

FOMA Summit 2025

“Are We There Yet? – Prosperity, Abundance and Wellbeing The New Māori Economy”

Keynote Speech – Nanaia Mahuta

Thursday 3rd April 2025

Mihi

E rere tonu ngaa mihi ki te tini o mate o te tau, o te marama o nanahi rā, kī ngā mātanga o te motu Kahurangi Iritana, Kahurangi Tariana, Koro ‘Bom’ Gillies – rātou katoa hāere - tatū atu rā ki a Kiingi Tuuheitia e moe, e oki koia ki te rangi. Ko Te Arikinui Nga wai hono I te po ki te whenua rire rire rire hau, Pai Maarire.

Kua taka mai ki tēnei, ka whakatau i te tongikura a Kingi Tawhiao – “e kore tēnei oranga e huri ki tua o āku mokopuna...” – ina ko te āpōpōtanga I manakotia nei e ia ko tēnei te wā, kia kaha rā ki te whakatōpu ngā tāonga hei tuāpapa mo te wānanga e whai ake nei.

No reira, ka aro atu ki ngā mahi ahuhenua i whakatauirā mai a Te Puea i tōna wā ma te mahi tahi me te pukumahi ka tāea te titiro te whānuitanga o te kitenge a te tupuna rā a Tāwhiao.

Nō reira kei ngā mana, ngā reo nō ngā tōpito o te motu, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou katoa.

Acknowledgements:

Can I briefly take the opportunity to thank the Chair Traci Houppa and the FOMA executive for the opportunity to offer some reflections at this annual summit. I also want to acknowledge your effort to collectivise your ambition for a prosperous and thriving economy that can support the wellbeing of whānau and their communities.

I make these remarks recognising we are living through a seismic shift in our collective consciousness. The Māori population is growing—both in size and influence. Our contribution to the economy is increasing, and inclusive participation of Māori in all spheres of society is gaining momentum. These forces will shape the future of Aotearoa New Zealand, regardless of political headwinds.

In my opening remarks, I referred to a tongikura of Tāwhiao that he left as a lasting reminder after the battle of Rangiriri (followed by the travesty of Rangiaowhia and Ōrākau). He envisioned a future where his mokopuna would no longer bear the hardships he endured. Instead, they would seek their livelihoods - grounded in the wisdom of their tūpuna.

A Vision of Prosperity

Tāwhiao left us (his people) tongikura - timeless truths that guide each generation. In *Te Paki o Matariki*, he laid out a vision of prosperity, abundance, and ora. Central to that vision is *Mana Māori Motuhake*.

This concept has often been misunderstood - viewed through a colonised, capitalist lens as a call for isolation. As if Māori could or should survive in a vacuum. But this is a distortion - one that sustains an economic system built on competitive individualism, favouring some while excluding many. And too often, that ‘many’ are our whānau.

Tāwhiao’s vision was not about exclusion. It was about self-determination, collective strength, and defining prosperity on our own terms, taking collective action to guarantee our success..

We need to take stock of what is happening around the world, in our country and legitimately ask: What does a new tomorrow look like - and what can we do today to shape it? Inevitably as we transfer the success features within the Māori economy our ability to transport these practices, relationships, opportunities and ongoing innovation can extend to benefit other indigenous economies with similar objectives.

Kotahitanga is a powerful force. But if we are to embed it into our vision of shared prosperity, we need more than good intentions. We need deliberate, sustained action.

Kotahitanga is not just an idea - it’s a practice. We see it come alive in moments of hardship: during tangihanga, or when communities rally together in the wake of natural disasters. We also see it in times of joy: birthdays, weddings, cultural milestones like Te Matatini. And we feel it in collective movements - revitalising te reo Māori, reclaiming whenua, and asserting our rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Kotahitanga binds us - in grief, in celebration, and in pursuit of our highest aspirations. So, what does the future look like through the lens of *economic Kotahitanga*?

If it starts with self-leadership, then collectively it's about forging shared aspirations - collaborating not to move at the same pace, but with the same intention: to create a more inclusive, values-based economic future.

So what might economic *Mana Motuhake* look like?

Are We There Yet?

We have strong foundations: land trusts, Incorporations, thriving Māori SMEs, and PSGEs. We're leaders in fisheries and are exploring high-value opportunities that bring culture and commerce together. Our enterprises offer real hope, but this is the start not the destination and by that I mean not more of the same operating in a context that has failed intergenerational Oranga for our whānau.

The wealth gap continues to widen - affecting health, housing, education, and employment. Structural poverty persists, holding back whānau from homeownership, developing the full potential of their whenua across key parts of the country, gaining financial independence, and improving collective opportunity.

I acknowledge, as it stands, the Māori economy shows promise, the recent release of *Te Ohanga Māori* led by BERL demonstrates that point. But real transformation demands we move beyond the tired binary of capitalism and socialism. We need an economic model that shifts the current paradigm - one built on connection, is relational, practices reciprocity, and impacts collective wellbeing. A model that is inclusive and attracts those who share our values and are prepared to partner in this space. There are existing models – we need more of them.

Mokopuna decisions demand an intergenerational lens - one that confronts the harm caused by extractive economic models that have widened the gap between wealth creators, wealth holders, and wealth takers - while leaving too many as mere wealth watchers, excluded from prosperity altogether. Māori have already acknowledged that the current

economic system has breached our ecological limits for responsible and sustainable prosperity.

Te Mana o te Wai is an opportunity to recognise a value system where connection, care, and accountability to te taiao are central to the health of our waterways, land utilization and smart productive growth. Sadly politics gets in the way of intergenerational responsibility.

Māori - and Indigenous economies - are well-placed to change the narrative and the lived reality of a modern transformative economy. With our willingness to embrace new technologies, connect to ancestral intelligence, and lead ethically in AI, we could help shape a climate-sensitive, tech-enhanced future.

Take Te Hiku Media, for example. They're using AI to build te reo Māori datasets in ways that uphold cultural integrity. Their kaupapa puts mokopuna at the centre - preserving identity while building a pathway into the future digital economy.

In the U.S., the Blackfeet Nation combines traditional ecological knowledge with climate data - using satellite and sensor technology to monitor environmental changes across their lands. They are mapping the future capability of their resources to inform smarter, intergenerational investment decisions.

Meanwhile, Indigenous Guardians programmes in Australia and Canada empower First Nations to care for their lands using both traditional knowledge and science. These roles are not just about conservation - they're about cultural responsibility and mokopuna-centred decision-making. At the heart of the new Māori economy is an Oranga vision that is mokopuna focused and deeply connected to our values, and what we value as intergenerational impact.

Here in Aotearoa, with one of the youngest populations, we can create the conditions for our rangatahi to thrive.

Intergenerational equity is one of our Kotahitanga challenges. An inclusive relational economic model that resides in our Oranga is another. As our kaumātua age with dignity, our mokopuna can grow with confidence that their potential will be reached.

Towards the New (Old) Māori Economy

It may be time to rethink the ideologies we've inherited. What would it mean to reframe our economic goals through a new economic lens where the choices are not about tradeoffs between one thing or another? Could PSGEs apply an equity lens that genuinely prioritises intergenerational wellbeing? Would we have the collective courage to make that shift?

These are the questions we must ask and the time to do that is now, this is an inflection point that requires different thinking.

Then there's climate change - an existential threat largely caused by human activity. Rather than dwell on past neglect, let's return to our tūpuna wisdom. They understood we are part of a living, interconnected ecosystem. That knowledge should guide us - not just to survive, but to thrive in a generative eco-system. That generative eco-system is the new approach to prosperity, abundance and ora.

This is bigger than applying mātauranga Māori to problems. It's about weaving together different knowledge systems to tackle complexity. As AI and data advance rapidly, we must ask: What does an ethical Māori framework look like in a knowledge-based economy?

And if we are to lead globally in Indigenous thought, what might an Indigenous knowledge commons look like - one that protects against appropriation and exploitation, seeks out opportunity and fosters responsible innovation.

In the current economic, socio-political paradigm we face the challenges to our identity, language, culture, values and tikanga. We've made great strides - but some old 'festering' issues remain to remind us never ever be complacent.

Let me take a moment to share an update on a research collaboration that's helping to build a strong, modern economy—one that values Indigenous leadership and builds resilience across our trading relationships.

Tauhokohoko is a five-year MBIE funded research partnership between Te Taumata and the University of Waikato, now in its second year. Its goal is simple but powerful: to indigenise trade policy and support mana motuhake by strengthening Indigenous-led trade.

The research component is led by a talented team—Dr Jason Mika, Associate Professor Robert Joseph, Associate Professor Maui Hudson, and Professor Matt Roskrige—and focuses on three key areas:

- Indigenising Trade Policy is about creating trade policies that reflect Indigenous values, knowledge, and aspirations.
- Measuring Indigenous Trade looks at how we collect and use Māori trade data to show how trade can improve wellbeing and contribute to global Indigenous trade insights.
- Enabling Indigenous Trade explores what Indigenous trade looks like in practice, and how we can support Māori-to-Māori and Indigenous-to-Indigenous trade opportunities.

At the heart of the project is mātauranga Māori and Indigenous data sovereignty—making sure that cultural knowledge is protected and respected in future trade policy, especially in areas like digital trade.

As project manager, I see Tauhokohoko as a chance to reshape how the world sees trade—by putting Indigenous knowledge, values, and leadership at the centre. We’re still in the early stages, but we welcome your participation to test ideas, and be part of shaping the benefits of this important work to strengthen indigenous trade and the resilience of the indigenous economy.

You’ll notice I haven’t mentioned what the government is or isn’t doing. That’s intentional. My focus is on what we can do for ourselves.

That in itself is liberating - because it reminds us that transformation isn’t always about funding. It’s about intention.

Tāwhiao believed building his own whare wasn’t just a dream - it was a necessity. Resilience, after all, comes from resourcefulness and purpose.

So, as you move into the panel discussions and what looks to be a very informative and provoking summit, I leave you with this wero:

What is our generation's gift to our mokopuna?

What deliberate actions will we take to embody transformative Kotahitanga - so that our vision for prosperity, our lived experience of abundance, and our collective sense of Oranga changes lives?

Are we living the reality of Mana Māori Motuhake or merely expressing a notion of it?

I wish you well in your deliberations and the next steps of collective intention to prosper and thrive.

Nō reira, he paku wero i te pīnati mō tēnei rā.

Pai Maarire.