentric approach. Today, as the world looks to indigenous wisdom for solutions to the ecological crises we face, Aotearoa has a unique opportunity to reclaim and innovate upon its ancestral practices.

Marine governance in Aotearoa New Zealand

Marine governance in Aotearoa New Zealand stands at a critical juncture. The need to create a governance framework that is inclusive, sustainable, and reflective of our unique cultural heritage is paramount. This policy position paper outlines five key priorities for reforming marine governance, emphasising the integration of tikanga Māori, a systemic and holistic approach, the empowerment of Māori and local communities, long-term planning, and the importance of diversified resourcing and continuous learning.

Integration of tikanga Māori in marine governance

A foundational element of marine governance reform is the integration of tikanga Māori at its core. Tikanga Māori, which embodies the values, principles, and practices developed by Māori over centuries, offers a deeply rooted, culturally relevant framework for sustainable marine management.

Policy recommendations:

- **Embed tikanga Māori in governance structures**: Marine governance must be guided by tikanga Māori, ensuring that Māori knowledge systems are central to decision-making processes. This integration respects the spiritual, ecological, and cultural connections that Māori have with the ocean.
- **Honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi**: Recognise Māori as equal partners in marine governance by upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This includes ensuring Māori have a substantive role in all governance decisions affecting marine environments.
- **Promote culturally grounded management practices**: Promote management practices that reflect Māori values, such as kaitiakitanga (guardianship), to ensure the sustainable use and protection of marine resources.

Systemic and holistic approach to marine governance

A systemic and holistic approach is essential for addressing the complex interconnections within marine ecosystems. This approach must prioritise the health and well-being of the ocean while aligning with both environmental sustainability and cultural values.

Policy recommendations:

- **Adopt systemic thinking:** Recognise the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems and the need for governance models that comprehensively address these complexities. This recognition includes understanding the ripple effects of decisions across the entire marine environment.
- **Integrate environmental and cultural values:** Ensure that governance decisions prioritise the health of marine ecosystems and are informed by both scientific knowledge and cultural values. This integration supports the creation of policies that are sustainable and culturally appropriate.
- **Develop holistic management frameworks:** Develop management frameworks that consider environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions collectively, rather than in isolation. This approach will lead to more balanced and effective governance outcomes.

Empowerment of Māori and local communities

Empowering Māori and local communities are critical for fostering responsive, context-specific, and culturally grounded marine governance. Recognising and upholding Māori self-determination and autonomy is key to achieving this goal.

Policy recommendations:

- **Devolve decision-making authority:** Transfer governance authority to iwi, hapū, and local communities, enabling them to manage marine resources in ways that align with their knowledge, values, and priorities. This approach ensures governance is responsive to the specific needs of each community.
- **Support local governance structures:** Establish legal and institutional frameworks that support local governance structures, ensuring they have the resources and authority needed to make informed and effective decisions.
- **Promote inclusivity in governance:** Create inclusive governance models that ensure all voices, particularly those of Māori and local communities, are heard and respected in decision-making processes.

Long-term planning and anticipatory governance

Long-term planning and anticipatory governance are essential for preparing for future challenges in marine governance. By adopting a forward-looking approach, Aotearoa New Zealand can build a governance system that is proactive, adaptable, and resilient.

Policy recommendations:

- **Establish a foresight unit:** Create a dedicated foresight unit within marine governance structures to conduct regular scenario planning, risk assessments, and horizon scanning. This unit will help anticipate and prepare for future environmental, social, and economic challenges.
- **Integrate long-term goals into policy frameworks:** Incorporate long-term sustainability goals into marine governance policies, ensuring that decision-making is guided by future-oriented objectives.
- **Develop adaptable governance models:** Develop governance models that are flexible and capable of evolving in response to new information and changing circumstances, ensuring that marine management remains effective in the face of uncertainty.

Diversified resourcing and continuous learning

Effective marine governance requires diversified resourcing and a commitment to continuous learning. Ensuring financial stability through a collaborative funding strategy and fostering an environment of ongoing education and adaptation are crucial for long-term success.

Policy recommendations:

- **Adopt a diversified funding strategy:** Implement a funding model that draws resources from multiple sources, including government, iwi, hapū, private organisations, non-profits, and community contributions. This approach will reduce reliance on any single entity and ensure financial stability.
- **Pool resources:** Encourage collaboration among various stakeholders to pool resources, enhancing the resilience and sustainability of governance efforts.
- **Foster continuous learning:** Establish systems for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and education within marine governance. Doing this will ensure that governance practices remain effective and can adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities.
- **Build capacity:** Invest in training and capacity-building initiatives for local decision-makers, empowering them to manage marine resources effectively and sustainably.

Marine governance transformation

Tikanga Māori-centred system

Emphasises cultural, spiritual, and ecological wisdom for sustainable marine manegement.

Policy requirements:
- Understanding Tikanga and Te Tiriti
- Uphold Māori self-determination and autonomy
- Integrate Māori governance principles
- Value Māori knowledge systems

Long-term planning and anticipatory governance

Focuses on understanding and managing long-term risks and opportunities

Policy requirements:
- Create a high-level foresight unit
- Ensure long-term concerns in political agendas
- Hold policymakers accountable for long-term implications

Systemic thinking and holistic transformation

Integrates environmental, economic, and social aspects for balanced outcomes.

Policy requirements:
- Develop integrated management frameworks
- Establish inclusive governance structures
- Support collaborative decision-making platforms

Empowerment and subsidiarity

Devolves decision-making to local communities for responsive governance

Policy requirements:
- Grant decision-making authority to local communities
- Encourage collaboration across sectors
- Enhance flexibility and responsiveness

Acknowledging and providing for the unique position of Māori

Recognises Māori authority and expertise in marine stewardship.

Policy requirements:
- Empower Māori as decision-makers
- Dismantle historical biases and barriers
- Uphold commitments in the Māori Fisheries Settlement

Resourcing

Adopts a diversified funding strategy for sustainable governance

Policy requirements:
- Diversify funding sources
- Implement collaborative resource pooling

Clear vision and principles

Establishes a unified vision and guiding principles for marine governance

Policy requirements:
- Create a clear, shared vision
- Develop principles based on Ngā Pae Moana
- Establish a hierarchy of obligations prioritising ocean health

Monitoring and evaluation

Implements results-based processes to track and measure effectiveness

Policy requirements:
- Develop a comprehensive monitoring system
- Ensure dynamic and evolving governance models
- Foster continuous learning and adaptation

Education and capacity building

Focuses on building capacity and providing resources for effective management

Policy requirements:
- Establish support structures and training initiatives
- Launch public education campaigns
- invest in local decision-makers

Marine governance transformation in Aotearoa New Zealand

The transition from the current system to one that places Tangaroa at the heart of decision-making won't be achieved through a quick fix or within a single government term. It will take time, and it will require momentum from local communities to be able to make the change required.

The infographic highlights essential elements of marine governance transformation that individuals, local communities, and society can consider adopting to foster an improved relationship with the ocean. These initiatives aim to enhance our cultural, social, environmental, and economic well-being.

For each of the areas mentioned above, individuals and communities can begin to advance these key transitions in ways that align with their unique circumstances. Actions requiring national coordination will depend on political leadership and commitment, which may be beyond individual control. When opportunities arise to influence national direction in a politically safe manner – without risking the entrenchment of policies or legislation that would further hinder system change centred on Tangaroa – those opportunities should be seized. Until the right time comes or it becomes appropriate to take that specific action, we should focus on advancing the actions towards transformation that are within our grasp – mahia te mahi.

Conclusion

The future of marine governance in Aotearoa New Zealand depends on our ability to create a system that is inclusive, sustainable, and reflective of our cultural heritage. By integrating tikanga Māori, adopting a systemic and holistic approach, empowering Māori and local communities, engaging in long-term planning, and ensuring diversified resourcing and continuous learning, we can build a marine governance framework that is resilient, equitable, and capable of addressing the challenges of the 21st century.

This policy position paper outlines a path forward for achieving these goals, providing a roadmap for transforming marine governance in a way that:

- honours our past
- addresses present needs
- prepares for the future.

The journey toward sustainable marine governance is ongoing, and it demands the collective efforts of all stakeholders. Let's act now to ensure our oceans and communities thrive together.