

## Article

# Te Pūkenga Atawhai—Cultural Awareness Raising and Conservation for Future Use in Aotearoa New Zealand

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**Abstract:** At Te Papa Atawhai/Department of Conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand, ‘cultural differences’ account for some of the difficulties that department staff experience in their interaction with Indigenous Māori in conservation work. To meet the need for better ‘cultural awareness’ of Māori conservation principles, the department has facilitated the development of Te Pūkenga Atawhai, which is an introductory course to Māori views of conservation offered to all department staff. For Māori, the course is also a part of a broader revitalisation process for Māori culture and society and a recognition of their bicultural Treaty partnership with the Crown. The paper investigates how the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course addresses the perceived difficulties with cultural differences between DOC and Māori in conservation work, and how Pou Kura Taiao and participants perceive its usefulness for teaching staff about Māori views of conservation. Some department staff argue that the course has contributed to a better understanding of Māori culture and conservation principles; others that it is too politicised and engages in cultural ‘tokenism’ of little relevance for conservation work.

**Keywords:** Māori; conservation; cultural revitalisation; cultural awareness; Aotearoa New Zealand; indigenous peoples



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## 1. Introduction

Te Pūkenga Atawhai (‘the source of learning’) is a cultural awareness course organised by Te Papa Atawhai/Department of Conservation (DOC) in Aotearoa New Zealand and offered to its staff to acknowledge the bicultural Treaty partnership between Indigenous Māori and the Crown, learn about Māori views of conservation and ‘enable staff to build and maintain effective working relationships’ with Māori [1] (Foreword). When DOC was formed in 1987 there was little recognition of Māori as Treaty partners, and staff were finding it difficult to work with Māori in conservation. In 1995, DOC’s Pou Kura Taiao (Māori conservation ethics and relations managers in the conservancies, who also work as Te Pūkenga Atawhai course teachers) were therefore tasked with developing a cultural awareness programme to address these issues. The Te Pūkenga Atawhai course was developed in response to the increasing need for DOC to ‘improve the performance of the DOC in terms of meeting its statutory obligations’ with Māori as Treaty partners in conservation [1] (Foreword), and since 1999, the course has been offered several times per year at different locations.

Te Pūkenga Atawhai is an intensive on-site course based on cultural immersion at a marae (traditional Māori meeting place) over four or five days, covering both theory and practice around four modules: Māori beliefs and values, interacting with Māori, the Treaty of Waitangi and Māori systems and structures. The aim, themes and design of the course have remained the same since its launch in 1999 but the training material has been revised in response to changes in legislation and policy [2]. Between 1999 and 2016, over 6000 DOC employees took the course at least once and the goal for 2018 was to enrol 30% of its 2400 employees [3]. Te Pūkenga Atawhai is now a nationally recognised course model in Aotearoa New Zealand, influencing other agencies and businesses, including

New Zealand Police and Air New Zealand [4] that are also required to, or have expressed an interest in, accommodating bicultural issues in their organisations.

This paper focuses on how the Māori cultural revitalisation processes and the Treaty partnership between Māori and the Crown in Aotearoa New Zealand are expressed in the conservation work carried out by DOC. More specifically, the paper investigates how the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course addresses the perceived difficulties with cultural differences between DOC and Māori in conservation work, and how Pou Kura Taiao and participants perceive its usefulness in teaching staff about Māori views of conservation.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This research is based on several ethnographic fieldwork periods in Aotearoa New Zealand from 2004 onwards, including participant observation at a Te Pūkenga Atawhai course, and in everyday work with DOC staff, and over 50 semi-structured individual and group interviews with course participants and DOC staff in all conservancies and at all levels of the organisation. Informants were selected using convenience (participants and Pou Kura Taiao at the course), snowball (recommendations from other informants) and strategic sampling (purposeful selection of informants at the same levels in each conservancy). All informants were interviewed in their capacities as public servants and employees at DOC. The research is also based on public policy documents and reports produced by DOC as well as on learning material from the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course. The literature review is based on previous research into Māori rights and cultural revitalisation, postcolonial settlement processes and Māori environmental guardianship in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Literature Review

#### 3.1.1. Conservation in a Bicultural Nation

The historical background to the need for DOC to provide cultural awareness training to its staff goes back to 1840, when the Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi was signed by Māori chiefs and representatives of the British Crown as the heads of two sovereign nations. The agreement acknowledged the 1835 declaration of Māori sovereignty [5] (p. 210) and was perceived by Māori signatories as a promise from the Queen to secure tribal chieftainship and Māori sovereignty over their lands and resources [6,7]. However, instead of protecting the sovereignty of the Māori as agreed in the Treaty, over the years the Crown facilitated the alienation of native lands and promoted individual interests among European settlers. The systematic alienation of Māori from their lands was accompanied by a ‘stigmatisation of being Māori and outlawing Māori language, culture and practices’ by the Crown, which has led ‘to inevitable poor socio-economic outcomes which burden Māori to this day’ [8] (p. 92).

In the mid-1970s, which has been referred to as the birth of the ‘Māori renaissance’ [9] (p. 593), Māori political and cultural revitalisation generated a renewed interest in the Treaty and increasing demands from Māori representatives for redress from the Crown for past Treaty breaches. The Treaty of Waitangi Act was passed in 1975, and the Waitangi Tribunal was established by Parliament the same year with a task to determine the meaning and effect of the Treaty for the purposes of inquiring into Māori claims and contribute to the reconciliation of outstanding issues between Māori and the Crown.

Since its establishment in 1975, more than 2500 claims have been taken by Māori to the Tribunal, seeking

*the return of stolen lands, waters, seas, fisheries, airways, minerals, and other resources, protection of the natural environment from desecration and unsustainable development*

and as part of a broader Māori revitalisation process also

*the restoration and recognition of our language and culture, equitable access to commercial opportunities and to government resources and services including education, health,*

*housing, and social welfare and recognition and upholding of our mana (power) and sovereignty* [8] (p. 94).

More than 120 reports have been made, upholding many hundreds of the claims against the Crown, including the return of lands and other resources taken from Māori, with the aim 'to reverse the damage done by colonisation that are still being committed against Māori by the Crown' [5] (p. 211) and to strengthen Māori culture and society. However, the Waitangi Tribunal and the claims and settlement processes have not been without criticism; for instance, against its polarisation between Māori and Pākehā (non-Māori, usually of European descent), instead of promoting an all-inclusive identity for all New Zealanders, the costs for Tribunal processes and settlements, the unwillingness in some cases of state authorities to follow the recommendations made by the Tribunal, and against the conflicts that often arise between claimants with overlapping claims.

However, successful settlements can provide different kinds of redress to claimants: (a) a historical account of the Treaty breaches, Crown acknowledgement and apology, (b) cultural redress including change of place names, transfer of Crown lands to claimants, co-governance of rivers and lakes and (c) commercial and financial redress in the form of cash, property or a mixture of both [10]. DOC's participation in claims processes mainly relates to 'cultural redress', including conservation redress, which is often an integral part of settlements and may include the transfer of ownership of areas to tangata whenua (people of the land, local (Māori) people) and/or to involve and recognise tangata whenua in management activities. The objective for DOC in considering redress options is to protect natural values and, if possible, also maintain public access to sites [11].

A post-settlement governance entity manages the settlement assets on behalf of the claimants and work with government departments, such as DOC, to ensure that place name changes, transfer of property, and co-governance regimes are established and managed [12]. Some claimants who have had their lands returned may however not be able to take on the management of the property and may ask for and rely on the expertise and resources of DOC for a shorter or longer period. Many Treaty settlements also involve co-governance regimes for lands and resources that the government will not give back to Māori, but these regimes often only provide Māori with advisory roles, while DOC maintains decision-making powers [5] (p. 211). Other claimants may decline any help from DOC and apply for other funding and management support from independent organisations, for example the Ngā Whenua Rāhui Fund, which supports the protection of Indigenous biodiversity on Māori-owned land [13]. The increasing number of Treaty settlements and subsequent return and/or development of co-governance regimes of public lands with Māori groups mean that the number of interactions between DOC and Māori are also increasing as well as intensifying, in response to the demands from Māori for DOC to recognise their Treaty partnership in practice.

As in many other settler societies, the process of nation-building in Aotearoa New Zealand is built on the colonial relationship between settlers and the Indigenous population [14] (p. 385) and the Treaty is regarded as the founding document of the state. The Treaty principles, which outline Aotearoa New Zealand as a bicultural nation between Māori and Pākehā provide the framework for all the work at Crown agencies and require DOC to recognise its partnership with Māori. Since the 1980s, the bicultural narrative has become the dominant symbol and ideology for national identity in Aotearoa New Zealand [15] and the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi and biculturalism is displayed and discussed in all central institutions [16] (p. 46) [17] (p. 742). DOC is also steadfastly holding on to a bicultural policy, which means that it only focuses on Māori and Pākehā, even though citizens who identify as Asian in Aotearoa New Zealand (15% of the total population) are almost as many as the Māori (16.5% of the total population) [18]. Aotearoa New Zealand has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world and is now home to 213 different ethnicities with 25% of the total population born overseas, and the fastest growing ethnic groups are Asian and Pacific peoples [19] (p. 38).

The political system in Aotearoa New Zealand is relatively unique in that it formally recognises Māori and Pākehā as distinct partners, with shared guardianship for natural resources and national identity and culture [16] (p. 38) [20]. This partnership is expressed in legislation, and both the Resource Management Act and the Conservation Act require consideration of Māori cultural values in environmental planning and conservation [21]. The passing of the Resource Management Act in 1991 was described as a ‘new planning paradigm’ and a landmark for the integration of Indigenous interests in planning and environmental management, and Section 4 of the Conservation Act specifically requires DOC ‘to give effect to the principles of the Treaty’ in its work [1] (Kāwai 2, p. 5). Furthermore, the 2015 Resource Legislation Amendment Bill, Section 58, included provisions to holding discussions and gaining formal and prior agreement with *iwi* (Māori tribes) about their participation in regional or district plan development. These amendments reflect the mainstreaming of Māori perspectives in the sustainable management of natural resources and has enshrined Māori terms and concepts into everyday resource management planning [22]. These responsibilities are also clearly expressed in the emphasis that DOC places on engagement and collaboration with Māori [23] (p. 523).

The explicit and simply stated purpose of DOC in 2021 is Papatūānuku (Nature) Thrives, and the outcomes are ‘healthy nature’, ‘people who care’ and ‘thriving communities’. The outcomes are specified as 10- and 25-year goals. By year 25, ‘the diversity of our natural heritage is maintained and restored’, ‘our history is brought to life and protected’ and Māori ‘are able to practice their responsibilities as kaitiaki (guardians) of natural and cultural resources on public conservation lands and waters’. Within the operating models for DOC, the decision-making principles are ‘elevating principles of the Treaty and fulfilling our Treaty partner relationships’ with Māori, ‘holding wellbeing and safety at our heart’, ‘working together with others’ and ‘leaving the world a better place’ [24]. The ways in which DOC phrases its goals and strategies are also indicative for the uniqueness of conservation work in Aotearoa New Zealand and its emphasis on the bicultural partnership with Māori. In its policy documents, DOC seldom uses terms and concepts that are commonly used in global environmental discourses, such as ‘sustainable development’ or ‘traditional knowledge’, instead favouring the general term of ‘conservation’, ‘conservation for future use’, that nature and communities should be ‘healthy’ and ‘thriving’, and/or indigenous Māori concepts such as *tikanga* (knowledge) that are sometimes translated into English. Aotearoa New Zealand is also relatively unique in its reluctance to implement the UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples but refers to Te Tiriti/the Treaty between the Crown and Māori as a national alternative. It is argued that

*in keeping with our commitment to human rights, and indigenous rights in particular, New Zealand’s support for the Declaration must be understood with reference to our existing legal and constitutional circumstances, of which Te Tiriti o Waitangi is an important part* [25].

The partnership in conservation between Māori and the Crown is also expressed in the increasing use of the Māori language and knowledge in conservation work, since ‘the roots of the Māori language are firmly linked to the work of the department through the naming and the korero (discussions) associated with the Indigenous species of Aotearoa/New Zealand’. It is also claimed that ‘while New Zealand now has many languages reflecting the multi-faceted nature of our society, the Māori language is pre-eminent in the context of the indigenous biological diversity’ [2].

Because DOC is responsible both for the conservation of cultural and natural heritage and for recreation, the concept of ‘conservation’ may, for instance, include restoration of historical whaling stations and pre-colonial Māori settlements, the reintroduction and monitoring of native flora and fauna, the return of lands and development of co-governance regimes with Māori claimants and maintenance of tracks and campsites for outdoor recreation and tourism [26]. However, whereas DOC makes a difference between conservation of natural and cultural heritage, for Māori the concept of conservation represents an integration of spiritual, cultural, social and environmental issues affecting all conservation

work. This difference in the perception of conservation is highlighted in the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course as a potential source of misunderstanding and conflicts between DOC staff and Māori groups, and a challenge to the partnership in conservation.

### 3.1.2. Challenges for Māori Involvement in Conservation

Despite an institutional commitment and willingness from DOC to engage more deeply in partnership and co-governance processes, ‘the mechanisms through which conservation partnership and co-management governance can be instituted remain weak and unclear, potentially undermining a discursive commitment to the meaningful involvement of Māori’ [23] (p. 526). Moreover, although progressive conservation legislation and the growing capacity among Māori to be involved in the formulation of management policies are receiving increasing attention in Aotearoa New Zealand, the actual involvement by Māori in conservation has not increased significantly over the years. Māori continue to be marginalised by the administrative and political structures responsible for implementing the Resource Management and the Conservation Acts despite obligations to give effect to the principles of the Treaty [5].

According to DOC, its staff ‘need better skills and to improve their knowledge of the Māori world if the relationships are to succeed long term’. Over the past decades, DOC has moved ‘from a traditional parks management model’ to ‘working collaboratively with tangata whenua’ on-site but admits that there is a need for ‘many more Māori at all levels of DOC, particularly in policy and cultural heritage management’ to guide its approach [27]. In the DOC language policy for 2017–2022, it is said that by 2022 the aim is to improve the proficiency and use of the Māori language by department staff who should have the requisite language skills ‘relevant to their position’. To achieve this, staff are expected to attend the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course. Another aim is for DOC to ‘increase the visibility of the Māori language ( . . . ) including bilingual signage’ in websites and information material. It is also stated in the language policy that there should be an ‘HR guide where roles explicitly require Māori language skills advertisements and interviews are bilingual’, followed by a list of DOC positions and the required Māori language proficiency, expressed as ‘must’ (Pou Kura Taiao), ‘should’ (managers) and ‘could’ (rangers) be fluent in the Māori language, to the lowest level of ‘desirable’ language skills for staff at business service units [2].

However, despite these ambitions, in the job vacancies section posted on the DOC website, experience from working with Māori-related issues or having Māori language skills is seldom stated as a requirement or even listed as desirable [28]. The number of DOC staff who identify as Māori has also remained at around 11% since 2009 [29] despite efforts to bring especially young Māori into DOC through cadetships and trainee ranger programmes [30] (p. 28). Furthermore, according to the DOC language policy, ‘there remains little data on the extent of the use of Māori language or Māori capabilities in the department’ and ‘other than the specialist skills of the department’s Pou Kura Taiao there is little information to suggest that Māori language is common or commonly used outside this group of employees’ [2]. Despite the lack of progress in some areas, however, the formal recognition of Māori traditional knowledge and perspectives is growing and is reflected across society in education, arts, the media, sports and the Māori language, and is also becoming prevalent in environmental management [31] (p. 70).

DOC has a crucial role in this transition, and according to Māori representatives DOC staff therefore need an understanding of ‘how we act and do things in the Māori world’ [3]. The Te Pūkenga Atawhai course aims at helping staff at DOC to ‘learn to listen more effectively, understand alternative perspectives, explore joint solutions, and be willing to work in new ways to achieve the greatest conservation gains for the country’. According to DOC, it is not only about transferring knowledge, but about changing perspectives and working with Māori at all stages of conservation, instead of merely consulting with Māori on conservation plans and impact assessments [30].



According to one of the Māori founders of the course, Māori 'have a significant interest in conservation' and it is 'part of the way they think and live'. The Te Pūkenga Atawhai course intends to capture the best of two worlds, and according to the course founder it is 'about bringing Māori and Western ways of thinking together: not replacing either one, but bringing them together for the betterment of conservation, for the betterment of Aotearoa New Zealand' [29]. Māori values are said to be 'a mixture of the traditional and the contemporary' and are instruments through which Māori make sense, analyse, experience and interpret the modern world [32]. According to one of the Pou Kura Taiao, a result of the course is 'a big improvement in the relationship between Māori and Pākehā' and it has also contributed to a 'mind switch' among staff, towards a better understanding of a Māori way of thinking about conservation [33].

### 3.1.3. Revitalisation and Cultural Awareness Training in a Postcolonial Setting

Cultural awareness training can be a part of revitalisation processes, when Indigenous groups are gaining more influence over issues of importance to them and are able to make demands for recognition and respect from the majority society. The concept of revitalisation, introduced by cultural anthropologist Anthony Wallace [34] to describe and analyse cultural processes aiming at creating a more satisfying culture, has often been used in the study of religious movements [35] and language revival [36]. However, a broader application of the revitalisation concept can be used in the analysis of how Indigenous peoples turn to tradition to inspire social change and transformation of the cultural system [37]. Any revival of tradition inevitably also changes the tradition it aimed to revive, which means that revitalisation and traditionalisation processes are as much about the present as the past and can only be understood in relation to modernity [38,39].

The current revitalisation of Māori culture started with the 'Māori renaissance' of the 1970s, including the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal and the possibilities for Māori to demand redress for Treaty breaches, and developed into the national bicultural policy in the 1980s, which has since then informed policy and strategies for all Crown agencies. For Māori, however, it has not been enough to settle for a symbolic recognition of their partnership with the Crown, and for Crown agencies such as DOC, this has meant that its staff should learn about Māori culture and understand and preferably be able to speak the Māori language, in the same way as Māori are expected to know something about Pākehā culture and speak the English language. What is taught at the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course is based on a pre-colonial tradition, worldviews and ways of life, but transformed and transmitted to DOC staff within a framework of environmental conservation and in response to the present situation and needs. Parallel to the revitalisation of the Māori culture in and for itself, then, Māori also want others, particularly public servants, to learn about Māori culture and master the language as part of the Treaty partnership.

Courses such as Te Pūkenga Atawhai can be linked to the transformations and demographic changes of globalisation, which have challenged workplaces to develop policies and programmes 'designed to enhance the recruitment, engagement, skills and development of employees that differ from those of the dominant groups' [19] (p. 34). The analysis and management of workplace diversity have mostly focused on gender, age and/or ethnicity [40–42] and research about cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence has been carried out in various fields, including the health and educational sectors [43] (p. 1153). Over the past few decades, the benefits of having culturally aware organisations have been realised and numerous organisations from the private sector, state departments and NGOs have initiated cultural awareness programmes to better function within the organisation as well as with society and markets [44] (p. 199) [45].

'Cultural awareness' can be defined in many ways, but usually entails an understanding of one's own heritage and culture, how these influence perceptions of self and others and how cultural differences influence the interactions between people from different groups [45,46]. Cultural awareness training can apply different methods, including guided reflection, written materials, multimedia tools and cultural immersion, i.e., learning by

spending time in another culture [47,48]. Teaching cultural differences can include themes such as greetings or difficult situations, in which there is the possibility of ambiguity, misunderstanding or conflict that require the participant to make decisions about culturally appropriate responses and behaviour, which can be practiced in the form of 'role playing' or 'case studies' [44] (pp. 200–202).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the efforts from Māori society to revitalise the knowledge and use of the Māori language and culture more generally is also reflected in the various new tools that have been developed in recent years to support this development. Several agencies and business organisations have developed apps for their staff to facilitate their learning about and easy access to Māori culture, protocols and language; for instance, Te Kete Tikanga Māori by Meridian Energy, presented as a tool to learn about Māori heritage, society and language, and Te Hiwa by Waka Kotahi/New Zealand Transport Agency, 'to support you in learning more of te ao Māori/the Māori world'.

Cultural awareness training often takes place within a framework of asymmetrical power relations between the groups, in which one group is lacking knowledge about the other and engages in a one-way learning process. Postcolonial theory explains how colonialism legitimises the points of view and knowledge of the dominant, colonising culture and how the imbalance of power is maintained through the creation of the colonised 'other' as a fixed reality; at the same time knowable and different [49] (p. 41). Teaching non-Indigenous peoples about Indigenous culture often rests on an assumption that the dominant culture is the norm, which, unlike the Indigenous culture, does not need examination or studies, thereby creating a 'culture of no culture' [50] (p. 555). It has been argued that a 'concentration on trying to understand 'them' better so that 'we' can do our job better both underlines their otherness, and detaches their decision making from wider highly political, structures and processes' [51]. Cultural awareness training has also received criticism for its tendency to essentialise Indigenous cultures, by referring to Indigenous culture that can be described, taught and understood [52] (p. 9). This may also lead to a risk for perfunctory ascriptions or attributions of misunderstandings to cultural difference [53]. Postcolonial theory emphasises that what is required is not so much the development of an 'awareness' of Indigenous cultures and identities as an understanding of how discourses of culture and cultural knowledge are used by colonial systems to obtain and maintain their dominance. According to postcolonial theory, (Indigenous) identity is something that is constructed and transformed in response to the present (Cohen 1994; Hall 2003) and that lives through difference, not despite it, which means that it cannot be reduced to a single set of beliefs and practices [54] (pp. 119–120) or easily be taught [52] (p. 10).

The revitalisation and cultural awareness of Māori culture and the usage of the Māori language is increasing in Aotearoa New Zealand society, in public institutions such as schools and Crown agencies and in business organisations, which primarily target Aotearoa New Zealand citizens. However, the revitalisation of Māori culture and language in conservation work is visible also to international visitors in the form of signs and information material produced by DOC about the national natural and cultural heritage and sites for recreation in Māori and English, along with presentations of Māori worldviews and values. For international visitors to Aotearoa New Zealand, then, it has become apparent that Māori have a stake in conservation.

However, over 20 years after the launch of the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course, DOC staff members are still in need of better cultural awareness of their Treaty partners in conservation. According to DOC, the strategic actions that the department is taking between 2017 and 2025 to pursue their goals and outcomes are to bridge Western science and Māori knowledge to enable conservation to benefit from both knowledge systems and to 'develop our organisation team process, core people management and Te Pūkenga Atawhai' to make the department more effective and to strengthen DOC's relationships with iwi across the environment sector [55].

### 3.2. Raising Cultural Awareness at the Te Pūkenga Atawhai Course

The Te Pūkenga Atawhai course is a four or five day long intensive course offered several times each year in different locations in the conservancies. All DOC staff are regularly reminded, via email, to attend the courses, and although attendance is strongly recommended, it is not obligatory. Many staff attend the course more than once, to refresh their knowledge and practice their language skills, and there are also opportunities for further language training in some conservancies. Teachers at the course are always Pou Kura Taiao, who work in the conservancies with providing advice to DOC staff about Māori issues and informing Māori groups about the work that DOC does.

The aim of the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course is for DOC employees to acquire better knowledge of Māori views of conservation and how to interact with Māori in conservation work, including the development of language skills. The focus in the course is not on details of Māori traditional knowledge, but on the principles of all conservation work, including the roles of humans, and their spiritual foundations. This is because there is no 'one-size-fits-all model' for Māori-style conservation to be used for all occasions everywhere, so the principles of the Treaty must always be applied in context [56] (p. 13).

Apart from learning about Māori protocols and views of conservation, participants are introduced to the practicalities of arranging a hui (a meeting or gathering) and practice language training in the Māori language. Activities at the course include first participating in a pōwhiri (welcome ceremony) and then planning for one, adhering to Māori protocols while on the marae, formulating and performing a mihi (a formal presentation of oneself in the Māori language), taking part in everyday chores at the marae (kitchen duties, saying Grace before meals, cleaning), learning songs in the Māori language, presenting a taonga (a 'treasure', in this context an item of personal importance), discussing case studies in groups and presenting the results and participating in role play to practice how to handle difficult situations. The activities all aim at facilitating the interactions between Māori and DOC staff, and for DOC staff to learn about the Māori view of conservation, why conflicts may occur between the conservation partners and how these can be mitigated or prevented [32].

According to the Pou Kura Taiao (the Māori course teachers), to understand Māori conservation principles, one must first understand the Māori view of the Creation [32]. One of the learning objectives for the first module of the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course is therefore to 'describe Māori beliefs and values based on the relationship between the spiritual and natural world' and how Māori traditional environmental guardianship 'form the bedrock of their role in care, protection and resource management of the natural world' [1] (Kāwai Tuatahi, pp. 4–5).

It was argued by the Pou Kura Taiao that what is characteristic for the Māori traditional worldview is its holistic and inclusive perspective [32] (Fieldnotes), which means that all aspects of the environment, including human beings and the spiritual world, are interrelated [1] (Kāwai Tuatahi, p. 7, 36ff). According to Māori, human beings should not be excluded from all future resource use, as is the case in many conventional nature conservation policies, but conservation policies should reflect the interdependence between human beings and natural resources. In the Māori worldview, humans are linked directly to nature through whakapapa (ancestry) [57] and refer to their kinship with a wide network of people, land, water, animals, plants and spirits [58]. In this sense, humans might be the guardians of nature, but they are not above or below any other element in the network. As such, conservation can be expressed, not in terms of preserving 'otherness' but in terms of sustaining 'us-ness', their very selfhood and their relationships and interactions with nature, based on an ecology of user rights rather than ownership [59]. This is also reflected in the Māori view that belonging is a two-way affair; they belong to the territory as much as it belongs to them [60]. In most Indigenous cultures, including Māori, property regimes [59,61], insofar as they exist, treat natural entities as 'intrinsically communal, inter-generational, and spiritually imbued with obligation' [62]. According to Māori, humans are spiritually connected to nature as guardians [63] and while nature gives and sustains life, guardianship represents the obligation that humans hold in return [58,61]. These Māori



beliefs have ‘a marked influence on the way they behave in the context of conservation (or more appropriately “sustainable use”)’ [1] (Kāwai Tuatahi, p. 7).

Traditional Māori views of conservation also include the concepts of tapu and rāhui, i.e., a longer or shorter period during which a natural resource or species in a certain area must not be hunted or harvested, or when access is restricted at a certain site for spiritual or ecological reasons. The use of tapu or rāhui is often meant to protect a species from extinction, but also to make sure that the species can be hunted or harvested again, and the site be revisited, i.e., conservation, but for future use [1] (Kāwai Tuatoru 3, p. 25, 33).

According to the Pou Kura Taiao, the introduction of national parks and nature reserves, which often includes permanent bans for hunting or harvesting certain resources, or restricting access to important sites, may therefore collide with Māori conservation principles of temporary bans and continued use, and may lead to protests [32]. DOC has a reputation among many Māori of having a conservation objective which is ‘hostile’ towards customary sustainable use of resources [64] and the many national parks are seen as ‘gated areas’ that obstruct Māori from engaging in their customary practices and maintaining their relationships with culturally important sites [65]. The continuous and sustainable use of resources is an important part of the Māori conservation ethic, not only for flora and fauna [66], but critically important also for the cultural survival, identity, knowledge and language revitalisation of tangata whenua [67]. Another issue that is often debated is that tourists often regard hunting and gathering as recreational activities, whereas for Māori this is a way of life, and natural resources and customs may be regarded as taonga (treasure, something of significant cultural value). This difference is also illustrated in the popular recreational activity for tourists of ‘trekking just for the sake of trekking’, which is an ‘alien concept’ for many Māori [68].

These values and beliefs form the basis for Māori cultural protocols, and all DOC staff must abide by these protocols in their interaction with tangata whenua. The protocols are not just about the ways in which human beings should behave towards nature and species, but about the social protocols, i.e., the way people should engage with each other [1] (Kāwai Tuatahi, 2000, p. 5). According to the Pou Kura Taiao, most participants have nothing against learning about Māori spiritual beliefs, but they are aware that some staff who have decided not to attend Te Pūkenga Atawhai have based their decision on these course elements, sometimes with reference to the incompatibility with their own religious beliefs [32]. However, according to one course participant, people who seek employment with DOC are often ‘a bit hippie’ and therefore seldom have attitude problems or problems with other people’s beliefs and different worldviews. Although especially younger DOC employees are ‘fairly openminded’, some participants said that they failed to make the connection between Māori cosmology and conservation. They thought that the stories were fascinating but did not provide them with any clues to deal with more immediate conservation issues where DOC and Māori may not agree [32].

### 3.2.1. Protocols, Performance and Tika Behaviour

The first module of the course also focuses on explaining Māori systems and structures relevant to DOC relationships with tangata whenua to help staff manage their working relationships with Māori in cooperative conservation management [1] (Kāwai Tuatoru 3, pp. 4–5). It includes knowledge about Māori whakapapa (principles for genealogy, which includes humans as well as the natural world) and how the Māori society is organised into iwi (tribes), hapū (sub-tribes), and whānau (extended families) [1] (Kāwai Tuatoru 3, p. 6, 10, 12). For DOC staff, it is important to know on which levels and by which iwi authorities that decisions are made in their conservancies and with whom consultations should be had in different situations [1] (Kāwai Tuatoru 3, p. 18).

In recent years, there has been a gradual shift towards negotiating with hapū rather than with iwi. During colonial times, the British preferred negotiating with iwi because it was easier to deal with fewer people representing larger groups, but hapū better reflect the local perspective, and do not always want to take their issues to iwi level. As part of the

broader Māori revitalisation processes, it is therefore increasingly hapū who have stepped forward as DOC's new negotiation and co-governance partners, but this shift is rather reflecting a return to the precolonial level of local authority. However, staff must always be cautious in accepting their negotiation partners and must make sure that they are talking to the right people over the right issues. There may be conflicts between hapū, sometimes because of overlapping claims for the same lands and resources, so DOC staff must have good knowledge about the local relations in the conservancy and stay away from internal Māori conflicts [69].

A problem for DOC staff with the renewed negotiations with hapū is, however, that it takes more time to negotiate with several smaller groups, and the budgets in the conservancies seldom take this into account. Both the course Pou Kura Taiao and the participants who had manager positions at DOC emphasised the need for good knowledge of the local situation, and the only way to acquire that knowledge is to regularly engage with tangata whenua and visit people not only about urgent matters, but to get to know each other and create mutual trust. Regular visits to local marae are therefore important parts of the conservation work for DOC staff [32]. This is one of the reasons why Te Pūkenga Atawhai courses are held at a marae, which is a traditional Māori meeting place, usually consisting of a group of buildings for meeting, sleeping and eating, which belongs to the tangata whenua of that place. The choice of marae as a place for instruction has important symbolic value not only for the local Māori community, but as cultural symbols for the wider Māori society. The 'absolute centrality and importance of marae cannot be overstated', and 'tangata whenua see the marae as being essential to their cultural well-being and identity' [1] (Kāwai Tuawhā, p. 8).

Each marae has a slightly different way of doing things, and traditional protocols and procedures must be recognised by all visitors to the marae, including course participants, who are expected to demonstrate tika (correct and appropriate) behaviour on the marae. Unintentionally breaking the protocols may be forgiven but 'is degrading to the tangata whenua', and one of the purposes of the course is to prevent such breaches from happening [1] (Kāwai Tuawhā, p. 6). According to the Pou Kura Taiao, most Māori have a similar view of what is tika behaviour at a marae or when interacting with Māori, and it is therefore possible to talk about a general Māori way of thinking about social protocols, even if there are local variations [70].

Each Te Pūkenga Atawhai course starts with a pōwhiri (a traditional welcoming ceremony), where participants are first instructed about protocols and then asked to take part in the ceremony together with Pou Kura Taiao and tangata whenua. Participating in a pōwhiri, both as host and visitor, requires good knowledge of Māori social protocols, including formalised speech, designated speakers, gender roles and procedure. The course participants are given some information about the pōwhiri beforehand, such as the strong recommendation for women to wear long skirts during the welcoming ceremony, that all participants should be silent during the ceremony and that someone should look after them to make them feel safe. It was explained by the Pou Kura Taiao that the pōwhiri is not just for Te Pūkenga Atawhai courses but takes place prior to all hui (gatherings, meetings) on a marae. People gather at their marae for many different reasons, but funeral gatherings are important occasions, as are weddings, birthdays, political meetings and educational workshops, such as Te Pūkenga Atawhai courses. The Pou Kura Taiao also explained the many rules that needed to be followed while at the marae, including paying respect to the sacredness of the tupuna whare (the main building) as a symbolic representation of the ancestors. Explanations for these rules were given by the Pou Kura Taiao who emphasised the need for participants to comply. Some of the participants expressed concern over the risk of forgetting these instructions and throughout the course kept reminding others to behave properly [32].

The participants were also told that they were expected to share the responsibility for saying Grace before meals, helping in the kitchen, and help keeping the marae tidy during the course week. All participants, including the Pou Kura Taiao, slept in sleeping bags

on mattresses on the floor of the tupuna whare, and personal space and time were kept at a minimum throughout the course [32]. The course was designed in such a way as to disregard individual characteristics of the participants, such as age, previous education or experience as DOC employee, type of job or individual preferences, to focus on team building and learning. The tight schedule and the limited time for personal reflection was psychologically straining and towards the end of the course, some participants expressed a sense of fatigue. However, the design of the course and the protocols were explained as standard procedure for any hui at a marae, and something that DOC staff should be prepared for when interacting with Māori over conservation matters [32]. The course location and design are therefore important parts of the learning process, as course participants obtain practical experience from what it is like to stay at a marae and interact with tangata whenua, and what they can expect when preparing for a hui.

### 3.2.2. Politics and Propaganda

One course module focuses on the understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, and how its history, issues and principles have relevance for DOC [1] (Kāwai 2, p. 4). The Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975 and the Waitangi Tribunal are regarded by Māori as attempts to redefine the Māori version of the Treaty and provide the 'right of Māori to full, exclusive and undisturbed possession of their lands, forests, estates and fisheries' [1] (Kāwai Tuarua 2, pp. 66–67). With a growing number of settlements between iwi and the Crown, conservation work in many conservancies is focused on the transfer of public lands to iwi and the development of new policies and co-governance of lands and resources. According to the Pou Kura Taiao, these processes are changing the relationships between DOC and iwi and may lead to tensions and conflicts [32].

Most course participants found it interesting to learn about Māori culture and perspectives, and how Māori perspectives differ from their own. However, this view was not shared by all participants at the course. One participant expressed frustration over having to attend the course and referred to negative attitudes towards the course among other DOC staff, who had refused to take part of what they perceived to be 'religious, propagandistic indoctrination'. Another participant related that the first Te Pūkenga Atawhai courses had been referred to as 'neo-fascist' among staff but said that the course had changed for the better after criticism from the first generations of participants. With 'neo-fascist' he meant that the courses initially had been 'far too political', and that the emphasis had been on what was 'politically correct' to know and say about Māori people and culture, rather than on what was perceived as useful knowledge for DOC staff in their everyday work [71]. This was also mentioned by one of the Pou Kura Taiao who said that Te Pūkenga Atawhai has changed through the years in the sense that 'Māorihood' is no longer in focus, as the Pou Kura Taiao decided to remove most of what was perceived by participants as 'too provocative' [72]. However, according to a group of DOC employees who had attended the course previously, some of the staff still think that the course is 'too much about tokenism' [73] and too little about issues of importance to DOC staff. In response to the criticism against the more political parts of the course, one of the Pou Kura Taiao explained that 'it cannot be up to Pākehā to choose what they want to know about the Māori', that it is important in a partnership to have relevant knowledge about each other and that a partnership should be based on mutual respect, even if the parties do not like or agree over everything [72].

### 3.2.3. The Difficult Roles for Māori Cultural Advisors and DOC Staff

The teachers at Te Pūkenga Atawhai courses are all Pou Kura Taiao, Māori cultural advisors employed by DOC to advice department staff about Māori issues. There are Pou Kura Taiao in all conservancies and their primary assignment is to be 'relations managers', teaching both Māori and DOC about each other and their different perspectives on conservation. They are however often squeezed between the wishes of their own people about how things should be and DOC's regulations, and according to one of the Pou Kura

Taiao, they are often ‘backstabbed by their own people’ for doing their job for DOC. All Pou Kura Taiao are Māori, and it was argued that it would be difficult for a Pākehā in this position, partly because the job requires very good knowledge of Māori protocols and language; partly because it sends an important signal that it is a Māori person who is teaching others about Māori culture [74].

According to one Pou Kura Taiao, for co-governance regimes to be efficient, more Māori, and especially younger Māori, need to be involved in conservation projects and both iwi authorities and DOC must be better at recruiting young Māori to work for them [68]. There are however still very few Māori managers at DOC, in part because they risk ending up in loyalty conflicts, especially if they choose to work in conservancies close to their own homes [75]. In Māori society, identity and belonging is to a large extent defined by a person’s family and where it originates from and having local knowledge and good relations with iwi in the conservancy is promoted as an advantage by the Pou Kura Taiao, but for Māori DOC staff these same good relations may lead to added pressure to take sides. Moreover, because iwi in some areas have grievances towards DOC, it may be difficult for Māori to work for DOC as they risk being seen as ‘traitors’ [68]. Making decisions that go against the wishes of the family may be difficult for some, but there are ways around these situations; for instance, by hiring people from the outside to make difficult decisions [69]. When this is not possible, Māori DOC staff must decide which ‘hat’ to wear in different situations: DOC’s or the family’s [76].

DOC staff are also sometimes called to give evidence during Waitangi Tribunal hearings, as representatives for DOC as a Crown agency, and it can be difficult for Māori DOC staff to take on this dual role, because in some cases DOC and claimants may not share the same view of a situation. Some Māori DOC staff may therefore decline to give evidence but may still enter a difficult situation since they can be asked to take sides. After the tribunal hearings are over and the lawyers and administrators are gone, local relations between DOC and iwi may also have changed and must be renegotiated and repaired [75]. As representatives of a Crown agency, staff at DOC also risk being exposed to the grievances and frustration against the Crown which some Māori hold after many years of bad relations between authorities and iwi over Māori issues. Furthermore, in some areas, DOC is the only Crown agency that is present locally, which adds to their responsibility of improving relationships with local Māori [77].

#### 3.2.4. Skirts and Sentiments

The Te Pūkenga Atawhai course curriculum is a result of careful negotiation over what Māori want to communicate to DOC staff and what DOC staff need to know to be able to do their work and recognise Māori as partners in conservation. This may include elements that are perceived by non-Māori as very different from one’s own worldview and may sometimes be provoking. During the course, Māori protocols are followed, and the participants are expected to demonstrate tika behaviour on the marae. This includes having knowledge of and adhering to gender-specific roles for the pōwhiri, the welcoming ceremony [1] (Kawai Tuawhā, p. 15). Before the pōwhiri, the course participants were organised and instructed by the Pou Kura Taiao about how to perform the ceremony correctly. After the initial formal exchanges of greetings between the visiting party of course participants from DOC and tangata whenua of the marae, the participants walked over the front yard towards the main building, women in front and the men behind them and on the sides. Putting the women in the front of the entering group was explained by the Pou Kura Taiao as a display of non-hostility and good intentions. The men symbolically serve as protectors of the women, it was said. When the visitors had been welcomed on to the marae, the male participants were seated in front of the female participants and were given the tasks of formally acknowledging tangata whenua and provide gifts as a token of respect and good intentions. This was commented upon by several of the female participants, who were uncomfortable with what they perceived as having to put themselves in a ‘subordinate’ position vis-à-vis the male participants [71].

A few of the female participants were also not wearing the recommended long skirts for the pōwhiri, and there were different explanations for this. One woman had not understood the information that had been sent to her and said she felt embarrassed that she did not follow the protocol. Others said that they would not wear a skirt as such but would wrap a large bath towel, which participants were also asked to bring, around them and over their regular DOC trousers, at least during the pōwhiri. Some of the women who chose to wear trousers under their 'towel-skirts' said that it was for practical reasons, as the participants had been told that women could wear trousers at the marae after the ceremony. One woman said that she did not even own a skirt, and would not start now, but could accept to wear a 'towel-skirt' in order not to offend anybody. She said that this was an acceptable compromise for her but referred to another DOC employee who refused to attend the course if it meant she had to wear a skirt at any point [71]. This 'skirt issue' was not a new topic for discussion, one of the Pou Kura Taiao said, but since it is regarded as an important part of the protocol for a pōwhiri, it remains included and is explained in the course. He said that he understands that female participants may react strongly to what they perceive as symbols for gender inequality, but he referred to the importance of displaying tika behaviour while entering a marae and added that it is only during the pōwhiri that female participants are given other instructions than the male participants [78]. Out of all course elements, the 'skirt issue' and the symbolic subordination of women during the pōwhiri was the most frequently discussed, but only by female participants [56].

### 3.2.5. Speaking and Singing

One course module focuses on interacting with Māori, including being able to speak the Māori language, and preferably do it well. Singing songs in Māori was part of the daily activities at the marae, and the participants were encouraged to sing out loud and to learn the Māori texts by heart. Although the singing sessions were seen as welcome breaks from the long hours of learning, some participants did not understand the meaning of the activity. The course is supposed to be about conservation, but 'singing is not about conservation, is it?', as one participant argued. The Pou Kura Taiao explained that Māori songs are often sung at a hui and that it is therefore good to know a few of the more popular songs in Māori. It is also a good way to learn a bit more Māori language, and the Pou Kura Taiao emphasised the need for the participants to learn some basic expressions and greetings in the Māori language, and the importance of pronouncing the language correctly [32].

The Pou Kura Taiao regularly spoke in Māori to the participants, and this was a source of irritation to some of the participants. One argued that 'it is really rather pointless since we do not understand what they are saying' and another that 'it becomes more of a power demonstration to use Māori that much' and it is like 'putting up a show' with those formal greetings in Māori [71]. However, some of the participants said after the course that one of the most useful parts of the course had been to learn a bit more Māori, since it would facilitate their work with iwi. One participant agreed but said that 'the Māori are very particular about pronunciation, but what can you manage to learn in five days?' [71].

The language training in Māori during the course was primarily focused on Māori protocols on the marae, and how to organise a hui. The course participants were told step-by-step what to do and what resources that need to be mobilised and were then asked to plan for and demonstrate knowledge of how to organise a hui [32]. The manuhiri (visitor to a marae, in this case a DOC representative) has the assignment to contact tangata whenua about setting up a meeting. Tangata whenua will talk to their people, suggest a date for the event, organise the cooks at the marae, sorting out waiata (songs to be sung at the pōwhiri) and finally select kaikaranga (female callers welcoming the manuhiri) for the pōwhiri. In turn, manuhiri must select participants and organise their own kaiwhaakatu (female callers from the visiting party) for the pōwhiri. For each hui and pōwhiri, then, DOC staff must have good knowledge about Māori protocols, and be able to mobilise staff with sufficient skills in protocols, procedures and the Māori language [1] (Kāwai Tuawhā,



p. 11). For some participants, the cultural competence required and the resources necessary for organising a hui were perceived as daunting, but they also argued that such competence is obviously useful for interacting with Māori and for arranging formal meetings [71].

In a group interview with DOC staff who had attended a previous Te Pūkenga Atawhai course, it was argued that most DOC staff know way too little Māori to be able to stand up and hold a speech; not even a short mihi (formal greeting and presentation of oneself). It becomes embarrassing if it is too bad, they said, and many Māori feel ashamed on behalf of the speaker if the pronunciation is poor and if the person in question ought to have known better than to stand up and try to speak Māori. It is better to abstain from speaking Māori and admit that you do not master the language, they argued. At least the Te Pūkenga Atawhai provides an opportunity to formulate a personal mihi, to be learned and delivered by heart when meeting with Māori, but many DOC staff never learn to master more Māori language than that [73].

### 3.2.6. Mainstreaming Cultural Awareness in Conservation

The Te Pūkenga Atawhai cultural awareness course for conservation staff is globally unique but has become standard for DOC staff in Aotearoa New Zealand. The course is like any kind of competence development, as one Pou Kura Taiao argued, because the staff 'attend courses in how to make PowerPoint presentations, so why wouldn't they attend a course in Māori views on conservation?' [33]. According to some course participants, everybody at DOC 'should' attend the course, but one can also easily just click away the reminder that arrives regularly in the mailbox. In the end, though, most people at DOC do attend a Te Pūkenga Atawhai course, as it is good for career opportunities within DOC. Besides, it was argued by one course participant, 'everybody else is doing it' so it has become a 'non-issue' [71].

One of the course participants narrated her experience and said that she had never been to a Te Pūkenga Atawhai course before but felt that this is 'what you should do as a DOC employee'. She felt that most staff who attend these courses are 'clueless' and would not have more information about Māori views on conservation or Māori social protocol than non-staff would. According to her, the course is an 'eye-opener' to the participants. She argued that it was useful to learn about the Treaty of Waitangi and the history of European colonisation and 'about some of the grievances that many Māori still have towards the Crown', including DOC, because it explains why there are conflicts in some conservancies. She expressed a wish to attend another Te Pūkenga Atawhai course in the future, because she found it 'very useful' in her work and wanted to learn more [79]. For those interviewees who had attended Te Pūkenga Atawhai twice, the course was perceived as more useful the second time, since a lot of the stress about not knowing what to expect and feeling inadequate had gone away, and they could focus more on the content of the course and practice a bit more Māori language and procedures [73,80].

DOC staff are however also receiving mixed messages from management, i.e., staff at Head Office, because it is said that developing good relationships with Māori is necessary and important for DOC staff, but at the same time it is communicated that no agreements should be made between DOC and tangata whenua before Waitangi tribunal hearings and possible settlements. It is said that previous agreements can be used as arguments for Māori claims in the tribunal hearings, and DOC 'must stay away from politics'. However, it is neither practical nor feasible to wait for claims and hearings, as these may take many years and urgent conservation issues must be dealt with. Moreover, it is difficult to work for mainstreaming Māori participation in conservation if relationships and negotiations are sometimes 'off' and sometimes 'on' [81].

### 3.2.7. No Easy Recipes for Knowledge

All Pou Kura Taiao have follow-ups during the year after the course, which usually consist of meetings with staff that have attended the course in the past year. According to the Pou Kura Taiao, they usually receive good feedback on these sessions, and it seems

that it is only when people have started to work again that things are falling into place and the 'aha-experiences' occur [70]. This is partly because it is difficult to describe and explain what is intangible, according to one Pou Kura Taiao, for 'how do you learn about culture, and how can it be presented?' There are 'not any easy recipes for knowledge', he said, and Te Pūkenga Atawhai only provides a general point of departure, which most Māori agree upon, but must be completed for a more detailed knowledge of Māori views of conservation and the environment, and situations differ between conservancies [82] so 'one visit to a Pūkenga course does not equip you with everything you need' [70]. It is also important to know that mandates within iwi authorities shift, and DOC staff must therefore keep up with changes between or within stakeholders. Connecting with Māori people should not only be about conservation issues, but also 'talking about the weather, having a cup of tea, and warming the relations' [32]. In many areas, Māori landowners are suspicious of the intentions of DOC, sometimes because they have had bad experiences from previous encounters with DOC staff, who often focus on what people cannot do [83], or just because DOC is seen as a representative of the Crown and therefore unreliable [84].

According to one of the Pou Kura Taiao, DOC staff sometimes also rush things, but developing good relations with landowners take time, especially in areas when relations between DOC and iwi are historically bad. Another issue is that DOC often recruits specialists who travel between conservancies to solve similar issues in different places, but who do not stay long enough to develop local relationships with tangata whenua. What is more appreciated by Māori landowners is for DOC staff to have good local knowledge, both about the lands and about tangata whenua. Many elders among Māori landowners are also not willing to share their knowledge about the lands with anyone, if they do not know how it is going to be used. Elders are however often crucial in iwi decision-making processes, and it is important for DOC staff to recognise who must be consulted before decisions are made, as it may not always be a formal trust board member but could be a respected 'auntie' who needs to approve new projects. This is difficult to explain to new DOC staff as there is 'no one way of doing things', but 'as many ways as there are people' [83]. The Pou Kura Taiao at the course offered to help facilitating meetings with Māori representatives, but were not willing to help with negotiations, or do a mihi on behalf of someone else. That is the responsibility of the relevant DOC staff in that situation, the Pou Kura Taiao said, and a cultural competence that they must develop themselves [32].

Most interviewees believed that it is possible, but not without challenges, to develop co-governance regimes between DOC and Māori. However, one interviewee, a conservator, said that he did not believe that DOC's conservation philosophy, which is based on complete protection of natural resources, is compatible with the Māori conservation philosophy, which is about using available resources. He suggested that one solution could be to have some areas protected according to DOC's protection philosophy and some according to the Māori users' model [85]. This is to avoid some of the conflicts that have arisen when DOC and Māori are trying to work together in the same areas. However, both DOC and Māori ultimately want the same thing: 'to ensure that no species go extinct but survive for the future', even if they approach this goal in different ways [86].

Many of the participants had been reluctant before they entered the course, but many also came back with a sense of fulfilment, according to participants at a group interview. Some participants said that they will even use their mihi in non-Māori environments to show their good intentions [71]. One of the Pou Kura Taiao confirmed that many participants perceive the personal mihi that they develop as the most useful knowledge acquired during the course, even if, or perhaps because, it is the only Māori that they will learn by heart [32]. One of the course participants said that he had acquired better knowledge of Māori views on conservation from the course and 'good tips' for how to better interact with Māori to take with him in his work. He also said that he had continued to have contact with one of the Pou Kura Taiao, who had offered to help him with how to pronounce different Māori words and what persons he should contact for different questions. He said that whereas 'most Māori seems to have knowledge of each other', for

him it can 'take days to find out the right person to talk to', and the Pou Kura Taiao can tell him immediately who to contact [86].

In another group interview, the interviewees agreed that Te Pūkenga Atawhai is a good course, in fact 'one of the few good competence development courses that DOC offers its staff' and most participants were happy after having attended the course. However, it was argued that the course 'mostly functions as a door opener' for a Māori way of thinking and becomes like a 'snapshot' or a 'postcard' with a Māori perspective, and the picture that is presented is perhaps 'a little too neat'. All also agreed that what is taught in the course is what is of interest to DOC, and what DOC wants its employees to know, instead of representing an independent Māori perspective. The course is therefore not really about Māori culture, but about the aspects of Māori conservation views that may differ from the way DOC 'normally' does conservation [73].

#### 4. Discussion

This paper investigates how the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course contributes to overcoming perceived difficulties with cultural differences between DOC and Māori in conservation work, and how Pou Kura Taiao and participants perceive its usefulness for teaching staff about Māori views of conservation. As the only course in cultural awareness training at DOC, Te Pūkenga Atawhai has the responsibility to convey issues of central importance to Māori and their views of conservation and present them to DOC staff. The course is however also a part of a broader revitalisation process for Māori culture and society and a recognition of their bicultural Treaty partnership with the Crown. The course curriculum therefore reflects important issues of relevance to Māori revitalisation processes, including language revitalisation, a recognition of Māori culture and values and an acknowledgment of the bicultural partnership in conservation.

Most participants said that they had become more aware of the reasons for the misunderstandings and sometimes conflicts between DOC and iwi, and they had realised that it is necessary to invest more time in developing social relations with local Māori people to be able to carry out their work. It was argued by some of the participants that they are expected to have not only social competence in their work, but cultural competence too. The message conveyed by the Pou Kura Taiao was that a lot of the conservation work is not directly about conservation, but about getting to know people in the conservancies. Some participants were however frustrated over having to learn about Māori cosmology, history, social organisation and language, which they dismissed as irrelevant for conservation work.

The course content was in parts even perceived by some participants as provoking, sometimes resulting in defensive comments about being subject to religious and political 'indoctrination' of Māori perspectives during the course, i.e., being 'confronted' with the cosmology and colonial history according to Māori and their expectations of the Treaty partnership with the Crown, and by extension DOC staff. However, while some participants argued that Māori grievances were presented in a rather provocative way, others found the picture presented of the Māori society too 'neat', like a 'postcard' with Māori views, but all referred to their own previous knowledge of Māori and how this knowledge did not correlate with what was taught at the course. Strong opinions from primarily female participants were also voiced against the requirement for them to wear skirts and symbolically be protected by the male participants during the welcoming ceremony. Critics argued that they expected to be treated equally as DOC employees and had difficulties accepting that they had to act subordinately to be welcomed on to the marae and to the course, and perhaps also, by extension, to make a career at DOC.

The difficulties with integrating different customs and traditions into conservation work was also reflected in the problems for DOC with recruiting Māori staff, which was brought up during the course. The Treaty partnership between Māori and the Crown can be expressed in various ways, including the recruitment of staff from both parties in a bicultural partnership, fair representation from parties at all levels of organisation and

sufficient knowledge about ‘the other’ to carry out the job. Rather than having to teach non-Māori about Māori, Māori themselves should, according to DOC managers, ideally work alongside non-Māori for mutual learning to occur, but many Māori are reluctant to seek employment with DOC as they are risking being seen as ‘traitors’ and ‘taking sides’ working for a Crown agency. There is therefore a need for Te Pūkenga Atawhai—a special course in conservation Māori-style for primarily non-Māori DOC staff—whereas conservation non-Māori-style is taken for granted and seldom problematised for its own worldviews, gender norms, traditions, knowledge and tika behaviour.

Another aspect of the Māori cultural revitalisation at DOC is that although almost all Māori speak English, Māori expect that the partnership should be expressed in bilingualism, which means that all documents and information material produced by DOC should be provided in both languages, and that it should be minimally ‘desirable’ for DOC staff to master basic greetings, be able to make a short presentation of themselves, and understand common phrases in Māori. Some course participants expressed frustration over having to listen to and learn Māori, which they do not understand, and questioned how much language one is able to learn in a few days. Others welcomed the opportunity and practiced their mihi for the final day performance at the course. The language requirement is however not only an expression for equality and partnership in conservation, but according to Māori, their language is essential for accessing valuable knowledge of Indigenous flora, fauna, and ecosystems—something that other languages are incapable of.

Having at least basic language skills in Māori is also essential to be able to follow Māori cultural protocols in connection with negotiations and meetings between DOC and Māori groups over conservation issues. Great emphasis is therefore placed during the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course on how to organise a meeting at a marae, what to say and how to behave. It was argued by Pou Kura Taiao that it is difficult to get away with bad behaviour at the marae and poor pronunciation of the Māori language at meetings, as this shows a lack of respect for the Māori hosts. The message in DOC’s language policy and the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course is that for the partnership to be recognised, non-Māori speakers should learn at least a little Māori. However, for all the clarity in policy documents and the Te Pūkenga Atawhai course, there is little evidence to suggest that the level of Māori language skills among DOC staff is increasing or that new staff members are recruited based on their experience and knowledge of Māori culture and language.

The course participants are also expected to become aware of and acknowledge how colonialism and Treaty breaches by the Crown have had, and still have, a negative impact on relations between the Crown and Māori. These relations form the backdrop for the explanations from the Pou Kura Taiao of the cultural differences and resentment that exist between the Crown and Māori as partners in conservation. Whereas the primary objective for DOC is to conserve by permanent protection of land areas and flora and fauna, Māori see conservation as temporary restrictions and/or conservation for future use. DOC’s policies represent a Western view of humans as external to nature, whereas Māori worldviews are based on holistic views of humans as part of nature, with a special role as guardians. DOC’s focus on recreation for the sake of recreation was also presented as an alien concept for many Māori, who prefer to see themselves as part of the environment and not something that is merely visited occasionally and just for fun. According to the Pou Kura Taiao, these perspectives have consequences for how nature, as well as relations between people, should best be managed.

The transfer of lands and resources to Māori, and the establishment of co-governance regimes as parts of settlements between the Crown and Māori claimants, were identified as common sources of tension and sometimes conflict between DOC staff and iwi. To overcome these problems based on cultural differences, the course participants are encouraged to learn more about Māori worldviews and become aware of why Māori conservation strategies may differ from conventional strategies even if the goal is the same; to preserve species from extinction and to maintain the integrity of landscapes and ecosystems, for the benefit of all citizens and visitors to Aotearoa New Zealand.

As a Crown agency, DOC must abide by the bicultural policy in its work and formally acknowledge Māori as Treaty partners in conservation. The Te Pūkenga Atawhai course addresses the need for better cultural awareness among DOC staff of Māori worldviews and perspectives of conservation and focuses on the kinds of issues that risk leading to conflicts between DOC and iwi. The Te Pūkenga Atawhai course, the expressions of the bicultural and bilingual policy and the recognition of Māori as partners in conservation should also be seen as parts of a broader Māori revitalisation of Māori language and culture, which is slowly but gradually changing not only the Māori society and conservation, but all of Aotearoa New Zealand.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Ethical review and approval were waived for this study since all informants were interviewed only in their capacities as department employees and no interview questions of a personal or sensitive nature were asked. The research is therefore not applicable for review by the Swedish Ethics Review Authority, according to the Ethical Review Act (2003:460) and the General Data Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679). This study is based on semi-structured interviews with employees at the Department of Conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand between 2004 and 2011.

**Informed Consent Statement:** The research project was approved by the Department of Conservation in New Zealand, and all subjects gave their individual informed verbal consent for inclusion before participating in the study. No recordings (audio or video) of interviews were made, and participants were provided with aliases (employment role) in digital fieldnotes. Code lists are stored separately from transcripts and are only accessible by the author.

**Data Availability Statement:** Digitalised fieldnotes and interview transcripts can only be accessed by the author. Written course material is only available to course participants and/or by permission from the Department of Conservation. Policy documents and reports from the Department of Conservation are publicly available online.

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