



# Mori Cultural Database

## Project Summary

The Mori case study is located on Rēkohu (Chatham Islands, New Zealand). It focuses on the development and implementation of a multi-layer research programme that ties together work on Mori identity, indigenous cultural heritage management and protection and resource management.

### Objectives

- To establish a Mori knowledge database for the recording of traditional knowledge;
- To carry out field work with elders in an indigenous methodological and ethical framework;
- To ensure Mori intellectual property (IP) is protected through appropriate recording and access protocols;
- To develop the Hokotehi Knowledge Recording Mentorship Programme to assist with the expansion in recording traditional knowledge;
- To develop indigenous archaeological recording methods that may work as models for other communities;
- To explore options for land use and resource management that protect cultural heritage.

### Outcomes

Digital Information Systems and Training: Responses to problems caused by historic archaeological surveys on the islands initially resulted in the Hokotehi Heritage Strategy (May 2006), which proposed a bicultural approach that blended archaeological field work with elder knowledge. Soon after this work started we were gifted the Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways (TKRP) software and training, which then formed the basis of a digital approach to recording in the field. The use of digital technology has enabled us to overcome many of the barriers potentially found in remote isolated communities. It has also allowed us to share data, record, store and adapt without additional

expense. We have found the use of laser scanners, the TKRP system, and the use of low-cost video cameras to record field work to be a good contemporary solution that also enables high levels of participation. We can now make our own maps and planning documents by using the film clips, GPS data, and key word TKRP software. Key ingredients in the use of this technology have been intergenerational, in control and inspirational. We have struggled at times to get all three happening at once, but at least we can be confident that our records will be available for present and future generations.

Workshops: The case study work enabled us to run two cultural database workshops at Kōpinga Marae in 2010. The first was focused on documenting and caring for *taonga* (artefacts). A large collection of *taonga Mori* (ancestral artefacts) had been in storage at Te Papa for many years and was finally brought home by Te Papa collection managers and conservators. Our workshop designed an accession system and worked to record and conserve every artefact. Attendees built museum storage boxes and also set up a new museum display at the *marae* (sacred communal meeting area), selecting all items ourselves. The second workshop was based on the preservation of images and digital records.

Community Participatory Planning - Building Partnerships: Island isolation has already been mentioned as a barrier we have had to overcome with our work. It has also been a primary motivator for building collaborative relationships. Simply put, we have to do it all by ourselves, so working smarter has been a positive direction and one where the benefits seem to grow exponentially. The persistent interest from outsiders in studying aspects of Mori history and culture or Rēkohu ecology and geology means that we are frequently attempting to engage with researchers, with varying degrees of success. The tools we have developed to enable partnerships to flourish are producing our own set of ethical protocols and the use of informal expert advisory groups for important projects.

## Addressing the Challenges

Past management of our island's natural resources has not been carried out in a way that has been mindful of Moriŕi aspirations and *tikane* (cultural protocols and obligations). This has resulted in a disjunct in the way that sacred places have been cared for. Since starting the IPinCH project this separation has been less pronounced, less problematic. One example of this has been the management of a sacred grove of *rākau momori* (carved living trees), unique to Moriŕi. The grove has been managed as an ecological remnant locked within a fenced reserve but it needs to be managed as if were a garden within a sacred compound. Our approach has been to bring Moriŕi values to the problem, addressing our concerns in an inclusive manner through the creation of a wider advisory team. This challenge has arisen largely because of the limited knowledge of Moriŕi heritage, cultural landscapes, language, and so on, in the modern generation of Moriŕi. The relative silence of Moriŕi voices and our cultural authority has also been a challenge. This project is helping to restore Moriŕi names and Moriŕi control over signage, interpretation and management planning.

What we have found is that this research process has highlighted the importance of hope. Moriŕi ancestors gave their lives to stand for their beliefs. Their commitment to their peace covenant is a beacon of hope for all of us. The case study research has given us hope too in other ways—hope that our trees and living tree carvings can be saved; and hope that the process of engagement and collective decision-making is the best course of action.

## IP in Cultural Heritage Insights

We have often reflected on whether to protect or control certain information from our case study. The consensus has been that when a culture has been in crisis and when valuable knowledge is in the heads and hands of only a few the imperative to share is greater. This seems to us to be a vital point to stress in a project on intellectual property in cultural heritage. In times when culture is thriving, the knowledge holders can select those to hand it on, and when and how. In situations like the one we are in—where Moriŕi history, cultural practices, and language have not been handed down since the 1830s except through archives and memories of those few whose grandparents and great grandparents kept the knowledge fires glimmering—open sharing and active teaching is essential. We have seen similar imperatives with our Hopi friends who have initiated inspiring projects to teach their youth ([www4.nau.edu/footprints](http://www4.nau.edu/footprints) and [natedigitalstorytelling.blogspot.co.nz](http://natedigitalstorytelling.blogspot.co.nz)). We have found that the most useful and durable solutions for protecting our own

IP are active engagement in revitalising culture and retention of control over what is shared and with whom. We have also found that, by being engaged in research as collaborative partners, we enhance opportunities for control.

## What resources, guidelines, or tools created by the project are available?

- Ethical protocols and guidelines;
- Moriŕi People of the Land exhibition book;
- Customary fisheries interviews and report;
- Laser scans of *rākau momori* and digital images of all photographs of the living tree carvings;
- Me Rongo Congress Proceedings and Me Rongo Declaration;
- Taonga recording publication;
- *Waipāua* – archaeological survey and community management plan.

## Who participated in this initiative?

Consistent participants were the co-developers, Susan Thorpe and Maui Solomon, and elder Tom Lanauze. For the 2010 workshops they were joined by youth participants from the island and New Zealand. Other participants are the many collaborative partners and associates, such as the TKRP team, Otago University, writer Tina Makereti, DNA researcher Robin Atherton, and those involved in the *rākau momori* project and the Me Rongo Congress, as well as our Hopi, Niue, and Kanaka Maoli colleagues.

## Learn more

This summary was drawn from the final report of the “Moriŕi Cultural Database” project. The full report and other resources created by the project team can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1I4cLYc>