
MAORI INTERESTS IN FRESHWATER FISHERIES

PURPOSE

The purpose of this brief is to share our ideas on what the term ‘Maori interests’ could be defined as for Te Wai Maori Trustee Limited (Wai Maori). We recognise that this is a broad area and want to gather views and perspective from iwi and Maori on the range of interests that exist within the complex freshwater environment.

Section 94 of the Maori Fisheries Act 2004 (MFA) states that:

The **purpose of Te Wai Maori Trust** is to hold and manage the trust funds on trust for and on behalf of the beneficiaries under the Deed of Settlement, in order to **advance Maori interests in freshwater fisheries**, but not in a manner that could adversely affect the charitable status (if any) of the Trust. (emphasis added).

STRATEGIC PLAN 2006 - 2010

In 2006, Te Wai Maori Trustee Limited (Wai Maori) undertook a consultation with iwi and Maori on the strategic direction of Wai Maori that resulted in the inaugural strategic plan. These hui provided an opportunity for iwi and Maori to give their views on what aspects of freshwater fisheries should take strategic priority. As a result Wai Maori identified that iwi and hapu had realised that their present role in freshwater fisheries customary, non-commercial customary or commercial was not consistent with their traditional values and tikanga.

The task of Wai Maori, in collaboration with iwi and Maori was to enable iwi and hapu to reassert their mana over their freshwater fisheries and to exercise effective kaitiakitanga over one of their most precious taonga. This would be achieved through four strategic focus areas:

- i. Habitat protection and native species enhancement
- ii. Research and education
- iii. Strategic relationships
- iv. Governance and management

We want to directly gauge from iwi and Maori if these are still priorities and if continuing to focus on these four areas will advance Maori interests in freshwater fisheries. If not, then what are those interests and how do we prioritise to ensure the optimal outcomes for iwi and Maori in this broad freshwater environment.

MAORI INTERESTS

Underpinning any discussion on interests for iwi and Maori in freshwater is the relationship with the freshwater environment. Maori regulated fresh water and freshwater fisheries through kaitiaki and tohunga, whanau and hapu as vital resources for pa and kainga. For Maori certain things are believed to have or could be imbued with a mauri, or life essence. Water or water bodies were believed to have a mauri of its own. Water with a healthy mauri will sustain healthy ecosystems and support cultural uses.

Mahinga kai was pertinent to the survival of iwi. They depended upon the knowledge of mahinga kai and participation in gathering from mahinga kai was important for maintaining traditional practices. It was also important that water quantity and quality was maintained as they impacted on these cultural values and traditional knowledge and practices.

Definition of Freshwater Fisheries

We propose that the term freshwater fisheries is not restricted to freshwater species but that it also encompasses the habitat, surrounding land, water column, water quality and quantity. This aligns with Wai Maori's belief that a holistic approach is appropriate in regards to this term. This also encompasses our functions as defined in section 95(b) in the Maori Fisheries Act 2004.

Having determined that the term freshwater fisheries is broader than just species it allows the opportunity to identify the range of interests for iwi and Maori in the freshwater environment. The following diagram illustrates those interests and a description of each is provided below.

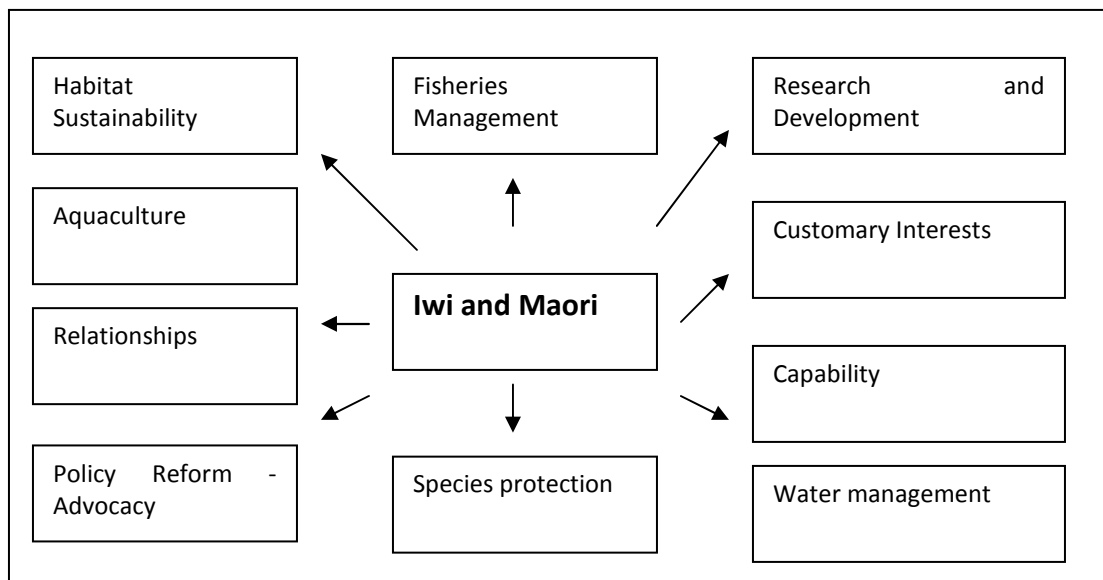


Figure 1: Range of iwi and Maori interests in freshwater fisheries

From the species to the quality of the water that supports them to the habitat that surrounds them we know that iwi and Maori have a holistic view of their freshwater environment. Restoring the ecological and spiritual integrity of degraded waterways is an important principle. This includes replenishing water quantity, improving water quality, and habitat restoration.

Habitat Sustainability

Wai Maori is aware that there is a strong desire that iwi and hapu reassert their mana over their freshwater fisheries recognising that restoring habitats is the foundation upon which fisheries can develop. There are iwi and Maori groups that continue to protect and enhance their freshwater, freshwater species and adjoining land.

Species Protection

Freshwater fisheries species, such as eel, are of great cultural significance for iwi and Maori and an important food source and there is concern with the sustainability of the stock and the impact of such structures as hydro dams in eel migration. The quality of the water also has a detrimental impact on the health of freshwater species.

Water Management

Water management is a topical issue and the proposed reforms will have implications for iwi and Maori participation in environmental management. Freshwater is managed by regional councils who are responsible for the water bodies within their boundaries however the water rights and water management debate has gained momentum with the introduction of the Sustainable Water Programme of Action (SWPoA) in 2003. Many Maori expect that they will be involved in environmental management processes relating to water and one of the main issues for them is the incorporation of cultural values into water management.

Research and Development

Wai Maori has supported iwi and Maori to undertake a range of freshwater research to achieve their freshwater aspirations. This research is an effective mechanism to advance Maori interests in freshwater. The research contributes to broadening Maori knowledge on freshwater fisheries restoration, protection, management and development.

Freshwater Aquaculture

Freshwater aquaculture is a relatively young industry and there is a wealth of opportunities, both commercially and customary related for iwi and Maori. As the industry grows and expands, iwi and Maori can take advantage of the opportunities that will arise. To be able to make this shift will require careful policy changes and the establishment of an industry that is sustainable within itself but also would contribute to the enhancement of the customary freshwater fisheries in our rivers and lakes.

Fisheries Management

This relates to the input into the development of fisheries management decisions led by the Ministry of Fisheries to ensure that sustainability of fisheries is assured and consistent with kaitiakitanga.

Policy reform – advocacy

Many iwi and Maori have to engage with a number of central and local government agencies just for the management of their freshwater environment. This is a time consuming and in some cases, a frustrating experience. Wai Maori believes there is an opportunity at a national level for advocacy for effective policy reform and development in freshwater and freshwater fisheries.

Customary Interests

This relates to enabling iwi and Maori to give expression to their customary interests in freshwater and the freshwater environment. This could be achieved through the improved integration of customary, commercial and non-commercial fisheries.

Relationships

Relationships are integral for iwi and Maori as they strive to protect, enhance and develop their freshwater environment. The development of key relationship between Maori and iwi groups, central and local government, and other organisations with freshwater interests is important to enhance knowledge sharing for iwi and Maori to achieve their freshwater aspirations.

Capability

To enable effective management of freshwater and freshwater fisheries, there should be a focus on lifting the capability of Maori and iwi. Wai Maori has provided this through subsidised training and development of strategic relationships.

Summary

After four years of operation we have a good understanding of the freshwater environment. We have taken a broad approach to allow us time to collect information and galvanise our thinking and we believe the components identified above make up the freshwater environment.

While we recognise and have focussed some of our funding on specific components we need to be mindful of the recommendation from the auditors that Wai Maori needs to clearly define what Maori interests in freshwater are. When considering these interests and refining our direction, we are seeking a direct gauge from iwi and Maori on the priorities for iwi as we strive to answer the following questions:

1. What are the key Maori interests in freshwater fisheries?
2. How should we prioritise a number of key interests to achieve the best outcomes?

It is now time to re-focus and to strengthen our foundation as we move into 2010 and beyond.