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Aotearoa New Zealand's modern economy, much like the traditional economy of both Māori and Pakeha, remains heavily reliant on biological resources framing what has been called a bio-economy. While current research in Aotearoa New Zealand focuses on the agri-food assemblages of this bio-economy (Lewis et al., 2013), Māori have a fundamental role as custodians of important biological heritage and as actual and potential producers of future added value products. Essentially we supply valuable 'weightless' exports of cultural expressions and practices that form the unique cultural 'backdrop' by which Aotearoa New Zealand is recognised in a crowded global economy. We demand the right to participate as equals in administering our natural world which is the source of our spiritual, cultural and economic wealth.

Māori concerns over the obligations and responsibilities for protecting this wealth are encapsulated in local, national and multinational debates and agreements. WAI 262 (Waitangi Tribunal, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c) makes regular mention of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), adopted during the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The CBD is a legally binding agreement for the protection of all forms of biodiversity and explicitly acknowledges the holistic thinking integral to Indigenous philosophies through an ecosystem approach for the common interests of all humankind. Article 8(j) requires New Zealand to 'respect, maintain and preserve' what we term *mātauranga Māori* that contributes to the 'conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity'. Article 15 allows for holders of traditional knowledge to receive benefits where that knowledge is used for commercial or research purposes. Other agreements include the IUCN (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2012) and the World Trade Organisation's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). The rush to harvest resources that had been considered peripheral –physically and economically – to mainstream industrial development has exposed contradictions, contests and conflicts within and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies.

While significant concerns are held by Māori over interpretations and management of this 'property', in many respects the country holds an important position in global Indigenous discourse. The New Zealand government has been willing to innovate in the legal realm

of intellectual property and traditional Māori knowledge (Lai, 2014) and the Treaty settlements process empowers Māori collectives to better participate in decisions relevant to their self-determination (while stopping well short of what Māori request and are due).

While the participation of Indigenous communities in research on biological diversity, bio-economies, intellectual property and so on remains scant and often problematic, not least because of open warfare in some regions (see Hanson et al., 2009), the role of Indigenous Peoples as the living repositories of vital accumulated knowledge has elevated engaging with this knowledge and knowledge holders by Western scientific and economic agents and therefore their political masters. What is clear to Māori and other Indigenous Peoples is that the necessary legal instruments for protecting both the knowledge and the knowledge keepers are lacking.

References

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