



THE VALUE OF MĀTAURANGA MĀORI FOR DECISION- MAKING IN AOTEAROA

There is a lot of discussion about mātauranga Māori, and its role in managing our natural resources. There are many aspects to mātauranga Māori which often get lost in translation, but in this article, contaminated land practitioner **Sari Eru** (Ngāti Raukawa me Ngāti Ranginui) explains what it means for her work.

EACH INDIVIDUAL person holds a fundamental cognitive orientation of one's self and the society in which they belong, to form their point of view. 'Te Ao' or the 'worldly view' is strongly connected to our understanding of all things within that world, our culture, knowledge, beliefs, perceptions and even our behaviour. Here in New Zealand, most within our society hold one of two primary viewpoints of the world, both of which are equally valid and of benefit to our country as a whole. These are often referred to as Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Pākehā. It is important to note that just as all Pākehā hold different viewpoints, so too do Māori, therefore the views expressed here are a generalised perspective, and there will always be that outlier which does not follow the

majority. However, for the purpose of understanding, we shall assume a generalised perspective from here on.

The current use of 'mātauranga Māori' is a concept that was developed to explain a traditional knowledge system built from generational observations of te taiao (the natural world) from a Te Ao Māori perspective. Concepts of whakapapa (lineage, or layering) connects us to each other and the land itself whereas the ideals of tapu and noa provide the basis of social lore. In this worldview, nature and all its occupants in the past, present or the future, possess a unique spirituality or 'wairua' that is interconnected and of equal importance. Human induced change is effectively constrained through the balance of tapu and noa, so that all living things are in balance and harmony.

“KO AU TE WHENUA,
TE WHENUA KO AU”
(I AM THE LAND, AND
THE LAND IS ME).

Mātauranga Māori is multi-faceted, and cannot be completely explained in English. It includes systems that generate knowledge that are consistent with that of western science, such as pūrākau (traditional narratives) and mōteatea (traditional chants), which are both oral based evidence of the past. One pūrākau tells the story of Kupe (a great explorer) and his taniwha, Āraiteru and Niua, who occupy the heads of the Hokianga Harbour. These taniwha were left by Kupe to provide safe passage for returning waka, but if these taniwha were made angry they would turn the sea wild. Understanding the behavior of the sea assisted navigators in finding safe passage, allowing these men (or women) to return home safely. These phenomena can also be explained as energy dissipation during wave-current (or tidal) interactions when seen from a western viewpoint. However, the complexities of this view have yet to be widely understood within society, which in turn limits the benefit of having the knowledge to begin with. Although pūrākau was

at times difficult for non-Māori to comprehend, the ease of which this knowledge could be transferred would in turn improve the understanding and the mana of the people.

The concept of mana can be seen as a framework for social order. For example, a strong, healthy system which supports all life is seen to have mana; however, when stress is imposed on the system, the mana is lost. This shift often triggers a rāhui (ban of use) to restrict human induced change on the system. Just like the benefits of marine protection areas, rāhui acts by limiting the stress and allowing the system to replenish, thus restoring mana.

Another key concept within mātauranga Māori is that of change. For example, maramataka is used as a framework to measure the change in time. Otherwise known as the lunar calendar, this knowledge was derived from observations and interactions with the environment, gathered over generations. Trends were recognised, and an understanding of the weather, natural cycles and circadian rhythm was developed and applied to the management of climate change, conservation, resource management, sustainable food production and more. Driven by a holistic understanding of the natural world, humans are seen as part of the

system, rather than superior to the system, in a manner that is adaptable to change. Here in New Zealand by embracing mātauranga Māori, we could initiate a paradigm 'shift' in the existing resource management system, one where land ownership becomes stewardship, resource extraction becomes resource replenishment, and humanity is considered equal in importance to nature.

WasteMINZ and its members understand the importance of mātauranga Māori and the value of weaving both philosophies into the work we do for the benefits of our environment and our communities. Watch out for upcoming webinars and workshops on Te Ao Māori, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori engagement.. **R**



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