

This place is bigger than the human



A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE FUTURE WITH /

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Rangimarie, thank you very much for your time – I'm really happy to have this opportunity to talk to you. I wanted to start by asking how Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei thinks about the concept of intergenerational wellbeing. You're managing some things on behalf of a group of people under your care. What is the context for your hapū that helps frame why the future matters? What does it mean for your approach to managing the issues that may arise over the next 40, 50, 60 years?

Intergenerational wellbeing is at the forefront of our thinking. It's what determines, describes and articulates our strategies and way of living. It's not just wellbeing of people, it's also of the environment. The Māori language and terms such as tangata whenua give you the sense that this place is bigger than the human or the physical. We are born from the land and so shall we return. Our relationship with the natural environment is reciprocal, enduring and constant.

Without a doubt, te ao Māori and tikanga inform this thinking and our practice. There are different ways that we remember what we're supposed to do and how we're supposed to do it through tribal lore, and how, since the beginning of time, we have understood certain phenomena within this world.

For Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, our history shapes our relationship and responsibility we have to Tāmaki Makaurau.

Ahi kaa is a key idea here. Our ancestors – their actions, constant occupation and settlement in the rohe – have underpinned our contemporary relationship with this place and we have maintained that over time. The way we invest, the way we engage with people, have a view on social matters, the importance of culture, language, arts – even the way we share innovation and aspiration. It influences the way we have political relationships also, particularly in terms of whakapapa, and in terms of the various engagements and relationships that we've had with other tribes over time. Tikanga is critical in that, informing intergenerational wellbeing and how we do it.

At a practical, daily level, we ask ourselves what decisions for mokopuna are we making. How you make that normal behaviour is critical and is our core responsibility. Our Act [the Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei Claims Settlement Act 2012] requires us to protect the estate of the tupuna in perpetuity. So we have a legislative as well as a moral responsibility to think intergenerationally, because that tupuna was here since the 1700s. We now have his estate that we have to care for and look after for the future.



One of the things I notice is your focus on housing, more holistically than just a house as a dwelling. You're strongly emphasising the facilitation of connection across generations, and while Māori longevity is increasing, the population remains quite youthful. How has that figured in your thinking about your housing objectives?

There's a couple of things about the housing strategy that we've done here. I think our colonial engagement and experience has been quite fundamental in that. We are one of the few tribes who, by 1951, were landless. We had a quarter of an acre which was the cemetery. We were wards of the State – we ended up here in this street just in front of you. Thirty houses were built. The rest of the community were pepper-potted – essentially, the Crown's assimilation policy was the reality for this particular group.

Our housing strategy started in 1978, so we're about a generation and a half in. The architects of the strategy were really clear – what we've done since 1978 is develop different housing solutions for our time. A lot of it has depended on the resource that we've had. We were in rentals in a housing estate from 1951, and in 1978 we went and took out a loan from the Māori Trustee and bought those homes. We were then landlords to our own families in that estate. After that we said, "Housing New Zealand can help us buy the next ones." They only let us build them on stilts because they would not lend money on collective Māori land.

I live in one of these. My house was built on stilts and the quality of the building was poor. We got to the next housing estate, and what we managed to do is get loans from Housing New Zealand, and we were able to be third party guarantors. The stock there was better. The latest development we have paid for ourselves rather than try to borrow money on collective Māori land or papakāinga land. We used our asset base in other parts of the city to be able to do that.

What that has enabled, really, is resilience and mana motuhake (self-determination). The accumulation of assets has been the mechanism for us to be able to make quality decisions around housing and to develop solutions where young people can afford to buy houses on their tribal estate. What we've also done here is open up land. We've opened up land for whānau to come back onto their tribal land – being very clear, though, that this land is communally owned, this is owned by the tupuna and for the next hundred years, whānau have the right and the privilege of being able to live on their tribal estate. We do not charge a lease cost to live on our tribal estate but after a certain period of time (e.g. a hundred years), the expectation is that that land comes back to the tribe.



At a practical, daily level, we ask ourselves, what decisions for mokopuna are we making?

Our lesson has been – which may be different to other tribal communities – that we have to keep all of our land in collective ownership. Our experience is that the individualisation of land title was the biggest policy that destroyed the social fabric of our tribe. When you talk about intergenerational wellbeing and intergenerational lessons, that's what they will say. Between 1869 and 1951, the single biggest thing that destroyed the socialisation of our people was individualisation of land titles. So you never, ever do that again. We've just had to start to think about what is absolutely sacrosanct, and then what are the contemporary models or ideas that we can use to support that.

What I've found is that when we were able to afford the developments on our own, we could make choices about what matters and what counts. So you will see here, the things about youth, about affordability, about environmental sustainability, about culture and health, about design – they all become a lot easier to do.

You can see examples. One day I'll take you to Kāinga Tuatahi. My sister lives in there. I'll take you into those homes. They're medium density because we don't have a heap of land, so we've got to be quite selective about how we maximise that block of land, but it is fantastic.

We bought 30 homes, \$15 million. We built a combination of two, three, and four bedroom homes. We've privileged intergenerational living, so they could bring in others – families. We made sure that it was cheaper to live in those homes so we've got solar there, we've used the first Tesla batteries. We've got swales so that when the water comes off the road, it cleans out before it gets into the Waitematā, because she's our tupuna. Things which are obvious, where you say, "of course we would".

What have been the impacts on your community with this strategy?

The thing I love about it is that in this street, we have been able to bring a lot more people back into the community. What was 16 houses is now 30; what was potentially 40 people is now 120. We've been able to triple the population in this community. They're all homeowners so they bring with them a particular āhua, a particular way of thinking which has been really, really good for the broader community. We run a GP clinic as well just at the top of the road. The number of children that are coming in with health-related or housing-related illnesses has fallen significantly. Our kids don't get sick any more because the houses are such good quality, which means that we can focus on other things like education and culture.

We have at least 30% to 40% in Kāinga Tuatahi where the Māori language is the language in the home. It wasn't just about the house. It was about all the other bits that fed into that. At least a third of them were first-generation homeowners. We're not talking about young people who are getting their first home because Mum and Dad have already got theirs. We've got 50 year-olds coming in there, for the first time owning their own homes.

Those are symbols of what mana motuhake and resilience look like in a Māori community. The thing for us is, we think there's something there that you can scale, but it's probably unaffordable. We've got about 1,500 families and we've only be able to do it for 30. How do we start to scale, realistically?

Concurrently to that, one of the women in my team, who you met, runs our Social Housing Programme. We've got 67 homes in the Ōrākei community through a community housing provider. We rent those homes to our families. What we have tried to do in those is try to instil a housing standard. You might not own your home, you might rent the home and it belongs to the tribe, but you will be able to have pride in the home that you live in, which means all the homes will have new carpet, all the homes will be well painted, all the same colour, no patches anywhere. Where the kitchen's dilapidated, we'll fix it. We'll insulate them all and put heat pumps in everywhere. We're on a maintenance programme to paint them all so that they get up to standard. Again, that's resilience and mana motuhake.

There's different levels of how you enable self-determination and resilience – tribal, strategic, then management and how you enable it on the ground. Housing's quite an interesting case of that. We're just looking now at models around shared equity. We need a different way to continue the momentum that we're building.

The multigenerational dwellings story is interesting. You have a lot of positive ageing stories here, different generations connected to each other through a housing solution like the one you've described. What sorts of "ageing population" issues are there for your community?

Our people are living longer, but I'm not sure if they're living better or well. We've done quite a lot of work identifying who our population is and I think we've connected with perhaps 95% of our population. We know who they are, where they are, how they descend. Our view is that we've now got to be more deliberate about our investment to have the best chance of making an intergenerational impact. We're dealing with systemic sorts of issues and trying to find a way through that.

We do have kaumātua housing. I think we've taken on some ideas that we thought were good at the time, but are now rethinking them. There are nine kaumātua houses next to us. We took 1.5- or two-bedroom houses, put everybody right next to the marae and let them coexist together. Actually what we're thinking about now is isolation of the elderly. How do we maintain connection? We have a kaitiaki kaumātua whose role is to support our kaumātua across the country which is very successful. There are some significant health issues that we've got to contend with and I'm not sure we're geared up for that at the moment. We're designing some more kaumātua units because we anticipate that our population will get bigger and we think it's important to privilege them.

We have been getting them involved with our designers, sitting in there with them. "Build your kaumātua village of the future – go on. You're not going to be in it, but help your cousins and find a way through."



[Our housing strategy] has enabled... resilience and mana motuhake.

What do they say about how it should look to maximise wellbeing?

They want to be here, they want it to be a bit bigger, they want it to be scattered.

On the topic of rangatahi – if you think 40 years ahead, how are we going to involve our young people in our economic base? What's your approach to education, for example?

The answer is really simple. Our children need to prosper if this nation's got a chance of surviving. This isn't a Ngāti Whātua problem or challenge, this is the country's challenge. We have got lots and lots of Māori and Pacific youth – I'm going to talk about Māori youth at the moment. We've got lots of youth and if we're not deliberate around how they become strong contributors to the New Zealand economy, we are in a whole heap of trouble. We have to figure out how they can earn more, in a meaningful way. Education becomes absolutely critical. I am not sure that our children currently have the environments – I'm thinking predominantly about school – that are conducive to them succeeding.

65 to 70% of our kids are schooled here in Tāmaki. Only 5% of those children have access to Māori language as the formal means of instruction, day in day out. It is really clear that there is a strong connection between culture and identity and prosperity and learning. Already, the ability for them to have that is really diminished, so we have to find ways to counteract that.

We're trying at the moment to work on both ends. We're worried about the future of work and understand that it will have a massive impact on the current workforce and the future workforce. We know that at the heart of that, Māori will be impacted, particularly where they've got low skilled jobs and when AI and tech can come in and take them.

Now, we have to try and find ways not to be the State, but to value add alongside the State. I'm not sure that we've got a shared understanding or that we perceive the risk in quite the same ways. I think we are nervous, we can see it coming. I'm not sure that we've got the same level of fear or that we see the same level of impact at the other end.

What we've tried to do here is a couple of things. We can be reactive – at primary and secondary and tertiary – and try to increase participation and love for learning. But we're also going to try to start early. We have put quite a lot of effort and emphasis around early childhood, the early years.

We've asked the parents – what are the major barriers to access, to entry and to supporting the learning journey for your child? They would say finance is the biggest one, particularly in Tāmaki – and distance. Finance and distance to early childhood institutions. We have asked how many parents want their children to learn te reo Māori. There's a desire, but barriers due to distance and the cost, which is prohibitive.

We're going to try to follow what was done with 20 hours free, but we think we can probably do a bit more – maybe 50 to 80% of funding for our children where they choose Māori medium. We will pilot co-investing with parents. We are not trying to be a quasi-state. Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei can't afford to be the Government. We can't be that. I really worry that in a post-settlement environment there is an assumption we can be.

We are doing some work in STEM in primary, and we're doing education grants and scholarships at early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary. We collect quite a lot of information from our families.

When it comes to rangatahi, we've been asking them – what would it take to pass NCEA Level 1, Level 2? They replied, "Aunty – it's money." We said, "How much money and how would you allocate it?" They said, "There is a difference between Achieved and Excellence". They put a table up on the wall – Level 1, 2, 3 – and then "Achieved," "Merit," "Excellence" and then they put a number there. We used that and put it on the website: "NCEA Rewards: Do the mahi, get the treats". That's what the rangatahi said, "do the mahi, get the treats". Then we said how will we know and they said, "take a snapshot of the results and send it in." We have had positive results.

What about entry into employment?

What we're doing this year is trying to focus on particular industries and pathways to employment. We've got teams dedicated to employment and what we're trying to do is bolster the Ngāti Whātua economy. It's about, how do we get more people working for us and/or our partners on projects that actually have a direct connection to us. My view is that we've got a tribal economy we're trying to build and it's beautiful. It's done really well, but that's not good enough if the whānau economy isn't flourishing at the same level.

Our job, in my view, is to try to make sure that some of that tribal resource is actually being filtered through an ecosystem inside that allows our families to participate. It's quite contained; we're not trying to go everywhere in the world. We know what our economic development areas are going to be over the next 15 to 20 years. Chances are, 90% of that's not going out of Auckland. We have better control over our economic circumstances, so we've got to try and figure out, with those kids that we've got coming through, how we're moving them into the world of work.

What we're trying to do is say to the team, "This is about feeding the demand for skills. You are going to have to determine the demand and go and get it supplied." Rather than focusing on supply and trying to find anywhere for it to be used. It's being quite specific and targeted. That's what I'm trying to get through here.

The other aspect is that we have internship programmes. I've got 12 interns here and they come in every Christmas. For 12 weeks of the year, they are just so dynamic. We kind of brainwash them for the first week saying, "Ngāti Whātua is the centre of your world and everything you do over the next 20 years/30 years/40 years is about coming back and giving back. You are going to do that." I just keep going for the first week and then the second week and I just make sure, because the reality for some of those kids is that they've never been here. Being told "you've got a job, you've got a role and you've got a legacy that you need to maintain" is enough to get them bolstered.

We've also connected with TupuToa – I'm the coach here for that – which is the Māori and Pacific Internship Programme into corporate New Zealand. What we're trying to do is increase the percentage of Māori and Pacific leaders in corporate New Zealand in senior management positions. They do a couple of years here, and then they go onto there, and the idea is they will have a degree programme before they walk out the door.

We're trying to facilitate pathways to prosperity and I think right now, we need to be able to do that in really deliberate ways. The next piece for us is SMEs. We're trying to fuel it. We haven't got the method yet to scale and speed. I think most of the work that we're talking about around the future of work, has to happen now. You've got a five to 10 year window and I think we're a bit slow.

There's not one Crown agency at this point that is along that journey. I'm not sure that it's a priority for them – I can't see it. That's not a criticism, but it's what I think we need to do. We need to be small, targeted, specific, understand the issues and the challenges and then look at scaling. I think that's what social investment intended – know the challenge you're trying to solve, and then figure out the right ways to be able to get at it.

Can we talk a little bit about your environmental restoration work? How does that figure in your approach – is there a climate aspect, an adaptation aspect?

Yeah, without a doubt. I might talk about two aspects of that because I'm also the Chair of Te Ohu Kaimoana, the Māori Fisheries Commission.

When I look at climate change, we will see the impact of that particularly in the primary sector, and that's the majority of where our assets are. There's a Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei reality – how do we deal with climate change issues in a contemporary metropolitan space, in a built environment? But those sorts of challenges are quite different to the broader Māori economy which is very, very heavily dependent on the primary sector.

We've said that we think that the biggest challenge for this generation will be climate change. Everything we're doing at the moment is starting to take a really strong climate change lens. We're thinking about how we deal with that greatest issue of this time, and how we ensure at the same time that we're enhancing our restorative relationship with the whenua, moana and the wai.



Our people are living longer, but I'm not sure if they're living better or well.

Climate change is going to be quite a massive area for us. We're doing some work at the moment not only on what our position on climate change is, which you would've seen in the Iwi Management Plan, but also about how are we starting to behave, and understanding where we are and how we are taking personal responsibility to combat it. We're doing work around understanding carbon emissions and looking at our own carbon footprint. Then we would like to have a view on what that looks like in terms of the built environment in the city, as well as in the moana.

I think that Auckland City has got a desire to get in underneath this, which has been really good. What's been quite interesting for us in different projects on the sea or in the water or on land is that we're in a particular part of the city where there are a lot of people who have got an understanding and sense of responsibility to do their bit for climate change. We're in Mission Bay, Ōrākei, Remuera, St Heliers and close to the CBD. We have a particular non-Māori population who we are working with really closely and I'm loving it. Climate change may be the greatest challenge for this generation, and we have cool partners outside of the local Government who we are able to work with in discrete projects. The unintended consequence of being able to think about climate change is that our friendships are expanding and I'm loving that.

I don't think we are ever going to try to do this alone. I think we have quite a good model, particularly in terms of the local community engagement, that will be able to really push the dial. We have been also trying to understand not only what we should measure and how we should look after pieces of taonga, but also how we should make sure we know the carbon footprint and carbon emissions of our homes. Not just the homes that we own, but also the homes in which our tribe lives.



Our children need to prosper if this nation's got a chance of surviving.

I would love to be able to say, "here's an indigenous sustainable village, here is what we take out of the environment and here's what we put back in." As part of our Environmental Restoration Project, we've got a native nursery down the end of the road. That will produce a whole heap of native plants specific to the rohe of Tāmaki. The idea is, we're not trying to grow plants from the Far North and have them here; we're trying to make sure that the biodiversity and the stuff we grow suits the place we're in.

Now, I think we could be able to contribute emission offsets back. If our families are emitting a certain amount, we will grow a number of plants that allows them to offset. We may be able to sell those to other places but offset is the intent. We will ensure that we are constantly trying to reduce carbon emissions as people and we will be collectively responsible for that. For climate change, unless people and nations take responsibility, we're not going to get to the answer. No great policy that I, or the team or iwi or hapū write are going to solve it unless there are deliberate, on-the-ground strategies to do it.

And with your involvement in fisheries?

When it comes to fisheries, which is something I'm passionate about, we are seeing the impact and it will have huge, huge economic impact on the families involved. It is having massive impact on a lot of our cultural engagements across the country. Particular tribes have for generations had particular places where they have gathered kai, where they have eaten kai, where they engage and a lot of that is changing before their eyes. Particularly the rural communities in the real far, far North and east coast – they are seeing it really, really strongly. It's striking at the heart of their cultural footprint and legacies as well as economically. That worries me. The other part we are seeing is that we are becoming the recipients of a lot of the global activity and behaviour around plastics and microplastics. We can't get away from that, and we think we have a responsibility to be able to deal with that.

We're looking at some things with the Government at the moment around deep sea fisheries management areas. I think we need to take more of a principled approach around climate change and just what's going on in the environment. We've said that whatever the solution might be, Māori world views need to be absolutely critical in here. What that does is acknowledge the natural law. Tangaroa has first rights, humans have second rights, and then after that, economics comes in. Being able to articulate that and have a shared view around it is quite powerful and it seems to me that it's one that all iwi are agreeing to. We look after the settlement on behalf of 58 iwi and that's what they've said – non-negotiables. Te hā o Tangaroa – in the Māori world view, first rights are back to the atua.

We have a responsibility, so whatever it takes, we must fulfil that. The contribution back will be that we will have a harvest and we will be able to enjoy the fruits. If that means that we wait, then we must wait. When you talk about intergenerational wellbeing – it's not just about what happens on land; it also is about what happens in the sea.

This is big. I'm not sure that we have the right technical or science skills here. We're talking about passion. We think we have an obligation, so we have a crack at doing it, rather than asking, do we have a science view about this? Have we got people doing a whole lot of work? No, not really.

I think we're all struggling with that. We've talked quite a bit about partnership, and the roles of Government, iwi, others. How should we think about Treaty of Waitangi principles playing into these big national questions?

I think it should be fundamental. There's a couple of things here. One is that Treaty settlements will be finished in the next 40 years. That's my sense. All of those Treaty settlements – there'll be hundreds of them – have a particular clause around the Treaty and how that will be honoured, how it will be valued within the context of those particular tribes. They will be a critical part of New Zealand legislation. There's no getting around that.

We should be proud that we're probably one of the best, most progressive indigenous countries in the world. I don't see it as a barrier to progress. I see it as actually being the enabler. It is completely innovative, in that there is opportunity to partner, to celebrate the indigeneity and the absolute beauty of a particular nation, and to do that together. We're going to move away from being fearful about the Treaty and actually see it as a way to move forward and give us solutions about stuff.

What I've talked about today is what was, I think, intended in the Treaty. A lot of it was about being able to nurture different ways of seeing and engaging with the world, and different ways of being able to see your obligations and responsibilities in the world. And right now, I think the world needs a bit of that, because I'm not sure it's been human-centred. It's been quite capitalistic in its intent. I don't feel that's what we were trying to get to, when we were thinking about the Treaty.

There's a real neat opportunity right now to reimagine the future that it might have. For years I've talked about it being the blueprint, but I'm not sure that it truly has been. I think it has been forced too hard through a legislative frame. But what you are finding right now is that the commercial sector is seeing it as an opportunity. Not necessarily the Treaty itself, but the idea of partnership and connecting with the indigenous way of being in Aotearoa.



We have a responsibility as iwi and hapū and Māori trusts and incorporations to be really active in trying to build this.

What the Treaty represents, not just what the words say, is I think the next play. I'm looking forward to seeing that. We are seeing more advancements in the relationship between Māori and non-Māori and participation between the two and partnership and all the other different parts of this. We are seeing more of it being valued and honoured well in non-Government circles because the Treaty settlements, in some ways, have been able to reorientate the primary relationships that Māori have had in the past.

Before, it was only Crown and Māori and most of it was based on grievance and loss of land and mana and all of those things that came out of colonisation. We're moving, and with that, so too are our views around how we partner and engage with the world at large. We also know that there is something about what we value, what we honour and what we intended that has global resonance. The other part that will help here is that our children are being immersed, whether it's deliberate or just happening in society. Our children want to be a part of something. They want to have an identity that is authentically Aotearoa, and know really clearly that to have that, there is Māori.

I'm not sure if it will be all about "Treaty of Waitangi", or if it will be all about "Māori" – either/or, right now, let it be. I just think the idea of having two parties – Māori and non-Māori – the idea that we can consciously, openly and kindly share in that beauty, that's what I can sense in the kids.

One final thing. You've talked about ways in which we can build on our strengths in how we are approaching some of these contemporary problems. What is the one thing that makes you hopeful about the future?

I'm hopeful in the fact that these conversations are happening, Tim. Never in our tribal history has somebody from Treasury who is trying to craft the long-term economic outlook for this nation, never have they come out and had a conversation with people, with us. We're really humbled by that; that our voice is actually meaning something in this. I'm hopeful that Māori can continue to be part of the narrative of Aotearoa's future, and not just in social matters but also in terms of the economic future, because we need Māori to be contributing and active and being able to build that. That's a huge signal for me. I'm hopeful because it also signals that we have a responsibility as iwi and hapū and Māori trusts and incorporations to be really active in trying to build this. Because we won't go – if we are not there having those conversations, I worry about that.

One thing that may not be so hopeful is that our costs of living here are too high. We're out there feeding families and so, too, are a whole heap of other people. We were not doing that five years ago and today we're having to do that because it's the reality. It is too hard to live in this country. So I think we have to take bold steps to actually make sure that this next generation doesn't start so far behind the eight-ball.

We talk about inequity, we talk about inequality but, actually, we haven't done the fundamental things. We've got an ageing population who are going to be, in the main, significantly wealthy and yet we're asking the poor to try to contribute to that. We're saying, "Did you know people are getting older? Do you know you need to work harder so you can pay for that? Do you know that?" You kind of look at it and you go, "What?"

The idea would be to say, actually – Māori, do you know you're going to be a huge part of that, so you'd better be part of solving it. I'm hopeful that we can have a different conversation that allows us to give these people an opportunity to ramp it up, because they are the consequence of a whole lot of stuff that, yes, they may've been involved with in some way or form, but they've also inherited a particular legacy. Treaty settlements haven't yet got out of one generation. We haven't quite got there.

There's an assumption, particularly by our own people and by the broader New Zealand society and the State, that the settlements should be able to revive those better circumstances. Actually, we'll never be able to get to that point very quickly. It's going to take us at least four or five generations, on our own, unless there's some fundamental, radical shifts. I'm hopeful that that kind of conversation, that is really bold and courageous, happens. Because we're actually saying, basically, "can one generation give up something for the future?" We would do that quite easily, but I'm not sure that it's a shared view – so how do we go down that track?

That's a big challenge.

It is, I think. I get why it's a hard challenge, but I'm not sure we've got another way out.