

Supporting Tangata Whenua development in disaster management and research in Aotearoa

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Aotearoa New Zealand has a specialised national incubator for Māori scientists of disasters to develop the next generation of researchers and to build risk reduction and resilience strengths of Māori communities.



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In October of 1878, 2 large vessels, the barque *Felixstowe* and immigrant ship *City of Auckland*, were bringing British settlers to Aotearoa New Zealand. Both sank offshore from the entrance to the Ōtaki River on the southwest coast of New Zealand's North Island. Local tangata whenua [Indigenous peoples] responded to the sinkings and all the ships' passengers survived. A large kōhatu [stone] now stands at the river mouth to commemorate the sinkings and as testament to the disaster response abilities of local tangata whenua. The plaque by the stone reads: 'The Māori of the Ōtaki district acted with great skill and courage to bring passengers ashore'.

The 19th Century exemplar of Māori managing emergencies is one of many and is typical of the ways tangata whenua apply holistic approaches that are underpinned by relationships, intergenerational knowledge, values and cultural practices when responding to environmental challenges in Aotearoa. As a result of historical and recent disaster management successes, Māori bodies of knowledge and approaches to whakaoranga [creating and enhancing wellbeing] within communities are being recognised in New Zealand Government disaster management policies and practices. However, research centres within te ao Māori [Māori world] and dedicated to Māori risk reduction aspirations in partnership with iwi [tribes], hapū [subtribes] and whānau [families] have, until recently, been lacking.



The large kōhatu stands at the mouth of the river as a memorial to the sinkings and the response of local tangata whenua.

Image: Christine Kenney



Te Toi Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa Hui-a-noho, Te Tauraka Waka a Maui Marae, Bruce Bay, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Image: Christine Kenney

Te Toi Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa ([Māori Disaster Risk Reduction Research Centre] was established with funding support from the Natural Hazards Commission (NHC) Toka Tū Ake. The centre launched on 10 July 2020, a date aligned with the rising of the star, Puanga, the herald of Matariki [Māori New Year]. The centre is a partnership between the NHC and Massey University. Centre research and capability development initiatives are designed and conducted in partnership with iwi hapū and whānau, in response to needs identified by Māori and in accordance with kaupapa Māori [Māori values]. This is in response to needs identified by Māori and in accordance with kaupapa Māori [Māori values].

Māori research affiliates and partner institutions are situated throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, and the centre has become the leading national incubator of Māori disaster researchers through growing a significant membership (n=60+) of senior and emerging scientists. Postgraduate mentorship opportunities, study stipends and cultural support in the form of writing retreats and

workshops are available for emerging researchers. Te Toi Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa facilitates iwi whānui [the broader Māori community] to increase Māori response capabilities through developing the next generation of Māori researchers and building risk reduction and resilience strengths of Māori communities.

Centre leaders regularly support Māori community disaster risk reduction aspirations and support grants are available on a case-by-case basis. Areas of research and capability development include safe housing, climate change and flood effects, land use planning, disaster recovery, digitised risk profiling, community resilience, disaster risk reduction, emergency management, urban design as well as seismic and environmental engineering for natural hazards resilience.

For more information about Te Toi Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa, go to www.tetoiwhakaruruhau.co.nz