

# **Effects of Industry on Maori Cultural Values: The Case of the Tarawera River:**

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## **Abstract**

*The research is a case study of the relationship between three tribes; Te Arawa, Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau and Ngāti Awa and the Tarawera River during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the river was polluted with effluent from pulp and paper mills. It involves the cultural story of the Tarawera River as told by the iwi (tribes) of the river informed by Maori epistemologies and what has come to be known as a 'kaupapa Maori research' approach. Reference is made to the history, legends, customs and lifestyle that have arisen from the relationship between iwi and the river. It includes comments on the pollution of the river from members of each iwi. The world views, experiences, and perceptions reported on here have forced a fundamental change on the iwi, a change that has affected their cultural and social relationship to the river. The price of economic development on the river has been cultural and ecological genocide.*

*The cultural voice echoes a familiar story in indigenous communities. In the Maori context the research provides opportunities for further inquiry into determining the socio-cultural, economic and political future of the iwi of the river.*

## **Introduction**

This case study provides compelling findings about the changes that have occurred amongst each of the iwi (tribes) of the Tarawera River and its estuarine environment as a result of effluent and other discharge from mills into the river. The story is grounded in the cultural and spiritual essence that once vitalized the river. Without the presence of mauri (essence, life principle), iwi say the river has lost its vitality, its life force, its quintessential presence and in cultural and environmental terms, has been withering to death from pollution. The relationship of each of the iwi to the river stems from strong whakapapa (genealogy) links through eponymous ancestors and famous navigators who founded the respective iwi and the river and its environment. The ancestors also named the river environment taking care to invest the forethought of sustainability as each place of significance was restricted to the type of usage concurring with the ancient cycle of water distinguished for physical and metaphysical purposes.

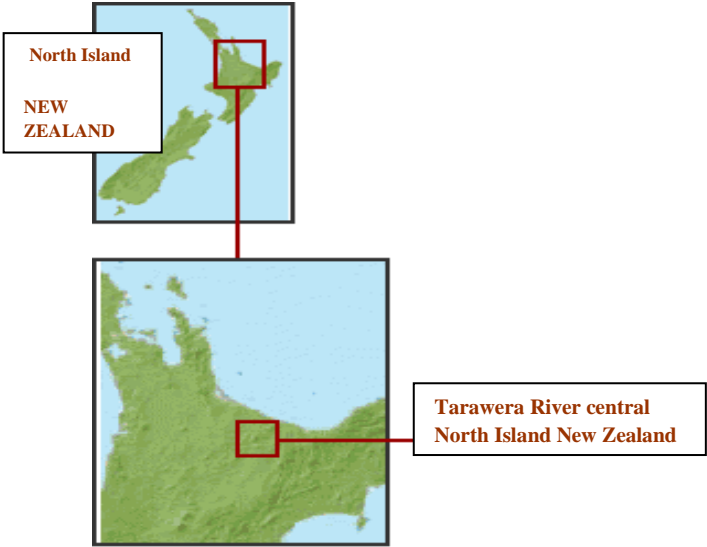
The bounty of the river in full force with relative vitality is conveyed in the stories of the lifestyle enjoyed prior to and in the early days of the establishment of the pulp and paper mills

at Kawerau. The cultural story details everyday accounts of swimming, eating, fishing, and gathering food from the river. Historically the river was always a place to go to gather herbal and medicinal plants from and to be healed. The light and shade, the diversity of the river in the fullness of its life, tells a story of abundance, a premise to the provision of food for the iwi kitchens, and to pleasure and provide for manuhiri (guests). In its pristine state, the river was abundant.

The force of industry and the physical benefits that the mills have bought to the iwi of the Tarawera have silenced their voices. One force has simply replaced the life force of the river so that now, iwi cannot take or gather food from the river from Kawerau down, nor can they provide food from the river for manuhiri. The river has lost its luster as a place to enjoy and most importantly its cultural soul and therefore place in the “iwi environment.” The disintegration of whanaungatanga (kin interrelationships) and social relationships that were formed around the river environment have been displaced by reference to “the Black Drain” and prohibitions on all forms of contact with the river. Many mill workers and families, past and present, some still working and living in Kawerau, told in explicit detail the changes that the mill and its discharges have brought to bear upon their lives and their families.

**Location**

The Tarawera River is located in the Bay of Plenty of the North Island of New Zealand. Its many tributaries flow approximately 50 kilometers long and 20 kilometers wide beginning from Mount Tarawera located at the source of the river, between Lake Okataina to the north, Lake Okareka, Lake Tikitapu, and Lake Rotokakahi to the west, and Lake Rotomahana to the south. It flows northward through Kawerau to just south of Matata, to its outlet to Te Moana Nui a Toi, the Pacific Ocean.



## **Methodology**

Under the rubric of Kaupapa Maori research different sets of ideas and issues are claimed as important. Smith, G. (1991) summarizes Kaupapa Maori research:

1. Is related to 'being Maori'
2. Is connected to Maori philosophy and principles
3. Takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Maori, the importance of Maori language and culture; and
4. Is concerned with the struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well being

The research attempts to learn from iwi what their experiences of the river were in its pristine state and in its changing state (over the last forty-four years). The Case Study approach is used as it allows for the gathering of information on one or more multiple cases (Yin 1994). The Case Study report did not set out with any preconceived ideas about what iwi experiences were. The research was mindful of the need to provide the cultural worldview as the context for the epistemological framework and methodological approach to the report. In so doing, the research involves action research approached and informed by Maori epistemologies and what has come to be known as 'kaupapa Maori research' an approach that is about bringing to the centre and privileging Maori centered research, indigenous values, attitudes and practices... (Smith, L.T. 1995, p. 125).

## **Approach**

Each tribe was assigned a lead researcher who affiliated to the respective tribe, was fluent in English and Maori and held a respected level of knowledge about the tribe and was respected amongst their people. This was a key factor in the success of the research and the ability to gather the knowledge and information and bring the chief informants and focus group participants together. Bishop (1996, p.15) contends, "kaupapa Maori research ... involving Maori knowledge and people needs to be conducted in culturally appropriate ways" and this point is made explicit by Smith L.T. (1999) that being Maori is an essential criterion for carrying out kaupapa Maori research.

There were three to five Chief Informants from each tribal area and they were interviewed individually. The informants chosen were the key repositories of cultural lore and knowledge and chiefs (rangatira) in their own right. The interviews were conducted in both English and Maori.

The robustness of the focus group sample enabled a high degree of research participation. The focus groups included 8-12 members from each tribe drawn from a sample of participants ranging in age from 18-88 years, a 60:40 male and female ratio and with lower to middle socio-economic backgrounds. All participants had whakapapa (kin related) relationships to

the river and 80% of the participants had lived within 20 kilometers of the river and 50% had either worked or had a family member who had worked at the pulp and paper mill over the last half of the 20th century. All focus groups were conducted in Maori and English and transcribed as recorded.

**Limitations of Research**

The following potential limitations of the case study are acknowledged:

- Lack of technical information and background relating to the precise nature and effect of specific organochlorine contaminants;
- Ethical issues unanswered by industry and faced by workers exposed to the emission of dioxins.
- A literature survey in the case study would have strengthened the findings with respect to an international context and the significance for indigenous populations.
- Locating the research in a wider indigenous socio-cultural, economic and political context.

**PART ONE – CHIEF INFORMANTS**

**Iwi of the river**

The Tarawera River and its tributaries are entrenched in the identity and lives of the three iwi of the river: Te Arawa, Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau, and Ngāti Awa. Each iwi has its own stories, stories that convey its relationship to the river since the founding of the lands, mountains and waterways of the Tarawera River by the ancestors.

Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau locate along the river in and around the greater Kawerau area, particularly at Onepu. Te Arawa in particular the sub-tribe Tuhourangi locate at the source of the river at Tarawera and near its outlet at the town of Matata. Ngāti Awa locates to the east of the river and its environment.

**The Heartland**

The river is central to the history and legends of each iwi. There are many famous sayings and stories that convey the connection of the river to its heartland, through other famous landmarks, and people. The river carries the birthright of chiefly lines from Tuwharetoa, Te Rangiaorere, Tuhourangi, and Te Ramaapakura who were all born along the river. Iwi identify with the river as reflected in the following famous and unique salutation:

<i>Ko Ruawahia te maunga, Ko Tarawera te awa, Ko Te Arawa te iwi.</i>	Ruawahia is the mountain, Tarawera is the river, Te Arawa the people
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## Mana (prestige)

The river is a symbol of mana amongst the respective iwi, with each tributary and its association with significant landmarks intertwining to add to its reputation. They are the life blood of Tarawera. All those tributaries both small and large give substance to the Tarawera River's vested interest to other mountains, valleys, forests, and to the seas and across the land. It is its connection to the heartland.

*Te Hau Tutua, Ngati Awa.*

Legend has it that the mountain of Putauaki (once) stood next to the other mountains Ngauruhoe and Tongariro at Taupo. A jealous quarrel took place amongst them, and they moved, including Putauaki, who wanted to move next to (the active volcano) Whakaari. It is said that mountains only move at night. When it came time for Putauaki to move it became daylight, and so he became fixed by the rays of the sun at Kawerau where he stands now. He wept for Whakaari, and it is said that his tears became the Tarawera River.

*Anaru Rangiheuea, Hiko Hohepa, Te Arawa*

## The Naming of Tarawera as Te Awa o Te Atua

There are different stories about the naming of the river from each iwi. Tuhourangi and Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau refer to the legend of the naming of the river by the great chief of the Te Arawa waka (canoe), Ngatoro-i-Rangi:

As Ngatoro-i-Rangi traveled along the eastern coastline to Matata he reached the Tarawera River. Upon discovering its cleanliness and purity he named it Te Awa o Te Atua, the river of the Gods. He prayed to the Gods to protect him on his journey inland and then followed the river inland, making landmarks and claiming different lands around the area. When Ngatoro-i-Rangi reached the summit of Tongariro he became frozen from the cold, so he called out to his sisters Kuiwai and Haungaroa who were in Hawaiiiki, to send him warmth. They heard his plea and with the assistance of the Gods, Pupu, and Te Hoata, sent him heat from Hawaiiiki. It came underground and under the land passing through a number of places and rising up at Tarawera.

*Hiko Hohepa.*

Ngati Awa recall the naming of the river by the great chief Toroa, as he observed his daughter Wairaka bathing in the river:

*Ka puta mai te mate wahine o Wairaka i Te Awa o Te Atua. Waiho Te Awa o te Atua kia rere atu ana", na Toroa tenei korero.*

When Wairaka had her menstrual period at Te Awa o Te Atua, Toroa is quoted as saying "Let Te Awa o Te Atua wash it away."  
*Onehou Phillis, Ngati Awa*

## Waiata, Pepeha and Pātere (Songs, Proverbs, Chants)

Legends, which relate the history of the river, have also been recorded in waiata, pepeha, and pātere. Onehou Phillis recited some of the teachings of her father, Eruera Manuera, about the significance of the landmarks around the river and the mountain, Putauaki, to Ngati Awa:

<i>Ka piki ake ki te taumata ra o toku maunga o Putauaki, ka titiro iho au ki nga nohoanga o aku tipuna e hora mai ra i nga puke tapu me nga awaawa o Rangitaiki, Ohinemataroa, me Te Awa o te Atua.</i>	I climb to the summit of my mountain Putauaki and I look across upon the places where my ancestors dwelt, spread across the sacred hills and valleys of Rangitaiki, Ohinemataroa, and Te Awa o te Atua.
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## Tikanga (Customs)

The relationship between iwi and the river was traditionally controlled through customs and practices that conserved the river in a pure and pristine state. Some of the important aspects to that relationship we were told about include:

- Respect for the mauri, - life force - of the river. The mauri is believed to be the full expression of the natural and spiritual processes of the river;
- The separation and respect for specially designated areas such as waahi tapu, or sacred sites;
- The gathering of particular food in appropriate seasons and at appropriate times; and
- The avoidance of despoliation or destruction of the river and its life.

## Tapu (Sacred)

*William Savage and Graham Te Rire* spoke about many of the ceremonies associated with mauri such as baptism, thanksgiving, and cleansing, which were traditionally offered along t

<i>Kei te mohio ki nga waahi tapu, Kotahi rau rima tekau kei te taha o Tarawera. Mai te pito whakarunga ki te pito whakararo. Nga taniwha I mohiotia nei, ko Tarakura, ko Irakewa, ko Tupai, ko Tamarau, ko Te Whai.</i>	I am familiar with its sacred places. There are as many as 150 along the Tarawera, from its headwaters, to its lower reaches. Some of the taniwha that are known are Tarakura, Irakewa, Tupai, Tamarau, and Te Whai. <i>Te Hau Tutua.</i>
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## Mauri (Life Essence)

The state of the mauri or life force of the river is the cultural litmus test for assessing the wellbeing of the river. I was told by each iwi that without mauri, the river would die.

*Onehou Phillis* spoke of how all things have a life force, a mauri that is sacrosanct. Her words were animated by all of the cultural experts who spoke about the mauri as being the living essence, or soul, of the river:

<p><i>Ko te mauri he mea tino tapu kei roto i nga wahi tapu katoa. Ki te kore te mauri, ka mate nga mea katoa.</i></p>	<p>Mauri, it is most sacred, it is the life force that dwells within all sacred places. Without mauri, all things die. <i>Te Hau Tutua.</i></p>
<p><i>Ko te mauri ki ahau, hei whakaohoho i te tangata. Ko te ara ki te ao wairua, ki te ao tangata ki a tatau. He mauri kei te awa me era atu mea katoa. Ka kore te mauri ke mate te tangata.</i></p>	<p>To me, the mauri is what arouses the inner being it is the passage from the spirit world to the world of humankind, to us. The river has a mauri, without mauri, man is lost and will perish. <i>Ben Mamaku.</i></p>

There were different stories about the placing of the mauri in the river. Many cultural experts and focus group participants believe that the mauri of the river comes from its abundance from the many tributaries that flow into it. It is believed that the tributaries provide for nourishment of both the spiritual and physical well being of the river beginning from Tarawera and carrying life through the land out to Te Awa o te Atua at Te Moana nui a Toi, at Matata.

*Anaru Rangihuea* told us that according to Te Arawa, the mauri of the river was originally established by Ngatoro-i-rangi when he was first naming the river. He also told us that he believed that the mauri of the river was still intact in certain parts of the upper catchment because of the deeds of the ancestors.

*Hiko Hohepa* told us that the ancestors had appealed to the Gods to put in place the mauri so that the river would be pure in order to sustain the people. This event was referred to as "Te tini o Ikatere."

Iwi focus group participants also told us about ceremonies that they had been part of, where people were taken to the river by tohunga to help heal transgressions of the heart and soul. However, there were serious doubts about the ability of the water to heal anymore due to the water being polluted and dirty. There was huge concern particularly from the cultural experts that some of the spiritual practices were still being undertaken and were routine in certain parts of the river.

*Graham Te Rire, and William Savage* told us that whilst they all still remained spiritually bound to the river, their gravest concerns were for the loss of the mauri and wairua (spirit) of the river, and the contemplation that the force has no life.

## **PART TWO – IWI FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

### **Introduction**

We were told that the relationship between iwi and the river has changed as a result of the introduction of pollutants to the river since the establishment of the mills. The impact has been more directly felt in certain areas of the river. Participants told us that it is the pollution

of the river by the "paru" or filth, from effluent discharge, which is responsible for the despoliation of the resources of the river.

### **Kai-Awa (Food of the River)**

All of the iwi focus groups and cultural experts told us about the continuous supply of food traditionally available from the river in times gone by. We were told about the abundance of kai-awa (food of the river) particularly fish species and watercress. Some of the traditional foods are still gathered by iwi, mainly from Tuhourangi, in the upper catchment area around Tarawera. There are iwi who continue to gather traditional foods from the polluted areas of the river, despite the hazard of collecting and gathering and the risk to health and safety from consuming the food.

There was lots of food, eels and watercress.... My Father used to throw watercress back into the river three times as his way of thanking the river for so much food...

*Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau iwi focus group participant*

According to participants Tarawera was famous for its enormous eels. The large eels of five to ten feet long were called paiwai. We were told that eels used to migrate during the third month. The migratory eels were known as matamoe. Kaiherehere was another name for them. Trout, freshwater crayfish and morihana would also be plentiful at the same time.

The most famous delicacy that all iwi are now virtually denied is whitebait. One focus group participant told us:

During the weekends I would come back to Matata to accompany my mother-in-law to whitebait at the mouth of the river. We used to catch whitebait by the kerosene tins. Everybody used to fish from the riverbank. There was a total abundance of whitebait, and heaps of it was caught.

*Ngati Awa iwi focus group participant*

### **Manaakitanga (hospitality of guests)**

The gathering of kai-awa from the river was not only for the purpose of sustenance and survival; it also has an intrinsic cultural value manifest in the custom of manaaki for manuhiri and tangata whenua alike.

The loss of the ability of each iwi to gather food that is culturally significant has eroded one of the most important roles of tangata whenua. The foods that were part of the staple diet of each iwi have disappeared. Along with the loss of culturally important food, the iwi have lost the enjoyment of water from the river, to drink it, and to swim in it, and enjoy the recreation of the river. *Hiko Hohepa from Te Arawa* summed up how each iwi felt about the loss of their staple diet and enjoyment:

The water and parts of our lands around the river are polluted and there is no kai now. This affects the ability of the marae to feed their manuhiri, therefore the rangatiratanga o nga tangata whenua, or the chieftainship of the host people, is taken away in this respect. If you go to Tuhoehoe, they feed you kereru, but the marae along the river, cannot offer you kai from the river. The iwi of the river will lose this taonga forever if the pollution of the river is not stopped.



### **Whanaungatanga (relationships)**

The principles of the cultural relationship between the river is reflected in the notion of whanaungatanga whereby it is said that people can leave the river, but the river cannot leave the people:

Although a number of participants had moved away from the river, the river remains part of them, and they remain part of the river. Physical separation does not sever the ties to the river, because whakapapa or geneology is the means by which the relationship between iwi and the river endures. *Te Arawa Focus iwi focus group participant*

### **Rongoa (medicine)**

A participant told us that his Grandfather was the healer for the area during the 1930's: There were areas of land next to the river where the plant life included pikopiko, tikouka, mitata and different manuka herbs that were procured for eating and medicinal purposes. Many herbs that were used as rongoa (medicine) by healers, could be gathered in abundance from along the river. *Te Arawa iwi focus group participant*

### **Transport and Recreation**

The river was an arterial system and a place for recreation and enjoyment:

If you swam across the river, you were great, even if you dogpaddled. On the transport side of things, we used to ride our horses across the river, or paddle our waka, or swim. It was our playground. *Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau iwi focus group participant*

### **Kaitiakitanga (steward, guardian)**

There are provisions in the Resource Management Act which relate to the role of kaitiaki, or steward, guardian, regulator. Some participants told us that an understanding of the role of kaitiaki was pivotal to understanding the cultural relationship to the river.

*Kua kii ke au, he taonga a Tarawera. He taonga e tukuna iho e matou ki a matou tamariki mokopuna. Na reira me noho ora a ia. Ma te aha noho ora ai? Ma te pai o ta matou tiaki i a ia. Anei ano te whakapono a te Maori, ehara nana nga taonga o tona ao. Mo te wa e ora ana a ia, ko ia te kai-tiaki. He kai-tiaki noa iho a ia."*

I have said that Tarawera is part of our heritage, for us to ensure and to bequeath to the following generations. Therefore it must be maintained in good condition. How do we achieve that? By good stewardship and care. It is a basic Maori tenet that the things of this world do not belong to us. During our lifetime we are only guardians - merely guardians."

*Ngati Rangitahi iwi focus group participant*

## **PART THREE - POLLUTION**

### **Discharge of effluent form the pulp and paper mills**

We heard from all iwi focus group participants and a number of cultural experts, about the pollution of the river. All spoke explicitly about the pollution of the river as a result of the discharge of effluent by the Tasman Pulp and Paper Mill and the Caxton Mill at Kawerau. A

number of focus group participants had either worked at one of the mills, or had family members that had worked at the mills.

The most compelling stories about the pollution came from people who were or had been residents of Onepu in Kawerau - over the last forty-four years. Some residents quietly expressed apprehension about being given the opportunity to be heard for the first time, and one participant who wished to remain anonymous asking, "Will our cultural voice be heard?"

### **Ahuatanga (Appearance)**

We were told that the most graphic impact from the pollution has been the change in the colour and appearance of the river:

Recently I took a trip along the Tarawera, from the Tarawera Falls to the Tasman Mill, to where the discharges happen, and it is completely different. It is black from there on right down to the outlet. It is completely black, polluted, paru, and it has got an odour. It is in a bad state. The upper Tarawera is crystal clear, and the lower Tarawera is black. It is a black drain. Physically you can see the difference. *Ngāti Awa iwi focus group participant*

Participants told us of the sorrow and dismay about the filth and the stench from the mill that had destroyed the river over the years. Many families have moved away from the river environment, to nearby towns. Many more families have moved far away as they did not want to live anywhere near the river.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research conducted informs us on the cultural story of the Tarawera River, it examines the ways in which the relationship between the tribes of Te Arawa, Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau and Ngāti Awa and the Tarawera River has changed since the discharge of effluent from pulp and paper mills into the river began in the second half of the 20th century.

The Tarawera River stands as the embodiment of the ancestors, named and claimed with sacred place-names indicating specific use; for sacred ceremonial rites; for social and recreational activities; for cleansing; for transport; for fishing; to gather food for families and feed large gatherings - these were the norm, the socio-cultural practices once undertaken by iwi and their families within the river environment.

The research tells the story of the river through interviews with tribal leaders, cultural experts, iwi informants and former mill workers. Most can recall the river in its pristine state, others can attest to the abundance and bounty of the river, cultural experts can connect and recite ancestral linkages through incantation, song, and stories and some tell of their experiences with chemicals and the work practices of industry.

Clearly, the relationship of each iwi with the river as kaitiaki (stewards) of the river has been affected by the establishment of the pulp and paper mills. The price of economic development on the river has been cultural and ecological genocide.

The cultural voice echoes a familiar story in indigenous communities. In the Maori context the research provides opportunities for further inquiry into determining the socio-cultural,

economic and political future of the iwi of the river. Without the presence of mauri (essence, life principle), iwi say the river has lost its vitality, its life force, its quintessential presence. The future physical and metaphysical relationships to the river sit within the wider and universal struggle for indigenous self-determination in regard to “wai” water in all its forms. That struggle is dynamic.

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