

Mātauranga and Science

Aotearoa New Zealand is rapidly advancing as a leader in Indigenous knowledge by recognising the potential for mātauranga and Western science to work together. The validity of mātauranga has been established by numerous recent publications, many of which are briefly mentioned herein. There are a myriad of urgent scientific issues facing us right now where mātauranga is a vital part of the solution, such as [climate change adaptation](#) and [managing ecosystems in Aotearoa](#), including [freshwater and marine resources](#). It has been incredibly exciting over the past few years to see mātauranga acknowledged and highlighted in these areas. [Decolonising research is recognised as crucial on a global scale, not only within Aotearoa](#).

There is an extensive body of work already in existence on mātauranga and its importance from Māori scholars, such as the recent book “[Ngā Kete Mātauranga](#)” (eds. Jacina Ruru and Linda Waimarie Nikora), the classic “[Decolonising Methodologies](#)” (Linda Tuhiwai Smith), and [this 2017 article by Dan Hikuroa](#). Such work has moved to the [forefront of global science, communicating](#) powerful narratives about global change and natural hazards. The NZAS was also proud to devote a [two-part special issue of the New Zealand Science Review](#) to mātauranga in 2019. Every article is worth reading but we particularly recommend [the foreword by Juliet Gerrard and Tahu Kukutai](#) and the introduction by [Ocean Mercier and Ann-Marie Jackson](#).

Specifically, like many others we were dismayed to see a number of prominent academics publicly questioning the value of mātauranga to science [in the Listener this week](#), and claiming that science does not colonise. While as scientists we clearly see the value of science and the good it can do, we must also acknowledge that science has an ongoing history of colonising when it speaks over Indigenous voices, ignores Indigenous knowledge, and privileges a limited, Western-dominated view of science. We acknowledge that many in the science community will have questions; we encourage people to learn more about indigenous experiences of colonisation, the history of Aotearoa, and the on-going effects of colonisation. This pattern must end. The implications can be seen, for example, in the way that Māori are disproportionately affected by [cardiorespiratory diseases](#) and [other diseases](#) and on average, [die younger](#). Science has offered us treatment methods, but the benefits have not been equal.

The NZAS considers it highly valuable for science education in this country to include teaching the history of science and understanding how Western views of science have related in the past (and sometimes present) to mātauranga Māori and other Indigenous knowledges. No useful science can be done in a vacuum, artificially disconnected from its context. We cannot make meaningful progress on doing better science now and in the future if we allow the continued treatment of mātauranga as unproven or lesser by Pākehā and other Western scientists. Instead, we acknowledge its equal importance and role in scientific work.

Ultimately, the NZAS is excited to see the research community as a whole discuss how we can better support and integrate mātauranga and Māori scholars into research in Aotearoa, but in this area, we need to take guidance from and listen to the voices of Māori as the experts on mātauranga. There is no argument to be had on whether this is good or necessary. It is both.