

# Should We Be Afraid of Co-governance?

Susan Healy discusses the significance of co-governance for the future of Aotearoa.

## Fears Can Be Learned

When we were growing up, our neighbours across the road had a couple of bulldogs. The dogs had a roaming area in front of the house but were well fenced in. We older kids in our family liked to go over and talk with the dogs and reach across and stroke their heads. We would take my two-year-old sister with us, and she loved the dogs as much as we did.

We were astonished when, at age four, my sister suddenly developed a real fear of the dogs and wouldn't go near them. Where did this come from? We soon realised that she was now spending time with friends her own age; they would cringe with fear whenever they saw the dogs, even at a distance. My sister had quickly absorbed their reactions.

It is concerning how, in ways subtle and unsubtle, fear is being engendered around the issue of co-governance.

## Fear for Political Gain

Fear is a powerful motivator in elections. "If there were an actual political playbook, fear tactics would occupy prime real estate. Simply put: fear works," a commentator has said.

This year at Rātana pā National Party leader Christopher Luxon chose to focus on co-governance, distancing himself and his party from any form of it in the delivery of public services. In justifying an attack on the Māori Health Authority, Luxon tapped into the "one rule for all/one service for all" theme – an approach that has dismally failed

Māori. If anything is to be learned from dealing with Covid, it was the greatly improved outcomes for Māori and Pasifika once the advice of their own health experts was heeded: that their communities knew best how to engage with and deliver to their people.

When Prime Minister Chris Hipkins met with the National Iwi Leaders Forum at Waitangi this year, he was told of their concerns at the way racism is being stirred in the country, especially over the issue of co-governance. "There is a level of frustration among iwi that again iwi and Māori are being used as a political platform," said Jamie Tuuta. Waikato-Tainui chairperson Tukoroirangi Morgan put it bluntly: "Will he [Hipkins] succumb to the attack dogs of the National Party and ACT as they fan the flames of racism and anti-Māori sentiments?"

Because the concept of "co-governance" is new for many of us, it is not unreasonable to have doubts and questions about its implications. However, when the Indigenous leaders of our country are clearly advocating for something, it behoves us who are not Māori to take note and consider their reasons for it.

## Mutuality and Cooperation Fundamental to Treaty Agreement

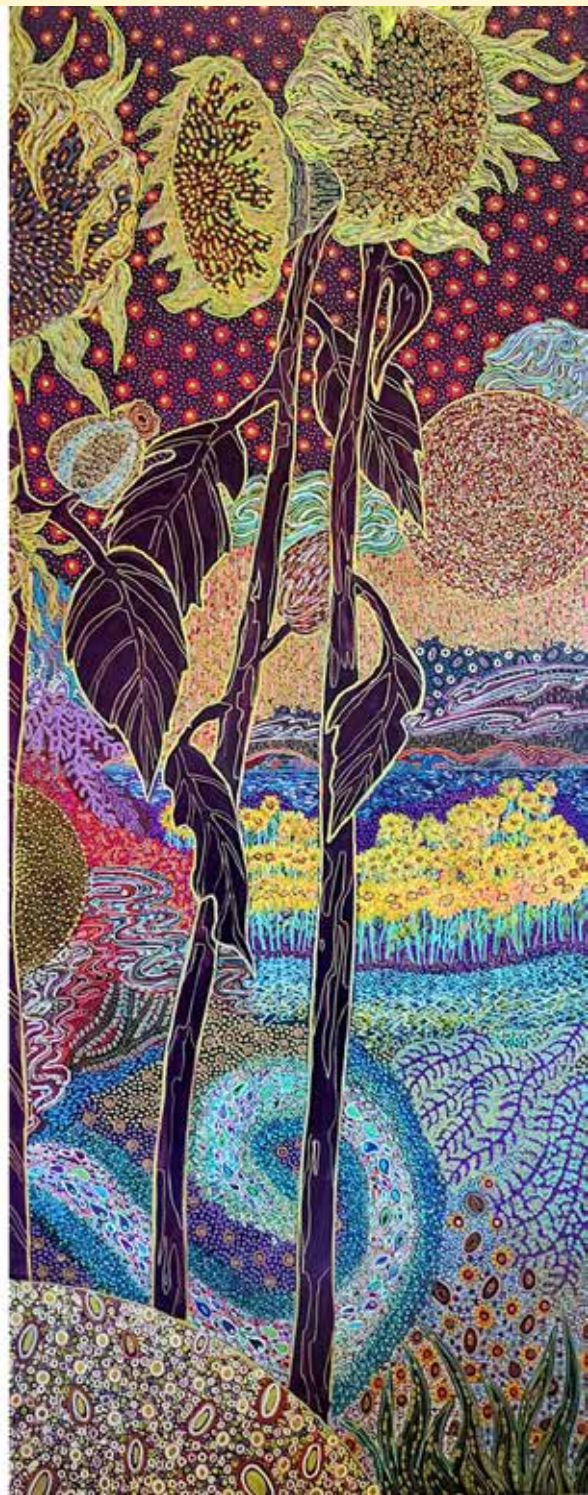
It is easy to forget that in the 1840 Treaty covenant it was Māori who chose to grant a place in their lands for the Queen's people and those



who were to come in the future. They fully expected the authority of their hapū and iwi to continue and be reinforced; the Crown pledged that it would uphold the tino rangatiratanga (full authority) of the different Māori nations (tribes).

Māori then and now are a people of peoples, within a polity where the independence and interdependence of each nation is acknowledged. In their world, coming together to





negotiate agreements and reconcile differences is basic to advancing common goals. The Queen's iwi was embraced as a people to live within this arrangement.

Ngāpuhi Speaks (the independent report on the Ngāpuhi Nui Tonu claim to the Waitangi Tribunal) concludes: [In Te Tiriti o Waitangi] "the rangatira were allowing the governor to stand alongside them as rangatira of the Queen's people ... The relationship

was to be one of co-operation, mutual support and reciprocity. In matters of common concern, the rangatira and the governor were to come together to address problems, advance common interests, decide on any needed new law, and generally work for the good of the country and its diverse communities."

Today, it is still the desire of Māori leaders and their communities that the relationship with government authorities is one where their mana is recognised and respected, and working together is based on real co-operation, mutual support and reciprocity – not just token consultation.

### Learning from What Is Happening Already

Chris Finlayson, among others, stresses that there are already a good number of co-governance arrangements in place and they are working well. The former Minister of Treaty Negotiations explained: "Since the late 1990s, governments have agreed in some major Treaty of Waitangi settlements to create boards formed of local government and iwi representatives to manage significant environmental features" (*Listener*, February 18-24, 2023).

Interestingly, the iwi and government representatives are generally expected to reach decisions by consensus. This is in line with traditional Māori decision-making, and allows for a cooperative way of working. Tukoroirangi Morgan said that in the years he and John Luxton were co-chairs of the Waikato River Authority all decisions were made by consensus. This is an Authority that has been very effective in its work of returning the Waikato River to health.

A similar positivity has been expressed by those involved in collaborative arrangements in the

South (Grant Miller, *Otago Daily Times*, 6 August 2022). Andrew Noone, Otago Regional Council chairman, and others spoke to Miller about excellent working partnerships with Ngāi Tahu. Heading the Ōtākou Rūnanga, Edward Ellison sees the partnerships as a benefit for everyone: "The Ngāi Tahu view is that we can help provide the cleaner water and environment that all New Zealanders want."

Ellison points out that many arrangements with regional and local councils guarantee iwi a voice in decision-making but are not negotiated co-governance as in the Treaty settlement cases. Politicians often fail to make this distinction. This is the situation with the Maori Health Authority (MHA). The MHA is not co-governing the whole health system; its role is to "ensure accountable Māori voices are heard at the decision-making level" (Tipa Mahuta, co-chair of the MHA board).

The concept of co-governance can be used to play on people's fears, or it can be seen as signalling a wider movement towards restoring and realising the intentions of the Treaty covenant. There is a choice between staying in fear and ignorance – or listening, learning and wanting a future based on reconciliation and the restoration of mana.

"Listening is much more than hearing – listening means paying attention, having the desire to understand, to give value, to respect, to treasure the word of others" (Pope Francis, 2016).✦

### FURTHER RESOURCES

Glenn McConnell, "How co-governance is already working," *Stuff*, 1 April 2022 [www.tinyurl.com/38cktr8m](http://www.tinyurl.com/38cktr8m)

Grant Miller, "Co-governance has become a contentious concept. Is it a threat or an opportunity?" [www.tinyurl.com/425f9mxc](http://www.tinyurl.com/425f9mxc)

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