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MOTORWAYS, WETLANDS AND KAI: CALEB ROYAL AND KAITIAKITANGA

STORYING KAITIAKITANGA: A KAUPAPA
MĀORI LAND AND WATER FOOD STORY

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OUR LAND
AND WATER

Toitū te Whenua,
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COVER IMAGE: TUNA MONITORING IN ŌTAKI, 2018.



[T]HE CROWN HAVE DONE A MAGNIFICENT JOB OF REMOVING MĀORI FROM LAND AND IF WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEIZE ON A PIECE OF LAND BECAUSE IT'S SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENT TO AN AGENCY, OR GOVERNMENT BODY, THEN WHY SHOULD WE BE SHY OF DOING THAT? THERE'S NO HUGE FINANCIAL GAIN FOR ANY INDIVIDUAL. IT'S ABOUT THE GAINS BACK TO THE PEOPLE AND ACTUALLY PROVIDING A RESOURCE TO OUR WHĀNAU, WHICH IS KAI. (CALEB ROYAL, 2018)

Caleb Royal and colleague, 2018





Measuring and monitoring activities, Ōtaki, 2018.

HE KAUPAPA INTRODUCTION

How do you turn an expressway project into an opportunity for local peoples to supply kai to their marae? This is a recent kaupapa led by Caleb Royal (Ngāti Raukawa ki te tonga) on behalf of Ngā Hāpu o Ōtaki, on the Kapiti coast. Caleb works with the Regional Council as a mandated representative, acting as kaitiaki for both whenua (land), repo (wetlands), tuna (eels) and tangata (people). His sphere of work includes resource consents, development, environmental monitoring and, more recently, expressway development. Like all roading projects, the Kapiti expressway has had environmental, social and cultural impacts on local communities. Houses have been moved, roads diverted, and ecosystems modified. Yet this development also provided opportunities for local hāpu and marae, as Caleb tells us:

So, the Kukutauaki is our boundary that we recognise down there but the Kukutauaki stream connects into the Paetawa stream. So, that's where the interchange is at Pekapeka and with that interchange, the NZTA had to retain a chunk of land for flood water attenuation purposes to meet the Board of Enquiry work. So, that presented an opportunity for us to say, what are you doing with that land? And they said 'oh we'll just lease it'. We wanted it all planted out as a massive wetland area because that's what it used to be.

Caleb sustainably runs around twenty sheep and some cattle on this leased land and is able to provide kai for events at the local marae as well as ensure the wellbeing of these wetland areas that historically

hosted a pā tuna site named Te Maire. The land is not leased for monetary gain, but to ensure the wellbeing of the land and waters, support the transmission of knowledge across generations and to shore up, build and deepen whānau and hapū relationships. As Caleb suggests:

I don't think [a monetary approach to the land] is meaningful to the culture of our people. Whereas gathering kai, and the transmission of knowledge through the activity of gathering kai, is a whole different ball game. Interacting with your taonga, interacting with the Ōtaki river, enjoying the whānaungatanga of going to the river and sharing that experience. Those are the sorts of things that, I suppose, wild food production brings into the fold. These are benefits that support kaupapa Māori and the ethic of kaitiakitanga.



Catching tuna for monitoring purposes, 2018.

HE KAWA KAITIAKITANGA VALUES



Releasing tuna from the hinaki, Ōtaki, 2018

Caleb is mindful of long-term negative impact on lands and waterways through transport projects and agricultural practices such as dairying. The true costs of these practices are shouldered by communities while the polluters gain the economic benefits.

We've recently had to close our shellfish beds at Ōtaki. We can't gather shellfish now from Raglan through to Waikanae because of algal bloom. Why? Why do we suddenly have these? I don't think you can pinpoint it down, but what we do know [...] is that after a rainfall event, you should not collect shellfish from our beaches. They are filled with cow shit. You will get sick. They've done studies on that. There was the Manaaki Taha Moana project that was conducted down here and they traced the faecal contamination in our shellfish back to cattle, to dairy farms.

Harm done to shellfish has a flow-on effect for the environment as shellfish are filter feeders who provide an ecological service to both people and waterways. While the dairying industry is increasingly aware of its social responsibility to the environment and wider communities, Caleb argues for more immediate and widespread action:

If you whakaiti the mana of our atua, sooner or later you're going to lose those trees, those plants, those animals. They're our tuakana and if we're going to keep hammering them, sooner or later there's going to be repercussions and I think we're at that stage now. [...] If we look at our contribution of nutrient and waste into our waterways, we haven't got that balance right. I still think that the pressure to drive a profit means that our waterways receive those excessive pollutants. I know we're improving, I just don't think we're improving at a rate that is reflective of our obligation of kaitiakitanga.

Caleb argues that the diversification of land-use is a vital way forward. Understanding the interconnected nature of lands, waters, peoples and animals could mitigate the large-scale intensive farming mindset currently in play.

Because at the moment we've got this, right we'll do dairy farming and we dairy farm. And every square inch it seems we've got to dairy farm, we dairy farm. Why we're not seeing big setbacks from our rivers and planting up with manuka as an example. We know that there are huge benefits with mānuka honey, but people don't also talk about the research that has come out of ESR (Institute of Environmental Science and Research) recently with the release of antibacterial oils into the whenua which then neutralise faecal contamination in our waterways. So, if we have a large riparian buffer planted up with mānuka, which is, ironically, where mānuka grows, to buffer and filter the ground water going through into our water ways, we know

that the antimicrobial properties that you get in mānuka honey is also exhibited in the root zone of mānuka. [...] We also know that the manuka has an uptake of nitrogen far exceeding any of the other local plant species out there and grass species. So, we also know we're going to clean our water and at the same time, we have an opportunity to then do aquaculture and run our bees and make money off our bees.

The ability to grow, harvest and cook kai on whānau lands is a fundamental act of food sovereignty, and yet Caleb wonders if we have lost that ability to sustain ourselves through our own food growing practices. He recalls the Depression Era when whānau were able to feed themselves using their skills of mahi kai and the healthy natural ecosystems that surrounded them. Whānau today do not have these same opportunities. Caleb leaves us with a final thought:

I think we need to be brave about, as Māori we need to be brave around what we do with our whenua. I think we sometimes go for what is easy, which is to lease our land out. I think we need to re-assert our rangātiratanga and our mana on that land again and connect our people back to our whenua, back to the origins of our food, the husbandry, the nurturing. Whether your nurturing a carrot or whether your nurturing a tuna or whether your nurturing a goat, they're all skills of nurturing that you can apply to your grandparents, to your children, to your home. They're all the same and I believe that our emphasis needs to be there.