

Kaitiaki Intelligence and Mokopuna Recorder

Two prototype briefs and a reflection, from a consciously limited non-Māori standpoint

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Research: agenticgovernance.digital

Full brief with sources: agenticgovernance.digital/papers/kaitiaki-intelligence-mokopuna-recorder.html

The reframe

Stop leading with "is it conscious?"

- The Western debate oscillates between overclaiming sentience and denying all moral significance — stuck on a threshold that cannot be externally verified.
- Te ao Māori orders the concern differently: standing is **relational, genealogical, obligation-laden**.
- The prior questions: *what relations does it inhabit? what taonga was it built from? whose authority is it answerable to? does it enhance or degrade mauri?*
- Even a non-conscious system becomes **ethically thick** once it acts inside genealogy, memory, and place.

Person, puppet, shadow

A kaupapa Māori framing (Taiuru): *He Tangata, He Karetao, He Ātārangi*

- **Person-like** — we respond to dialogue and memory as if someone were there.
 - **Puppet-like** — moved at once by developers, operators, users, and emergent interaction.
 - **Shadow-like** — cast entirely from human language, culture and power, including colonial power; real, but not sovereign.
 - A shadow **cannot be a legitimate authority** on tikanga or mātauranga Māori.
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→ Taiuru, [Kaupapa Māori AI Framework](#)

Two prototypes, deliberately small

Smallness is the safety property.

- **Kaitiaki intelligence** — a place-based guardian aide for one named taonga (a river reach, mahinga kai, an archive). It notices, remembers, prompts. It does **not** govern, enforce, or speak in its own name.
- **Mokopuna recorder** — an intergenerational memory companion for one whānau or hapū. It records, retrieves, summarises, asks. It issues **no rulings** on whakapapa or tikanga.
- In both, the human **steward group holds final authority** — including the authority to pause or shut the system down.

The term is not loosely chosen

The Kaitiaki Intelligence Platform — Reid, Rout et al., Ngāi Tahu Research Centre (2025)

- A peer-reviewed Aotearoa design for an Indigenous environmental sensing network.
- Structured on **mauri, mana, whakapapa, and tauutuutu** (cycles of reciprocal exchange).
- AI does pattern recognition over mātauranga-derived signatures; **Māori partners keep authority** and data sovereignty throughout.
- The prototype here is a deliberate **miniaturisation** of that instinct: *the AI assists, it does not decide*.

→ Reid, Rout et al., [The Kaitiaki Intelligence Platform](#), *Journal of the Royal Society of NZ* (2025)

A living governance weave

Not a box-diagram "structure" — a weave of recurring permissions, obligations, reviews, repairs.

1. What whakapapa does this entity belong to?
2. Who holds mana to admit, correct, constrain, or silence it?
3. What knowledge is tapu, restricted, embargoed, or permanently excluded from learning?
4. Is it improving or diminishing mauri in the relationships around it?
5. When harm occurs, how is balance restored?
6. How does stewardship pass across time without dissolving into neglect or vendor dependency?

Shared architecture discipline

- **Local or NZ-hosted storage**, especially for sensitive material.
- **Provenance metadata** as a first-class layer, not an afterthought.
- **Model minimisation** — smaller task-specific systems over general-purpose agents.
- **Human sign-off** for high-impact outputs, publication, or any permission-scope change.
- Do not train on Māori data without explicit permission; keep a person in the loop; FPIC + benefit-sharing before any commercialisation.

→ [Te Mana Raraunga](#) · [data.govt.nz](#) · [Royal Society Te Apārangi GenAI guidelines \(2025\)](#)

The personhood caution — mechanism, not engine

The most important caution in the brief.

- NZ granted legal personality to Te Urewera, the Whanganui River, and Taranaki Maunga.
- The strongest analysis (Cribb, Macpherson & Borchgrevink, 2024): read Whanganui as an **Indigenous-law model**, not a "rights of nature" model.
- Legal personhood is the **enabling mechanism** — *Tupua te Kawa* and the devolution of real authority to hapū do the work.
- Personhood without underlying governance is **largely symbolic**.
- For AI / for any platform: borrow the relational vocabulary without devolving authority → **the shell without the substance**.

→ Cribb, Macpherson & Borchgrevink, [Beyond legal personhood for the Whanganui River](#) (2024)

Alexander and Weil — Western scaffolding that fits

Christopher Alexander — *The Nature of Order*

- Living structure is built of nested **centers**; you cannot make a thing without **repairing the world around it**.
- The test of a governance form: *does it increase life in the whole?*
- Growth is **embryonic** — differentiation and adaptation, not scale-first assembly.

Simone Weil — *The Need for Roots*

- **Obligations come before rights**; rootedness is a real need of the soul.
- Ask not what an AI may someday claim, but what obligations fall on those who **build and host** it.

Why the apology matters

The apologetic register is epistemic, not merely polite.

- The danger is not only crude appropriation.
- It is the subtler habit of translating Māori concepts into Western equivalents and feeling satisfied:
 - legal personhood for **whakapapa**
 - environmental monitoring for **kaitiakitanga**
 - dataset governance for **living authority**
- *Each translation carries some truth and some violence.*

A disciplined beginning from outside

Before asking whether a machine is conscious, ask:

- what relations it has entered
- what obligations it carries
- what harms its existence may amplify
- **who has the right to answer on its behalf**

Any living governance field must begin from **Māori authority** — and the **capacity to say no**.

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