

# Achieving Sustainability Through the Use of CIAs

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Sustainability is a big aspiration. Often spoken and written about by academics, researchers and scientists, and equally referred to by policy writers and planners in their analysis, assessments and reporting, the term “sustainability” is fast becoming a watered-down term in this writer’s view. It is starting to lack meaning and genuine consideration when authorities encourage appropriate action.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) is the primary environmental management law. Its purpose is to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. In addition to the purpose of the RMA, in Part 2 are a hierarchy of principles that local and central government authorities, and appointed decision-makers, must also consider in achieving this purpose, such as matters of national importance and principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Although the term sustainability is not used directly, the sustainable management of our environment must also recognise our social, economic, and cultural well-being. The principles outlined in Part 2 of the RMA identify Te Tiriti o Waitangi related matters to ensure a Maaori worldview is provided in the sustainable management of our environment under the RMA.

## **Maaori worldview**

Te Ao Maaori, or the Maaori worldview, is holistic and acknowledges the interconnectedness between all things, both the tangible and intangible. The familial connection, or whanaungatanga, between Maaori and the environment, and the respect and honour afforded to the Gods or Ngaa Atua, articulates through narratives, and solidifies in practice, this worldview. Also, it is important to recognise and acknowledge that there is no one Maaori worldview. That the Maaori worldview is primarily reflective of locality (spatial) and of time (temporal) and the mana of tangata whenua/mana whenua

## **Consent Planning and Cultural Impact Assessments**

When it comes to consenting, there are measures under Part 6 and 6AA of the RMA that guide and direct consent planners in preparing consent applications and/or how to consider consent application if they work for a consent authority. The role of the consent planner in both instances is to evaluate the merits of proposal as to whether it is a sustainable use, development and protection of our natural and physical resources.

To help inform their evaluation, should they choose to, consent planners have the ability to seek or commission expert technical advice. Advice is often sought where there are matters such as sediment and erosion impacts, stormwater and traffic management, and noise nuisance or impacts. It is in this same manner that Cultural Impact Assessment reports are recognised as technical reports to help inform consent planners with their evaluation.

So what are Cultural Impact Assessments? The trusted planners' resource Quality Planning website outlines that Cultural Impact Assessments (CIAs) are "*reports documenting Maaori cultural values, interests and associations with an area or a resource, and the potential impacts of a proposed activity on these. CIAs are a tool to facilitate meaningful and effective participation of Maaori in impact assessment. A CIA should be regarded as technical advice, much like any other technical report such as ecological or hydrological assessments.*"

Although I do not disagree with this description, what is important to understand is that this description fits in a western planning or impact assessment context. CIA is not a Maaori planning/impact assessment tool. It is a method within a western framework to enable, in a managed capacity<sup>[1]</sup>, the consideration of Maaori values, Maaori perspectives, mātauranga Maaori, and a platform for kaitiaki to provide their views and direction on te mana o te wai/te taiao.

Therein lies the challenge: planners expect that Maaori, in preparing their CIAs, will stick to 'cultural' concerns and avoid social or other matters; and that the scope and focus of CIAs remains within the constraints of the proposal. The challenge for Maaori is that we are forced to narrow-down and compartmentalise our worldview so as to fit a compartmentalised resource management system. By doing, the consent planner (and decision-maker) potentially limit their assessment and evaluation against the matters in Part 2 of the RMA. Only by pushing the envelope on status quo consent planning practices through the courts do Maaori find incremental wins in achieving sustainable management under the RMA (e.g. [Motiti Rohe Moana Trust v Bay of Plenty Regional Council](#))

### **Achieving Sustainability under the RMA**

The opportunity for consent planners, whether working for Council or a consultancy, is to recognise the importance of CIAs (or Cultural Values Assessments) as reports that provide information that informs assessment and evaluation against the RMA and planning documents. This is where our understanding of sustainability, or sustainable management under the RMA, can be broadened in Aotearoa New Zealand. Consultants should be proactive and encourage clients to work with tangata whenua/mana whenua. Consent planners in local authorities should have the courage to commission CIAs to inform reports.

I can acknowledge that achieving sustainability is a big task. It is a very complex aspiration. It can mean different things to people and different situations. The Oxford dictionary itself has two definitions. The first is "the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level", and the second is "avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance". It must be assumed that in the eyes of the experts at Oxford that both definitions are of equal value, and that neither one of the definitions carries more weighting above the other. Sustainability can be an action to maintain, and equally an action to protect or avoid.



Sustainability for some Maaori could be in alignment with the first Oxford definition, where the effort of kaitiaki is to maintain at a certain rate or level the resources and environment within their area. Conversely, there are Maaori who would fulfil their kaitiaki role according to the second Oxford definition, and would seek measures to protect the depletion and degradation of the resources and environment in their area. Each perspective or Maaori worldview is of equal value and weighting, but more importantly is reflective of specific narratives and practices.

Whether consultant or a Council consent planner, it is important to take the time to investigate, query and understand the expression of the values outlined in CIAs, whilst also respecting the perspective and knowledge as empirical information/evidence. This approach would further enhance our efforts as consent planners and impact assessment practitioners towards sustainability (guised as sustainable management under the RMA) that appreciates and provides for a Maaori worldview.

[1] Managed capacity meaning in a RMA context – have regard to, take into account, or if we are fortunate enough, recognise and provide for.