

Colonisation and climate change

**Climate
Action
Aotearoa**

The Funders Commitment
on Climate Action.

COLONISATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The first commitment in our 'Funders Commitment on Climate Action' is - Reflecting Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supporting Māori aspirations regarding climate action. This lays the foundation of our commitment to the spirit of partnership with Iwi, Hapū, whānau and Māori to address the causes and impacts of climate change. It recognises our responsibility in enabling Māori aspirations and honouring mātauranga Māori in climate action, respecting whakapapa, tino rangatiratanga, rite tahi (equity) and kaitiakitanga.

Our Funders Commitment on Climate Action in Aotearoa mirrors other pledges around the world. It seeks equity in the transition to a low carbon society decarbonising of investment and mitigation of climate risks and impacts. What sets it apart and makes it a uniquely Aotearoa Commitment to Climate Action, is its honouring of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to meaningful partnership, collaboration and engagement with Māori.

The connection between colonisation and climate change

We must recognise colonialism as a historic and ongoing driver of the climate crisis. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) acknowledges the link between “colonialism” and climate change in the Summary for Policy Makers¹ section of the 6th IPCC Report, published in 2022. It states that “Present development challenges causing high vulnerability are influenced by historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism, especially for many indigenous peoples and local communities.”

Indigenous peoples are renowned throughout history for living in a way that preserves and protects the natural world whilst recognising the interconnectedness of all living things. By living in tune with their environment, many indigenous peoples across the world were able to observe their surroundings for long periods of time and draw evidence-based conclusions from these observations. In te reo Māori we refer to this knowledge base, drawn from lived experience as Mātauranga Māori.

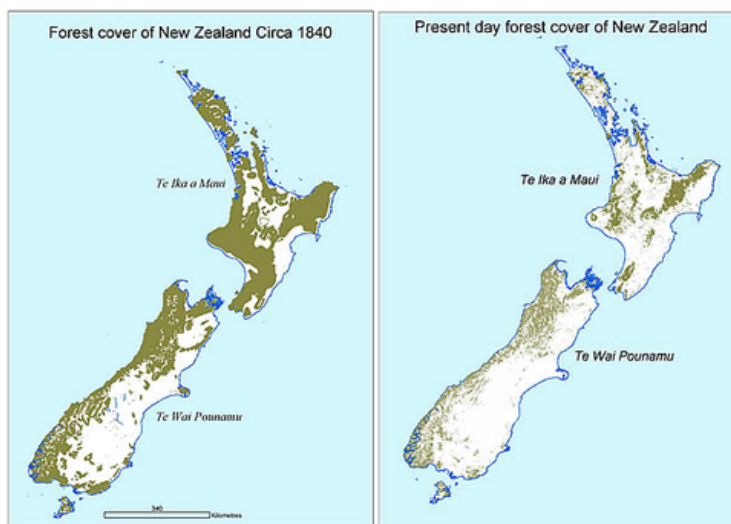
To this day, Indigenous peoples make up only five percent of the global population but protect 80% of the Earth's remaining biodiversity, according to data cited in Australia's 2021 State of the Environment report.²

Over many centuries, colonisation drove the unlawful confiscation of lands and caused extreme displacement of Indigenous peoples across the globe. This affected their ability to retain or practice vital knowledge systems and rituals developed over generations to protect people and the planet. This has led to ongoing, devastating implications such as loss of language, steady decline of native species, deforestation and severe degradation of soil and water quality.

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According to the Decolonial Atlas, in 1840 “European settlers in Aotearoa New Zealand had to first remove the Māori from the land before they could begin to extract resources from it – in this case, timber. As Māori land holdings decreased since the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, so too did the forests of Aotearoa. This may have been a contributing factor in the extinction of dozens of endemic bird species since European colonisation – the introduction of predatory mammals to Aotearoa being another large factor.”



Forest cover comparison; 1840- present day.

Image: Decolonial Atlas

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Western ideology sees humans as being dominant to the natural world. It views our Earth as a resource to extract and plunder, a separate entity from ourselves. Indigenous ideology sees the Earth and humans as one and as family and operates using a more circular economy.

European settler colonialism exploited land and resources, displaced indigenous peoples and devastated local communities and ecosystems. The impacts of colonisation were exacerbated by the forces of industrialisation and capitalism.

Addressing Inequities

To acknowledge a tika or just transition we must recognise who benefits and who loses from emissions, practices that degrade our environment and the impacts of climate change. Those with more economic resources may have a vested economic and self-interest in those practices continuing and be more able to shield themselves from or mitigate climate impacts. Those with the least economic resources are likely to produce lower levels of emissions and be more at risk of climate displacement and destabilisation. They are also more likely to live with the health implications and environmental consequences of polluting industries and practices.

A recent example of this is during Cyclone Gabrielle when slash from the forestry industry wiped out bridges, clogged rivers and caused huge environmental and infrastructural damage to small rural communities with a predominantly Māori population like Tolaga and Tokomaru Bay on the East Coast of the North Island. 4



Destructive forestry slash following Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023.
Source:RNZ

In 2008 at the UN climate negotiations, Climate Justice movements began to officially call for climate reparations. In essence, recognising that rich nations owe poorer nations a “climate debt”.5

A Tika Transition

Evidence suggests that Māori, rural communities and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are and will continue to be disproportionately impacted by climate change. This is because these groups are more likely to live in low-lying, coastal areas which are sensitive to sea level rise, flooding or extreme heat. These groups are also more likely to work in climate-sensitive primary industries, making them more vulnerable to job insecurity and economic loss.

A ‘tika transition’ or a ‘just’ transition as defined by Dr Maria Bargh recognises that the journey to a low-carbon society is just as important as the end goals. A Tika Transition embraces tikanga Māori and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a source of climate solutions. It recognises that in Aotearoa, tikanga Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi must sit at the heart of our climate action response. 6

The Tika Transition Guide provides useful questions to help funders achieve a just, equitable and tika transition that reflects our unique Aotearoa context.

The principles of a Tika Transition are:



Whanaungatanga - embracing whakapapa (ancestral connections), kinship and relationships. Whanaungatanga is premised on positive and enduring human connections and interactions with all of life, including nature.



Kaitiakitanga is the exercise of environmental guardianship. In te ao Māori, all living things are interconnected and it is the role of kaitiaki to protect and preserve. In the tika transition context, kaitiakitanga ensures that climate action is embedded in our stewardship role as human beings.



Tautuutu, or reciprocity and balance. This concept rests on the idea that ‘for everything given or taken a return of some kind is required’.



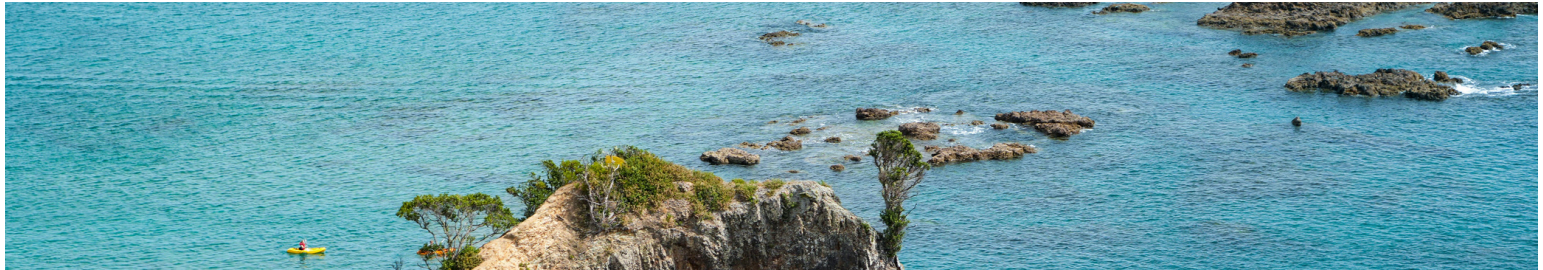
Mana has to do with the place and leadership status of the individual in the group. Relationships are always mediated and guided by the high value placed upon mana.

When applied, these principles create a safe and welcoming environment which encourages meaningful contributions, fosters good relationships, honours people's individuality and strives to work together on common ground.

The role of funders

Community funders and other philanthropic organisations should be acutely aware of the impacts of colonisation in their region. No iwi, hapū or whānau experiences colonisation the same therefore special care should be taken to ensure funders are well informed of the historical, local, and ongoing impacts of colonisation.

Funders should carefully consider a tika transition and commit to prioritising disadvantaged communities by channelling funding and support, based on need.



Call to action:



Educate - Invest in your board and wider staff. Provide personal development opportunities to help them better understand Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Te reo Māori, and the history and implications of colonisation. Discuss how Te Tiriti o Waitangi shapes your mahi and how you can implement it on a deeper level in your workplace.



Engage - Develop and nurture mutually beneficial relationships with local iwi, hapū, whānau and key stakeholders to better understand their needs, aspirations, and how you can support each other. Like all good relationships, it will need to be built on foundations of trust which will take time. It is best to be upfront with your challenges and not to go in with any predetermined ideas or prejudice.



Collaborate - Funders are in a privileged position to prioritise and fund the revitalisation of te ao Māori practices such as weaving, carving, kapa haka, te reo Māori, wānanga and mātauranga retention. These are just some of the things that make up the unique fabric of our country’s identity and have immense benefits for everyone who calls Aotearoa New Zealand home. Authentic collaboration requires working towards a partnership model that acknowledges Māori as the best people to determine outcomes and solve problems relating to them, and that facilitation should be led by Māori.⁷



Decarbonise Investments - Our investments should align with our core values. It’s contradictory to be trying to mitigate and build climate resiliency within our communities whilst simultaneously investing in fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industries which we know cause and exacerbate climate change, and directly harm our most vulnerable communities. There are many lucrative eco-friendly investments out there, - set up a meeting with your investment advisor to discuss this further.



Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge the inextricable links between colonisation and climate change, the impacts of which are diverse, deep and wide-reaching. No iwi, hapū, whānau or community experiences colonisation the same and a special duty of care should be observed to ensure a tika transition, so that our vulnerable communities are not further disadvantaged as we transition to a low-carbon society.

Titiro ki muri, kōkiri ki mua. Look to the past and learn from it, so that together, we can carve a way to a better future.



Related Resources:

[Te Puaha Talk, Te Reo o te Taiao](#)

[Landcare Research, Climate Change Adaptation and Māori Policy](#)

[Mātauranga Māori - what is it and how is it applied.](#)

[Tika Transition Guide](#)

References:

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