

Evolving Crown-Māori partnership

As Aotearoa New Zealand becomes more supportive of a bi-cultural nation the Crown-Māori relationship is maturing too. Though not without mistakes and disputes. The focus is shifting beyond Treaty settlements and righting wrongs, to enabling Māori to have greater self-determination, governance and kaitiakitanga (guardianship) roles. The Crown-Māori partnership is contentious, and trust across society still needs to be built.

What we're seeing

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The concept of partnership associated with the Treaty of Waitangi/ Te Tiriti o Waitangi has a long contentious history. There are different views on what a Crown Māori partnership should look like, or if one should even exist.

Treaty Settlements

Since the 1980's a key focus of the Crown has been on Treaty Settlements. These lead to financial and non-financial compensations, along with formal apologies from the Crown. They have contributed to a strong and diversifying Māori economy, which provides iwi and hapū with more influence inside and outside of government. Settlements, though, are lengthy contractual processes. The Crown often decides what recommendations from the Waitangi Tribunal to accept.¹ The 2017 Wakatū Supreme Court decision opens the possibility of pre-Treaty settlements as well.²

Collaboration is still a work in progress

Treaty settlements also set the expectations of collaborative development of plans and priorities between Crown agencies and iwi. However, a whole of government approach was often lacking, and independent reviews found agencies can still do better in honouring Te Tiriti.^{3, 4} The failure of the Crown to properly consult on foreshore and seabed legislation in 2004, and on establishing a marine reserve around the Kermadec's in 2015, have illustrated the lack of partnership.¹

Signs of change

More recent developments indicate that the Crown's approach is still evolving. The Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act provided legal personhood status to the river, with co-management by the Crown and iwi.⁵ The creation of Te Aka Whai Ora is intended to provide Māori with greater control over their health care.⁶

A new agency, but trust needs to be built

The newly established Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti (The Office for Māori Crown Relations) is seen as a new approach to how the Crown engages and partners with iwi.⁷ However, centuries of broken promises, and on-going inequalities for Māori, have eroded trust in government.¹ But others oppose what they see as decisions that give Māori unelected decision making authority over other New Zealanders. They dispute that the concept of partnership is a Treaty issue.⁸ While this is a minority view, at present, it could become more divisive if the benefits of Crown Māori partnerships are not well described.

A future republic?

Within the next few decades, it is probable that New Zealand becomes a republic. This is likely to be contentious for both Māori and Pākehā. It will also mean that the relationship between Māori and Pākehā will have to change, and including the development of a constitution that has Te Tiriti at its centre.⁹

Potential implications

Create

- Development of a real bi-cultural society
- A thriving, more equal Aotearoa

Relate

- Improving trust and collaboration between Crown and Māori
- By Māori for Māori approaches becoming the norm

Consume

- Māori-based products and services part of business as usual

Degrade

- Risk of increasing anti-Māori sentiment
- Crown's ability to dictate agreements with iwi declining

Connect

- Partnership driven by opportunities not solely from addressing grievances
- Engagement due to "want to" rather than "have to"

Define

- Aotearoa as a post-colonial nation
- What does real partnership look like?

More information (links)

¹ [Te Ao Māori. Trends & insights](#)

² [Update on mahi to return the Nelson Tenth's'](#)

³ [Report recommends changes to DOC Treaty implementation](#)

⁴ [An opportunity for Māori and the Crown to reconcile](#)

⁵ [Innovative bill protects Whanganui River with legal personhood](#)

⁶ [Te Aka Whai Ora / Māori Health Authority](#)

⁷ [Te Arawhiti a game-changer?](#)

⁸ [Hobson's Pledge](#)

⁹ [What a NZ republic might look like](#)