

2 February 2026

Dear Councillor Campbell

Thank you for your emails and I hope you had a good break over summer.

I set out below a brief response to your query. In short, the deep relationship between Māori and the natural environment is widely accepted and reflected in legislation, case law and Waitangi Tribunal reports, central and local government policy and planning documents and in academic writing.

I set out below a few examples of references to the connection between Māori and the natural environment in legislation that has been enacted by Parliament.

One example on point for the Taupō District is the Ngāti Tūwharetoa Claims Settlement Act 2018 (section 10(g)):

Through this settlement, and with this apology, the Crown recognises how your resilience as hapū and as an iwi depends upon your deep connection to the whenua and your desire to protect it. The Crown looks forward to building an enduring relationship of mutual trust and co-operation with Ngāti Tūwharetoa based on te Tiriti o Waitangi/the [Treaty of Waitangi](#) and its principles, and to support you in the revitalisation of ngā hapū o Ngāti Tūwharetoa.”

[Ngāti Tūwharetoa Claims Settlement Act 2018 No 55 \(as at 12 April 2022\), Public Act 10 Apology – New Zealand Legislation](#)

The Ngāti Rangi Claims Settlement Act 2019 (section 96) is an example of the use of 'innate':

kawa ora means the innate connection between Ngāti Rangi and the natural world

[Ngāti Rangi Claims Settlement Act 2019 No 40 \(as at 27 November 2025\), Public Act 96 Purpose of Te Pae Ao – New Zealand Legislation](#)

The Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010 includes a Crown recognition of this statement of significance by Waikato-Tainui (section 8):

The Waikato River is our tupuna (ancestor) which has mana (spiritual authority and power) and in turn represents the mana and mauri (life force) of Waikato-Tainui. The Waikato River is a single indivisible being that flows from Te Taheke Hukahuka to Te Puuaha o Waikato (the mouth) and includes its waters, banks and beds (and all minerals under them) and its streams, waterways, tributaries, lakes, aquatic fisheries, vegetation, flood plains, wetlands, islands, springs, water column, airspace, and substratum as well as its metaphysical being. Our relationship with the Waikato River, and our respect for it, gives rise to our responsibilities to protect te mana o te Awa and to exercise our mana whakahaere in accordance with long established tikanga to ensure the wellbeing of the river. Our relationship with the river and our respect for it lies at the heart of our spiritual and physical wellbeing, and our tribal identity and culture.

[Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims \(Waikato River\) Settlement Act 2010 No 24 \(as at 27 August 2025\), Public Act 8 Statement – New Zealand Legislation](#)

The Local Government Act 2002 refers to (section 77(1)):

A local authority must, in the course of the decision-making process,—

... if any of the options identified under paragraph (a) involves a significant decision in relation to land or a body of water, take into account the relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral land, water, sites, waahi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga.

There are similar references in the Resource Management Act.

As noted, these are just examples and there are many more.

In my 30+ years of legal practice, litigation and study, I have found the deep relationship between Māori and the natural environment to be widely accepted and respected. The discussion is more about how that relationship is reflected or provided for in a particular context, process or case.

I hope that is of some assistance.

Kind regards

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