

# Defining Indigenous trade

A working paper incorporating  
Māori and Indigenous perspectives

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TE MATA PUNENGA O TE KOTAHĪ



TAUHOĪKOHOĪKO  
Indigenous Trade



TAUHOIHOIHOI

## SUMMARY

This working paper is part of a New Zealand Government-funded research project titled 'Tauhokohoko: Enabling mana motuhake through Indigenous trade' (Tauhokohoko), which was developed by the University of Waikato and Te Rōpū Taumata Charitable Trust (Te Taumata). The paper was prepared by the Tauhokohoko Research Aim 1.3 team and sets out a working definition of 'Indigenous trade'.

The Tauhokohoko Research Aim 1.3 team acknowledges that the term 'Indigenous' can be problematic, since it collectivises the experiences of all Indigenous peoples. The project acknowledges the diverse realities of Indigenous peoples and strives to use the term in an inclusive way. Despite the existence of fraught relations between Indigenous peoples and postcolonial trade practices, Indigenous peoples have always had their own trade practices and relations grounded in Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing. Within contemporary economies, Indigenous

peoples are increasingly turning to international trade to meet their economic, social and cultural aspirations.

The Tauhokohoko Research Aim 1.3 team believes that Indigenous trade, when practiced in the right way, can be used as a tool for enhancing Indigenous self-determination and collective wellbeing. This paper outlines a tentative definition of 'Indigenous trade' for research purposes and provides grounded examples of Indigenous trade that fit within that tentative definition. The Tauhokohoko project is concerned primarily with the involvement of Indigenous peoples in international trade as a financial activity; however, the tentative definition encompasses financial, non-financial, tangible and non-tangible forms of exchange. The paper ends by outlining the key literature that informs the working definition of 'Indigenous trade', including perspectives on the origins of international trade and Indigenous trade, international business and entrepreneurship, and Indigenous economies.



▲ CPTPP Hui, Waikato 2023

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# INTRODUCTION

## 3.1 Purpose and scope

This working paper sets out a working definition of 'Indigenous trade' for research purposes. The research purpose in this instance centres on Indigenous trade enablement. Indigenous trade enablement is concerned primarily with understanding what makes Indigenous trade possible and worthwhile for Indigenous peoples at enterprise, industry and systems levels (Stoddart-Smith, 2025). Given the variegation among Indigenous peoples (World Bank, 2023), defining 'Indigenous trade' is essential for coherence, and to provide a basis for critically evaluating assumptions and generating insights about Indigenous entrepreneurial ecosystems, along with the actors (entrepreneurs and enterprises) who inhabit them and engage in Indigenous trade.

## 3.2 Indigenous trade research

### 3.2.1 *Tauhokohoko means trade*

This paper is part of a research project funded by the New Zealand Government titled 'Tauhokohoko: Enabling mana motuhake through Indigenous trade' (Tauhokohoko). Tauhokohoko, which means to trade in te reo Māori (the Māori language), was developed by the University of Waikato together with Te Rōpū Taumata Charitable Trust (Te Taumata). Te Taumata is an independent national organisation established in 2019 (Te Taumata & Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019) to advance Māori rights and interests in trade policy and trade agreements, and to work directly with Māori enterprises wanting to trade (Te Taumata, 2025). Te Kotahi Research Institute at the University of Waikato hosts the project.

The working definition of 'Indigenous trade' set out in this paper was developed by Tauhokohoko researchers who fall under Research Aim 1.3 (RA1.3). Their focus is exploring how to enable trade through Indigenous entrepreneurial ecosystems

(Dell et al., 2017; Mika, 2022b; Mika, Felzensztein, et al., 2022). The definition draws heavily on Māori perspectives, since the first author and several co-authors identify as Māori, and Tauhokohoko itself is a Māori-led research project based in Aotearoa (New Zealand). That said, the paper is inclusive of Māori, Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives.

Tauhokohoko is broad in disciplinary scope, incorporating law, as well as policy, economic, business, cultural and intellectual property considerations. Nuances in definitions of 'Indigenous trade' are to be expected, given the varying research aims and differences in their knowledge traditions. Hence, a working definition is posited, which is expected to evolve as the research unfolds. We welcome constructive debate on this definition.

### 3.2.2 *Mana motuhake and Indigenous trade*

The notion of mana motuhake (autonomy) represents the starting point for Tauhokohoko research, which explores the hypothesis that mana motuhake enhances Indigenous trade, and its huanga (beneficial) and waiora (wellbeing) effects. The intended outcome is that, by indigenising trade policy, Indigenous trade will increase, resulting in greater mana motuhake and waiora.

The overarching research question for Tauhokohoko is: 'What is the potential of Indigenous trade to transform trade policy and enable mana motuhake for climate-resilient outcomes, and human and environmental wellbeing?' The question and outcomes are addressed by three research aims: (1) indigenising trade policy using Indigenous world views, knowledge and values; (2) measuring Indigenous trade and its relationship to mana motuhake and wellbeing; and (3) enabling Indigenous trade through Indigenous entrepreneurial ecosystems. Tauhokohoko is underpinned by mātauranga

Māori (Māori knowledge; Mead, 2025), principles of Indigenous data sovereignty, which strives for Indigenous control of Indigenous data (Hudson et al., 2023; Mika et al., 2023), and the cultural integrity of Indigenous ethical research (Hudson et al., 2021).

### 3.3 Indigenous peoples and trade

Tauhokohoko engages with the term 'Indigenous', which can be problematic, since it collectivises the experiences and knowledge of Indigenous peoples (L. T. Smith, 2021). Although some commonalities exist among Indigenous groups, including collectivism, ancestral connections with land and resources, and long-term traditional knowledge systems (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022), Indigenous peoples are many and diverse (L. T. Smith, 2021). Thus, the Tauhokohoko project acknowledges the diverse realities of Indigenous peoples and strives to use the term in a way that recognises the distinctiveness of all Indigenous groups. We lean on Peredo et al. (2004) and their definition of 'Indigenous peoples', which has three core elements that not all Indigenous groups may exhibit: (1) Indigenous people descend 'from populations inhabiting a region before later inhabitants'; (2) Indigenous people are geographically, politically or economically dominated by these later inhabitants; and (3) Indigenous people maintain 'some distinctive social-cultural norms and institutions' (Peredo et al., 2004, p. 5).

Indigenous peoples' experiences of postcolonial trade are fraught, beset by exclusionary policies (Harawira, 1999), the appropriation of traditional knowledge (Reid, 2009), and the diminishment of Indigenous rights and interests (Kelsey, 2000). Trade is, in many ways, the basis of colonisation, used by colonial and imperial powers to destroy Indigenous economies and ways of life across the world (Comyn, 2022; Hart, 2002; Ince, 2018; Petrie, 2006; L. T. Smith, 2021; Waitangi Tribunal, 2023). Further, contemporary capitalist

trade networks perpetuate enforced borders that harm Indigenous relations with their lands and resources, such as the borders that separate First Nations, Native Americans and Alaska Native peoples across Turtle Island (North America; Feir, 2025; Global Affairs Canada, 2024; Greenhalgh et al., 2025).

Despite fraught relations with capitalist trade networks, Indigenous peoples have always had their own trade practices. Indigenous trade is diverse, and in contemporary times, Indigenous peoples are increasingly turning to innate processes and principles to evaluate how well trade accords with their economic, social and cultural aspirations (Borrows, 2020). The Tauhokohoko RA 1.3 team believes that Indigenous trade, when practised in the right way, can be used as a decolonising tool for enhancing Indigenous self-determination and collective wellbeing.

### 3.3 Methodology

The Tauhokohoko research design includes qualitative and quantitative methods, such as document analysis, kanohi kitea (observation), wānanga (discussion), kōrero (conversations) and economic analysis. The research is grounded in kaupapa Māori and Indigenous methodologies, in which Indigenous knowing, being and doing are accepted as inherently valid and legitimate (G. H. Smith & Smith, 2019). Given the primacy of relationality as an organising principle within Indigenous worldviews (Cribb et al., 2022; Gladstone, 2018; Greenhalgh et al., 2025; Jørgensen et al., 2025; Marsden, 2003; Royal, 2002), Tauhokohoko explores relationality as a theory of trade where culturally constituted relationships preface Indigenous economic relations (Mika, 2022a; Mika & Niu, 2025). This theoretical possibility contrasts with conventional understandings of the transactional nature of trade and its focus on material considerations (Suranovic, 2010).

## DEFINING INDIGENOUS TRADE

### 4.1 An exchange of value

For the purposes of research into Indigenous trade and its enablement, 'Indigenous trade' can be defined as:

*An exchange of value by, for, with, between or among Indigenous people where the Indigenous parties aspire to be self-determining and contribute towards Indigenous collective wellbeing.*

A broad definition of 'Indigenous trade' is intentional because Tauhokohoko is premised on Māori and Indigenous worldviews, values and norms, which are inherently relational, holistic and multitemporal. Thus, trade from this perspective is inclusive of financial and non-financial exchanges, tangible and non-tangible phenomena, as well as all the value exchanges

generally found within trade ecosystems, for example, trade facilitation, digital trade infrastructure and supply chain management. Indigenous people have always traded in various forms; not always involving finance, profit maximisation or competitive production (Scobie & Sturman, 2024). Measuring and defining 'Indigenous trade' in quantitative terms is useful, since Indigenous trade activity becomes visible through measurement and points to the importance of financial Indigenous trade activities for self-determination; however, Indigenous trade cannot be fully measured in quantitative terms. A large amount of non-financial trade that occurs both within and between Indigenous groups still exists. Examples of Indigenous trade that fit within our tentative definition are outlined below.



▲ Frank Dragon, Gwich'in First Nations, British Columbia, Canada – Wānanga at Waipapa, 25 August 2025



▲ Aroha Armstrong, CEO, Tupu Toa, Tūhono Business Mixer, 25 August 2025



▲ Attending Tūhono Business Mixer, University of Auckland Business School, 25 August 2025

**United States Native American delegates** (left to right): Mary Kim Titla – Executive Director of United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY) <https://unityinc.org/>; Jeff Barehand, President/CEO of Sky Bear Media <https://www.skybearmedia.com/>; Chris James, President and CEO, National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED); Derrick Watchman, Chairman of the Board, NCAIED; Erin Abrahamson, Chief of Staff, NCAIED; Kyia Jackson, Business Development Specialist, NCAIED; Daren Masten, Founder and CEO of Clear Cloud <https://clearcloud.net/>

# INDIGENOUS TRADE IN PRACTICE

## 5.1 Kakadu Organics

Kakadu Organics is an example of an Indigenous exporter that practices Indigenous trade in a way that is consistent with Indigenous values. Kakadu Organics is an Aboriginal-owned, female-led organisation that exports native food, bush medicine and other wellness products from Australia to international markets. The business is rooted in family, relations with land and respect for the natural world. Collective wellbeing is a core motivation, since a proportion of its profits goes back to supporting Indigenous Australian women, fostering Indigenous entrepreneurship and preserving cultural knowledge (Kakadu Organics, 2025). The activities of Kakadu Organics fit within our definition of 'Indigenous trade' through their focus on Indigenous values and their distributive practices.

## 5.2 Waka hourua revival

The recent revival of traditional waka hourua (voyaging ships) practices across Te Moana-nui-a-kiwa (the Pacific Ocean) provides a clear, contemporary example of non-financial exchange in Indigenous trade (Mills & O'Sullivan, 2021). This revival was led by three master navigators: Sir Hekenukumai (Hec) Busby from Aotearoa, Nainoa Thompson from Hawai'i and Mau Piailug from Satawal. Sir Hec, Thompson and Piailug collaborated to build and sail waka hourua, sharing knowledge and skills in the process. The waka hourua revival exemplifies Indigenous trade through non-financial exchanges of traditional knowledge and skills throughout Te Moana-nui-a-kiwa. These exchanges are self-determining and contribute to Indigenous collective wellbeing because they are run by, for and with Indigenous peoples seeking to revive their traditional waka practices and ensuring that this transmission carries on for future generations.

## 5.3 The Winnemem Wintu Salmon Rematriation Project

The Winnemem Wintu Salmon Rematriation Project exemplifies Indigenous trade that extends beyond financial exchange to reflect broad and diverse understandings. The Winnemem Wintu people are Indigenous to the Waywayet River in Sacramento and have kinship relations with the Nur salmon, which are also Indigenous to their river. In the late 1800s, American colonial authorities built salmon hatcheries on the river and sent stolen salmon around the world, including to Aotearoa. This process severed Winnemem Wintu relations with the Nur salmon, bringing both the Nur salmon and the Winnemem Wintu people to the verge of extinction (Russel & Cheung, 2025).

In 2010, a group of Winnemem Wintu people travelled to Aotearoa for the purpose of reconnecting with their salmon, which they found in the Mellish Stream in Canterbury. The Winnemem Wintu people built relations with the local tribe (Arowhenua), who ancestrally connect to the Mellish Stream, and both groups are facilitating the salmon's return to California (Russel & Cheung, 2025).

This salmon exchange will return wellbeing to the Winnemem Wintu, their waterways and their salmon, and is an important example of non-financially motivated international exchange between two groups of Indigenous peoples (Russel & Cheung, 2025). In this instance of Indigenous trade, one Indigenous group is facilitating another Indigenous group to enhance their collective wellbeing by improving the health of their kin species, their waterways and, in turn, their people, in a way that is self-determining for both Indigenous parties involved.

## 5.6 Metia Interactive

Metia Interactive is an example of a digital Indigenous trade enterprise. Founded in 2003 by managing director Maru Nihoniho, Metia Interactive are dedicated to creating inclusive and culturally authentic games. Metia Interactive is currently developing Guardian Maia, an interactive action-adventure video game grounded in Māori mythology. The game is positioned for international release on Steam, enabling it to be distributed and sold globally in a digital format (Metia Interactive, 2025). Metia Interactive demonstrates how New Zealand game studios can contribute to the growing Indigenous digital international trade economy through developing products grounded in an Indigenous worldview. Metia Interactive reflects notions of Indigenous self-determination. Further, their commitment to developing and sharing authentic games grounded in traditional Māori worldviews and knowledge contributes to Indigenous collective wellbeing.

## 5.7 Arctic Lavvo

Arctic Lavvo is a small Sámi family firm with around 10 employees producing and selling traditional Sámi tents, called 'lavvos'. Their markets include both Sámi and non-Sámi customers, mainly in Norway, Sweden and Finland, but also in other parts of the world. The company produces modern, durable, lightweight tents for comfortable outdoor living and easy transport, in addition to other outdoor equipment, including the PopUp Sled (with an integrated tent) and the Aurora Sled (a luxurious pop-up tent), both of which can be transported to remote areas with snowmobiles. Arctic Lavvo are also developing bigger tents, scaling up the traditional Sámi lavvo, for the conference market. Arctic Lavvo tents are constructed based on traditional Sámi knowledge systems (Arctic Lavvo, 2025). Arctic Lavvo reflects our definition of 'Indigenous trade' since it is an Indigenous-owned and led business that seeks to enhance Indigenous wellbeing by enabling Arctic Indigenous groups to reconnect with nature and their traditional livelihood practices.



▲ Moana Maniapoto and Jason Paul Mika address CPTPP Ministers, Auckland, New Zealand, 16 July 2023

# THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

## 6.1 Foundations of international trade

Foundational understandings of international trade are important for defining 'Indigenous trade' in contemporary contexts. The scholarly literature, industry analysis and policy research define 'international trade' in various ways. The International Trade Council (2013) defined international trade as 'economic interactions between countries where each nation specialises in the production of certain goods and services' (p. 4). Meanwhile, Polanyi (2018) defined 'trade' from an institutional perspective, as a way of acquiring goods that are not immediately available. International trade has a long and complex history, having been a vital part of human livelihoods and the growth of human civilisation since its inception (Curtin, 1984).

The International Trade Council (2013) discussed five key periods of international trade. First is the pre-historical period when trade took the form of gift exchanges or barter, a type of reciprocal exchange that occurred before the advent of monetary systems (Michailidou & Dogan, 2008; Polanyi, 2018). This early trade was initially characterised by exchanges at community boundaries or through random encounters, functioning as boundary markers (Curtin, 1984). During this period, humans traded the materials that were essential for survival, such as obsidian for tool making and salt for preservation. Pre-historical trade relations paved the way for today's global economy (International Trade Council, 2013).

After the pre-historical period came the ancient trade empires, where early human civilisations, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley, and later, the Greeks and Romans, developed sophisticated trade networks. These large empires established both maritime and land-based trade networks that facilitated the exchange of goods and knowledge, enabling urban growth and an overall expansion of the global economy (International Trade Council, 2013). Ancient trade

can be distinguished from modern market-driven trade, which tends to view trade as transactions for individual gain measured in profit (Michailidou & Dogan, 2008). However, trade in the ancient world was motivated by a complex interplay of economic, political, social and cultural factors.

State-sanctioned trade in ancient Greece and Rome involved imperial control of grain supplies and revenue generation, but the business of trade was perceived as a lowly occupation (Garnsey et al., 1983). Trade in ancient China evolved through a combination of state-controlled commerce, regional specialisation in agriculture and a demand for luxury goods by the elite; however, being a merchant was cast as a self-serving, dishonourable station (Frankopan, 2017). Trade in ancient India was encouraged by the state, which viewed wealth as a legitimate policy goal consistent with religious ideology, garnering investments in infrastructure, monetary systems and esteem for merchants (Chandra, 1977).

Subsequent periods of trade are related to colonialism, which refers to a period when European explorers searched for new trade routes and resources outside of Europe, establishing colonies (Mika, 2024) followed by mechanised industrialisation. During this period, European traders connected with American, African and Asian markets, often in exploitative ways (International Trade Council, 2013). The first industrial revolution transformed the way international trade operated and spurred an extremely rapid expansion of global trade networks. This period also brought with it new regulatory structures around international trade, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and, later, the World Trade Organisation (WTO; International Trade Council, 2013).

The most recent period of international trade was referred to as the 'digital age' by the International Trade Council (2013). The digital revolution, with the introduction of the internet, smartphones and online

payments, has transformed the global economy (Schwab, 2016). This has enabled the creation of large e-commerce entities such as Amazon and Alibaba. This period has brought many new opportunities for trade; for example, it has reduced barriers to entry, which means that small businesses can now access global markets more easily, but it has also introduced challenges related to over-consumption, cybersecurity and environmental degradation (International Trade Council, 2013; Yufriadi et al., 2024).

Today, international trade is key to economic growth and development, and it nurtures relations among countries (International Trade Council, 2013). Groups in various countries trade with each other for numerous reasons, including differences in technologies and resources, supply and demand imbalances, economies of scale and government policies (Suranovic, 2010). The International Trade Council (2013) proposed that contemporary international trade is fundamentally driven by the principle of comparative advantage, which occurs when a country or group of people can produce goods or services more efficiently than another group or country.

## 6.2 Origins of Indigenous trade

Historical Indigenous economies involved extensive networks of trade among tribes, clans and extended families, facilitating the exchange of goods, culture and knowledge (McCarthy, 1939). Indigenous peoples globally have maintained sophisticated and far-reaching trade networks throughout history. Keoke and Porterfield (2003), for example, highlighted ancient Indigenous trade networks across Te Whenua Moemoea (Australia). Keoke and Porterfield (2003) described extensive trade networks that existed across North, Meso and South America pre-European contact, where trade routes hosted complex systems of exchange between neighbouring and distant tribes. Le Dressay et al. (2010) also examined historical Indigenous trade across North, Meso and South America, describing First Nations economies as having six distinctive elements of market economies: specialisation in production, import and export trade networks, public trade infrastructure, commercial laws, mediums of exchange and property rights.

The origins of Māori trade are not necessarily distinct from Māori life itself, since trade has always

been part of Māori ways of being (Coleman et al., 2005; Firth, 1929; Nicholson et al., 2012; Petrie, 2006; Puckey, 2006; Scobie & Sturman, 2024; Spiller et al., 2011). According to the literature, the origins of trade for Māori were first made explicit through the notion of gift giving, which evolved into exchange, then transaction and distribution (Firth, 1929; Mead, 2003; Petrie, 2006; Waitangi Tribunal, 2006). Māori gift exchange includes transactions to acquire goods, and to fulfil a social purpose (Firth, 1929). Moreover, early Māori trade was governed by protocols that balanced communal needs, relationships, reciprocity and mana (Mika, Rout, et al., 2022; Pio et al., 2012; Spiller et al., 2025).

Māori trade economies in Aotearoa changed dramatically post-contact with Europeans. Trade was a key aspect of early Māori–European encounters (Mika, Dell, Elers, et al., 2022; Scobie & Sturman, 2024). Māori trade networks and commercial activity more generally expanded as tribes applied their long-standing trade knowledge in new contexts (Petrie, 2006; Reid & Rout, 2016; Scobie & Sturman, 2024). During this time, some tribes decided to set up long-term trading relationships with Europeans, while others carried out isolated exchanges (Petrie, 2006; Scobie & Sturman, 2024; Spiller et al., 2025)

By 1840, Māori engaged in large-scale international trade and maintained a trade surplus. Historians and business scholars have described the period from 1830 to 1860 as the golden age of the Māori economy (Petrie, 2006; Spiller et al., 2025). During this period, rangatira (chiefs) played a foundational role in Māori economies, ensuring that they served Māori collective wellbeing (O'Malley, 2012). Tribes actively engaged with new trading partners, technologies and productive activities to generate goods for international markets, while maintaining foundational Māori economic ethics (Firth, 1929; Petrie, 2006; Scobie & Sturman, 2024). During this time, tribes participated in the colonial capitalist economy on their own terms, maintaining pre-existing lifeways while adapting Eurocentric products and practices (Schaniel, 1985; Scobie & Sturman, 2024).

Post-1860, Māori engagement in the colonial capitalist economy was no longer voluntary, since they were forced to engage in these practices to meet their basic needs (Scobie & Sturman, 2024). Scobie and

Sturman (2024) stated that this process ‘was not inevitable but was the result of the imposition of extra-economic power expanding out from British colonial-capitalism’ (p. 125). The settler government required Māori land to uphold colonial capitalist systems and obtained it through violent means (Comyn, 2022; Scobie & Sturman, 2024). By 1930, the New Zealand settler government had overseen a reduction in Māori land holdings to 3.6 million acres of mainly back country (approximately 4.9% of the country’s landmass), significantly eroding the once-thriving Māori economies (Scobie & Sturman, 2024).

### 6.3 International business and entrepreneurship

One important theoretical foundation of international Indigenous trade and its enablement lies in the international business literature, and especially in the literature on international entrepreneurship. Indigenous perspectives are not common within these fields, and internationalisation activities are mainly understood from European or US perspectives. However, linking our research to theoretical perspectives within these fields can both provide an important lens through which to better understand international Indigenous trade and contribute to rich and diverse views on international business and entrepreneurship.

Modern technologies and trade liberalisation have paved the way for earlier and more rapid internationalisation for small firms and the internationalisation of new types of firms (Zucchella, 2021), for example, Indigenous firms. Wang et al. (2025) explored how firms navigate authenticity, foreignness and cultural identity when exporting cultural productions that are characterised by rich artistic expression and symbolic meaning. They suggested a framework for managing place-based identity that demonstrates how firms can connect, assimilate, showcase or enrich their place-based identity through trading cultural products (Wang et al., 2025). Theoretical perspectives on embeddedness can also help us understand how Indigenous entrepreneurs internationalise while remaining connected to their cultural contexts (Vanninen et al., 2022).

### 6.4 Indigenous economies and trade

Indigenous trade forms a part of Indigenous economies, which are based on the ethics and principles of Indigenous worldviews (Hilton, 2021). ‘Indigenous economies’ can be defined as the diverse processes, practices, relations and institutions through which Indigenous peoples generate their livelihoods (Amoamo, Ruckstuhl, & Ruwhiu, 2018; Bargh, 2011, 2012; Howard-Wagner et al., 2018; McLellan et al., 2025; Mika et al., 2019). Indigenous economies have two overarching commonalities. First, they tend to be place based and underpinned by relationality and reciprocal obligations between, and among, people and the natural world (Amoamo, Ruckstuhl, & Ruwhiu, 2018; Henare, 2014, 2016; Hilton, 2021; McLellan et al., 2025; Reid et al., 2021; Scobie et al., 2023; Scobie & Sturman, 2024; Trospen, 2022). Second, Indigenous economies are inseparable from the environments that sustain them (Amoamo, Ruckstuhl, & Ruwhiu, 2018; Cribb & Mika, 2022; Henare, 2014; McLellan et al., 2025; Rout et al., 2021; Trospen, 2022; Walker, 2020).

Today, Indigenous trade is often limited to either local markets or large Indigenous exporting companies doing business globally as a part of various trade agreements (Mika, 2021, 2023; Mika & Maniapoto, 2023). Indigenous approaches to trade prioritise relational efficacy (Mika & Niu, 2025; Stoddart-Smith, 2025). These approaches include the ways in which Indigenous people engage with common-pool and public goods through equity and empowerment, fairness in sustainable procurement, relational sustainability and holistic notions of wealth (Amoamo, Ruwhiu, & Carter, 2018; Feir, 2025; Morgan & Korinek, 2025; Panezi, 2020; Trospen, 2022). From an Indigenous perspective, for example, wealth comes from recognising that all things have mauri (life force) and mana (power; Dell et al., 2018; Mahuta, 2025), and that relationships are shaped through circularity, continuity and connectivity with the cosmos (Hilton, 2021; Pickering et al., 2025; Schwartz & Stoddart-Smith, 2024).

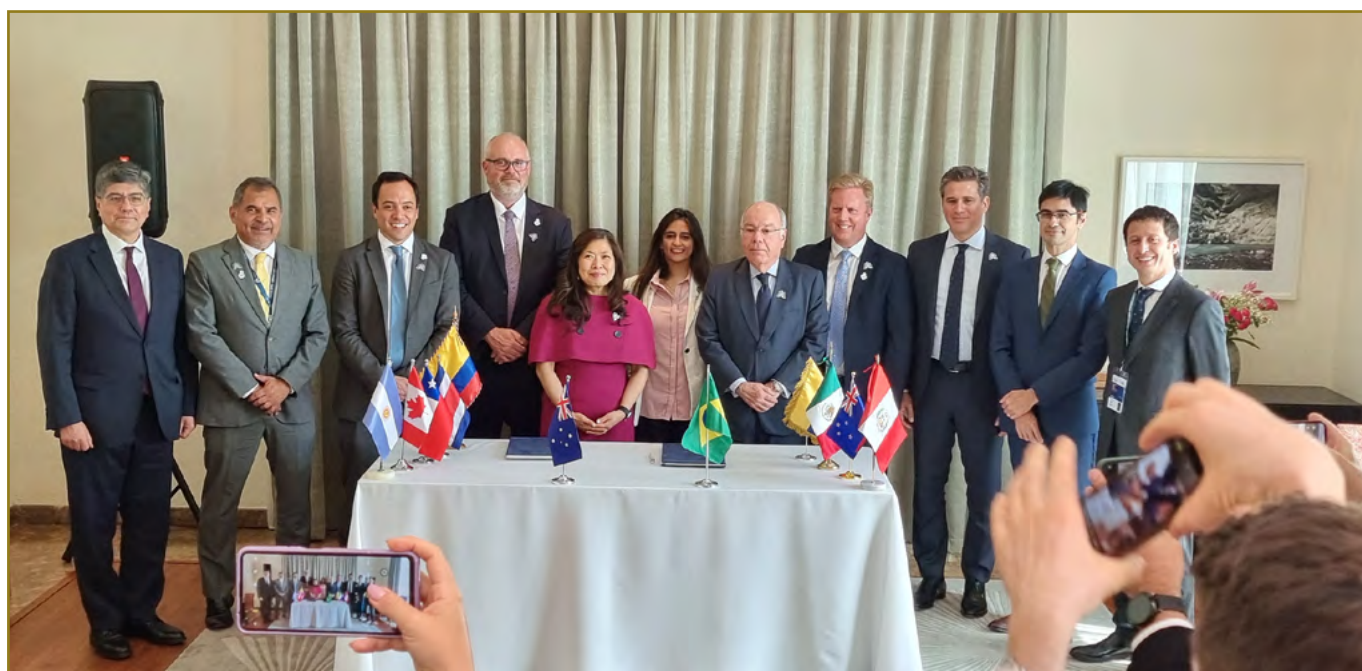
The result of a recent attempt to incorporate Indigenous worldviews into an ‘orthodox’ free trade agreement is the Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Arrangement (IPETCA). The IPETCA

defines 'Indigenous trade and investment' as 'forms of trade and investment with, between, and among Indigenous peoples from participating economies' (IPETCA Partnership Council, 2021, p. 3). The IPETCA definition of 'Indigenous trade' is inclusive of relational trade and investment, long-term exchange networks, and Indigenous laws and values. Further, the definition operates with an intergenerational perspective and involves responsibilities to land and resources, relations between people and the natural world, and the rights of Indigenous people to self-determine their own economic and social systems (IPETCA Partnership Council, 2021).

Our working definition of 'Indigenous trade', set out above, differs from the IPETCA one in three main ways. First, in our definition, 'trade' is defined in terms of exchanges of value, not things. Trade does not always involve an exchange of goods and services; trade can also include exchanges of culture, systems and knowledge. Thus, the term value is used to exemplify this broader view, referring to not only financial value, but also a broad spectrum of practices and relations that contribute to Indigenous livelihoods. Second, our definition involves self-determination, which points to Indigenous trade as a decolonising tool for revitalising Indigenous lifeways, livelihoods and knowledge (Cornell, 2019; Jefferies, 2024; Spiller et al., 2025). Finally, our working definition

refers to the importance of collective wellbeing, which, for Indigenous peoples, is inherently collective, relational and multitemporal (Mika, Dell, Newth, & Houkamau, 2022; Spiller et al., 2025). Indigenous people's wellbeing, for example, depends on the wellbeing of the natural world, their ancestors and their descendants (Cribb et al., 2024; Rout et al., 2025).

Indigenous entrepreneurship, which can be defined as the creation, management and development of new entities by Indigenous people for the benefit of Indigenous people, (Hindle & Lansdowne, 2005) is a key driver of Indigenous trade (Colbourne et al., 2024; Jurado & Mika, 2023). International trade is an important part of Indigenous entrepreneurship, since Indigenous entrepreneurs establish economic relations with groups outside their country of origin (Jurado & Mika, 2023). This is especially true in export-dependent countries such as Aotearoa where Māori entrepreneurs are increasingly looking to overseas countries for consumers, business partners, investors and suppliers (Mika, 2014). As Indigenous entrepreneurs consider internationalising their enterprises (Jørgensen et al., 2024; Warriner, 2009), culture offers a distinctive means by which to establish relations that are conducive to trade, both commercial and non-commercial (Ross & Mika, 2020). Māori values, for example, are salient in forging international business alliances (Jones, 2024).



▲ Inclusive Trade Action Group (ITAG) ministers, World Trade Organisation's (WTO) 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), Abu Dhabi, 26 February 2024

Indigenous trade enablement is important for the contemporary, and future, make-up of Indigenous trade relations. The Tauhokohoko RA 1.3 team conceptualises 'Indigenous trade enablement' as the context, systems and interventions that build entrepreneurial, organisational and institutional capability for Indigenous enterprises to internationalise, and to participate in and benefit from international trade. It is about making international trade for Indigenous enterprises possible and worthwhile, and ensuring that the process and outcomes of trade are guided by Indigenous worldviews, values, knowledge and practices. Indigenous trade enablement can be seen to operate at three levels – macro (system level), meso (industry level) and micro (firm level).

In practical terms, at a systems level, Indigenous enablement can refer to the favourability of the business environment for conducting Indigenous trade. This level of enablement is inclusive of policy settings, access to finance, infrastructure quality and the ease with which business and trade can be conducted globally. At the industry, sector or meso level, enabling Indigenous trade relates to the industrial structure, its competitive and cooperative dynamics, and the extent to which stakeholding entities and actors help or hinder Indigenous trade. Examples of this are whether industries and sectors are dominated by a few large

firms (imperfect competition; e.g. dairy) or many small firms (perfect competition; e.g. wineries), whether entry and exit barriers are high or low (e.g. fisher versus processor), whether industry, sector and trade associations are active or inactive (e.g. Seafood New Zealand), and whether sectors are self-regulated or externally so (Business NZ, 2006).

At a firm level, Indigenous trade enablement is concerned with building Indigenous entrepreneurial capabilities for Indigenous trade. Indigenous entrepreneurial capabilities consist of spiritual capital, cultural capital, human capital, social capital and financial capital (Mika, 2018); although 'capital' can be extended to mean any variant (Foley, 2014). What is missing is an explanation of how these capabilities enable trade. Meanwhile, Indigenous trade enablement can be examined rationally through the following notion (or theory of change) associated with traditional forms of entrepreneurship policy (Lattimore et al., 1998) and evaluation (Greene & Storey, 2010): (1) rationale – identifying a business need or defining a business problem, (2) design – developing an intervention to meet an unmet need or solve a problem, (3) delivery – intervention is provided and (4) efficacy – evidence of outcomes is sought. Thus, potential sites for the study of Indigenous trade enablement are the enabling environment, industry and enterprise.



▲ Rawson Wright and Tania Te Whenua, Hopuhopu, 10 November 2024

<< Gila River, Phoenix, January 2025



TAUHOIHOIHOI

## CONCLUSION

This working paper introduced a tentative definition of 'Indigenous trade' for research investigating Indigenous trade enablement as part of Tauhokohoko, a five-year, government-funded research partnership between the University of Waikato and Te Taumata. This definition is intended to help researchers critically evaluate assumptions and identify new insights. **'Indigenous trade' can be defined as an exchange of value by, for, with, between or among Indigenous people and others where the Indigenous parties aspire to be self-determining as Indigenous people and contribute towards Indigenous collective wellbeing.** This is a comprehensive definition, inclusive of value exchanges within wider trade ecosystems. The definition

reflects the relationality of Indigenous worldviews and the inherently political nature of Indigenous trade as a decolonising tool for advancing Indigenous wellbeing. Although the definition is provisional, it provides an important point of coherence and a foundation for ongoing Tauhokohoko trade research. Tauhokohoko is concerned primarily with the involvement of Indigenous peoples in international trade as a commercial activity, which necessarily involves cross-border exchanges of money. Thus, Indigenous trade for the purposes of research within Tauhokohoko is inclusive of financial elements, while acknowledging that trade encompasses non-financial, non-tangible forms of exchange.



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Indigenising Trade