

Interconnectedness of our Systems and the concept of Recloaking Papatuanuku

“Recloaking Papatuanuku” came out of the conference “O Tatou Ngahere” at Te Papa at the end of 2022 run by Pure Advantage and Tane’s Tree Trust.

“Recloaking Papatuanuku” is the title of a major initiative by Pure Advantage to weave climate and eco-resilience into our whenua. The proposal is to convert 2.1 million hectares of land that is unsuitable for farming or commercial forestry back into native bush.

Pure Advantage and Tane’s tree Trust slide/slides.

That sounds like another land grab. But wait a moment; one of the main reasons why our landscape is in such a mess today is that in years past a lot of land that should have been left in bush was converted to pasture, and commercial forests were planted in places where they should never have been. To make it worse there are many farmers today still struggling to make a living on land that was never good for farming, especially with the growing costs that are now the norm. We all know; the only thing you make off marginal land is work; you don’t make any money. If those unproductive places were fenced off and planted up it would save a lot of work, stress and leave more time to enjoy life, and without even losing money! That’s a good start towards finding that 2.1 million hectares. But how can you make that happen?

Recloaking Papatuanuku slide

That is something that needs serious thought. Are some of the improvements that have been made to increase farm productivity actually proving to be more costly than they were worth? This is not just because their impact on the environment but also their impact on the people involved, the pressures involved in farming today. There has long been a major emphasis on increasing productivity and there has been a lot of innovation involved in making marginal land productive. However we are also beginning to better realise the cost to the environment; extensive erosion and its downstream effects, magnified by events such as Cyclone Gabriel, and the pollution of waterways and aquifers, etc., as well as the effects on the people on the land, the workers. their families, and their communities.

Isn’t time we focused more on a way of working with the land that both cares for the land as well as making sure that those who live and work on the land also have a decent

life?. There needs to be a fundamental change in priorities. Instead of focusing on maximising cash flows and wealth creation for the benefit of the economy we need to focus on caring for the land and the life that belongs there, to help ensure we have a sustainable future.

There are a lot of things happening around the country that show that that's not just a dream. One that there's been a lot of talk lately about establishing a biodiversity credit system whereby businesses and companies wanting to balance their ecological footprint will pay into a fund which will pay farmers to fence off and plant areas not suitable for farming instead of expecting them to do that out of their own pocket. That seems a better idea than paying for carbon credits, especially off-shore carbon credits. That way the money would stay in the country and something really positive would be happening to deal with climate change.

Early days yet, and it remains to see whether the Government will endorse and support the idea but it's the sort of innovative idea that can help turn things around. Many farmers would like to do more to make their farms more environmentally friendly, but the costs involved are far beyond what most people can afford. A scheme like this would be a game changer..

That's the sort of bold ideas that are really needed. There is no point in just making adjustments, being a bit smarter, developing new technology, making better use of AI. or postponing any effective action until we get the economy back on its feet. That's just playing for time and recent events, like Cyclone Gabriel and similar events around the world, tell us that time is one thing we don't have. We need to keep reminding ourselves: We are not going to find the answers to today's crisis out of the thinking that created it. **We need a new start, based on a different set of priorities if we are going to have much of a future.**

That means being bold and brave, and working together.

Look at the way in which the Aotearoa has been developed. From the earliest days of land development the priority has been to get as much productivity from the land as possible, not paying attention to the cost, not just to the land, but to the people who work the land. "The economy needs it". "New Zealand has to pay its way". NZ is the food bowl of the world "..... We have been hearing that sort of talk ever since this country had its first Government. And that's still what is happening. The policies that are being put together at the moment don't seem to be any different. We are not going to address the challenges that face us with a new set of laws and regulations, and all the other "tools" economists say they have available to them to reset the economy. All the economic wizardry in the world is not going to stop the next cyclone.

We need a new start:

That's what the Tiwaiwaka is about.

TIWAIWAKA Principles slide. The slide with all the principles.

Certainly it reflects a Māori way of looking at the world, but we need to take much more notice of the people who have been here longest on how we live with the land. And you will find the same thinking in every culture, each with their own way of saying it. The English name for Papatuanuku is Mother Earth.

The principles can speak for themselves. There are several important points to highlight that are particularly relevant to our gathering today.

Show each of the Tiwaiwaka Principles as the talk proceeds).

**Principle 1: Te whenua, Papatuanuku, is the source of all life. She is the Mother.
*Ka ora te Whenua, ka ora te tangata.***

Caring for the whenua is the first priority. Everything else must be measured against this.

This is the most fundamental change that this country has to make. We have to put caring for the land ahead of caring for the economy.

The problems we are faced with today, water quality, erosion and sedimentation, loss of biodiversity, and the burnout, exhaustion, stress. mental health issues that farmers experience, are the direct results of putting development ahead of sustainability, taking from the land, without checking to see how much it was able to give. How often have we heard old time farmers tell us: "That's not good for the land"?

We always knew that. We always knew that if we kept pouring on fertilisers it would eventually stuff up the water quality, or if we kept irrigating the rivers and aquifers would run dry and the soils lose their structure, and so on. Lots of people, especially those close to the action, knew that it was going to catch up on us in the end, but we had to boost production, build our economy, meet our repayments on the money we had borrowed, to increase our wealth and earn overseas funds, ...

Well it has caught up with us.

There is no need to go on about that. The point is we are now having to deal with the consequences of decades of "development first" sort of thinking. The worry it is that is the same thinking that holds sway today.

We have to admit, we certainly have had enough of all the talking and going around in circles that has been happening for ever, not feeling ready or brave enough to make the bold steps that will give us a chance of a future. We don't need more managers or consultants, we need leaders, leaders who really do have their feet on the ground, not heads lost in the clouds.

Nor do we need to rush ahead with major changes, bypassing the sensible scrutiny that major developments need, to get things moving. That the sort of behaviour is irresponsible, given the uncertainties of the present time. The chance of avoiding a real mess are about as good as winning Lotto. Try telling the bank manager everything is going to be ok because you just bought a Lotto ticket! Climate change is a reality, not a theory, and it's happening now. We need to face up to it and deal with it. What we need is a Government that will work positively and boldly, not a one that goes like crazy to try and balance up the economy, regardless of the consequences to the environment, hoping like anything they don't get caught out by another cyclone or some other disaster.

The starting point is this: if we want to have any sort of a future we have to reverse our order of priorities: caring for the land is the first priority. There are no exceptions. Development, and we do have to keep moving forward, comes second to that. If you keep taking more than you put out back sooner or later you are going to run out. Who doesn't know that?

It's about time developers, entrepreneurs, bank managers and most of all politicians took that on board. We have to live within the boundaries that the planet imposes. If we don't we are using up the future, maybe not ours, but our children, grandchildren, those unborn. We need to invoke the "Mokopuna Principle": what does this do for our grandchildren's grandchildren?

The second Principle gives us another dose of reality. Slide

We have got to stop carrying on as if we were masters of the universe, able to do what we like with the rest of creation because we are the "owners". That's a fallacy, a fantasy; it was never true, no matter how much people have acted as if it were, just helping themselves with little thought of the consequences.

We need to remember that we are part of the network of life, one of the junior members. That means not the boss! We don't have the right to use other living beings, including other people, without respect and care. We need to keep reminding people that we are people, living people; not numbers, not FTEs, and our cows and sheep are not stock units, but living animals. Our cows moo and poo and like good pastures; so do we. We all are entitled to be treated with respect and dignity. That is sorely lacking in our modern society. Even people are treated as "things", units on a database and our value is measured by our productivity. Machines are much easier to work with because they don't have rights, and it seems we are expected to act like machines to hold our place in this modern technologically dominated world. The trampling of others' rights, be they human, animal, trees, etc. has always been the acceptable way of making progress. We have to have progress!!!

If we are going to have a future it will only be achievable if learn where we fit in, to respect life, all life, especially the living things that have been here long before us, and most of all respect the planet itself. It's not a resource; it's our home!

It's the network of life, the interconnectedness between all living creatures that keeps us alive. If that starts to fall apart we haven't got a chance. Loss of biodiversity, the network of life, is as great a threat to our future as climate change. Biodiversity is about how life on the planet works. It's a whole network of connections; the key is interdependence. Life needs life to keep going. If those connections collapse we are finished!

That's what the third principle is about:Mauri. Slide.

The Mauri is described as being a "life principle".

What we need to know is that the mauri is found in the connections that enable life to thrive. If we look after the connections that hold everything together things will keep working. The mauri of a river is not about how much water flows through it, but how well the water is. A simple way to test the mauri is to see whether it is safe for swimming, even better, safe enough to drink. If the water needs chemicals to make it safe it's not actually well.

If the focus of landholders was on making sure the water that runs through their land was well rather than focusing on complying with the minimum standards set by the regulations life would be quite different. But let's not just focus on water. Everything depends on connections, relationships. If our relationships are not going well, with our family, the bank manager, the people we work with, the stock on the farm, the soils that grow things, the gear and the technology we need to run a business, we are going to struggle, no matter how hard we work. The most important relationship of all is our relationship, our connection to the land. If the land is not well, we won't be well. If the land is not well, agriculture, horticulture, forestry and all the network of business that service them are going to struggle to be viable.

Caring for the land is the number one priority; there are no exceptions, not even fixing the economy.

Our key role is to care for the mauri. **Slide.** We need to focus on repairing and caring for the connections that enable things to work. That doesn't apply just to the land, but to every aspect of our lives, especially us, each other. We have to get back to caring for us rather than just me. We've got to turn the "me world" into a "we world". We need our world to be well for each of us to be well.

One more thing. **Slide.** All the ambitions that dominate so many people's lives, the need to be rich and powerful, at the end of the day are just nonsense. How many people have sacrificed everything that was important to them to become rich and powerful, only to end up dead. We all will die sooner or later. it's a dead end. We need to keep that in mind.

Finally, at the end of the day, the key to life doesn't depend on investment or technology and all the advice of the experts; it depends on microbes. Microbes in the soil, microbes in the guts of the animals we farm, microbes in our own bodies. They are the ones that keep life going. If we don't look after them we won't survive. Even synthetic meat needs

microbes. The surest way to survive is to take care of the microbes. The tiniest living creatures are in fact the key to our future.

Certainly Aotearoa needs a lot to get it back going again. We can't blame it all on the last Government. Cyclone Gabriel messed the whole economy up, not just the East Coast. But there is going to be more Cyclone Gabriels. There is no point in gambling that there won't, and using old ways of getting things going again, development at all costs, and fix the consequences later. We've had nearly 200 years of that and now we do have to fix up the mess. We need to change our priorities. **Caring for the whenua, the land is the number one priority. There are no exceptions.**

So where does it lead us, the ordinary people, our families, our homes and on our lifestyles?

We need to reset our priorities. Making more money is not the priority, it's caring for what's most important, the things that stand by us when things get rough, our families, our homes, our communities, and our land. That's what will give us a future.

There is another Māori saying that says it all: Ka ngaro te tangata, ka toitu te whenua. People will come and go, and Governments, but the land remains. That's why this is so important:

Ka ora te whenua, ka ora te tangata. When the land is well we are well.

Let's make caring for the land the number one priority. Do that in a way that will sustain us, not just for our short lives, but the many generations that are still to come. Do that and we have real hope for the future.