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United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

[2026 UN Water Conference - Second Global Online Stakeholder Consultation: Inputs for the Interactive Dialogues Concept Papers | Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ONE: Water for People

Key Challenge(s)

1. Since 2023, climate change and land-use activity have intensified freshwater degradation and public health risks in the Ngāi Tahu tribal territory, exacerbating systemic inequity and underinvestment in Indigenous communities. Enduring solutions are urgently needed to address the freshwater crisis.

Proposed Solution (Action-orientated)

2. Ngāi Tahu developed the Water Monitoring Programme to build technical capability in Indigenous communities with 27 participants including youth and women. The programme strengthened local oversight and drinking water safety by drawing on mātauranga Māori (Indigenous knowledge) and science.

Proposed Solution (Partnership-orientated)

3. Eighteen Ngāi Tahu communities partnered with specialist researchers and the national water regulator to implement the Water Monitoring Programme. Innovative tools such as metagenomics were made accessible to improve understanding. Bespoke training integrated Indigenous and scientific knowledge to empower communities to lead local solutions to contamination issues in their water supplies.

Transformation Action to 2030

4. To develop a solution to the freshwater crisis, Ngāi Tahu seeks to partner with the New Zealand Government to design a management system for freshwater within its tribal territory. Recognition of Ngāi Tahu customary authority over freshwater is critical to reimagining the protection and care for freshwater and ensuring better access to safe, affordable, and resilient infrastructure for all.

Keyword: Empowerment.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE TWO: Water for Prosperity

Key Challenge(s)

5. Waterways are taonga (highly prized treasures) for Ngāi Tahu, fundamental to customary life and identity. Sustainable resource use continues to be a critical challenge given the significance of primary industries in New Zealand, especially with recent shifts to prioritise economic growth.

Proposed Solution (Action-orientated)

6. Ngāi Tahu have developed a Smart Water Market framework to balance social, environmental, and economic water demands. This approach aims to improve the efficiency and transparency of water use and impacts, support integrated and sustainable management, and balance the Water–Energy–Food nexus.

Proposed Solution (Partnership-orientated)

7. To develop the Smart Water Market, Ngāi Tahu has forged international, cross-sectoral partnerships. These connections have enhanced cooperation and knowledge-sharing across academia, regulators, policymakers, industry, and communities. Through these partnerships, Ngāi Tahu will better optimise the multiple impacts caused by water takes and discharges across a range of sectors and users.

Transformation Action to 2030

8. Ngāi Tahu are leading practical solutions for the future of freshwater management and climate change adaptation in New Zealand which can ensure sustainable economic growth, while incentivising and rewarding better outcomes for the environment. These innovative solutions require community buy-in, particularly from regulatory authorities in New Zealand, to ensure their effective implementation.

Keyword: Holism.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE THREE: Water for Planet

Key Challenge(s)

9. Ngāi Tahu communities face increasing water-related climate pressures and degraded catchments. Limited resources and rigid regulatory arrangements hamper the ability for Ngāi Tahu to restore freshwater ecosystems and resilience over interconnected landscapes ki uta ki tai (mountains to the sea).

Proposed Solution (Action-orientated)

10. Ngāi Tahu is advancing transformative, place-based restoration projects to enhance sustainability, build climate resilience, and support cultural connection. The Whiria Te Waitaki project is an example which is restoring wetlands and biodiversity through planting, pest control, and regeneration.

Proposed Solution (Partnership-orientated)

11. Strong relationships underpin the success of environmental efforts. The Whiria Te Waitaki project unites landowners, agencies, and whānau (families) to restore the Waitaki catchment. The programme integrates Indigenous and scientific knowledge, employs whānau as kaitiaki (guardians), restores habitats and mahinga kai (food systems), and addresses industry impacts with a ki uta ki tai approach.

Transformation Action to 2030

12. Indigenous prioritisation frameworks must be utilised by the United Nations and its member states to enhance environmental resilience. Whiria Te Waitaki embodies the Ngāi Tahu vision 'Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei' (for us and our children after us) — demonstrating how Indigenous leadership in environmental restoration and long-term planning can strengthen global progress toward the SDGs.

Keyword: Multigenerational.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE FOUR: Water for Cooperation

Key Challenge(s)

13. Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand's founding document and recognises the co-existence of Indigenous authority (rangatiratanga) and colonial government (kāwanatanga). Currently Ngāi Tahu rangatiratanga over freshwater is constrained, contributing to freshwater degradation.

Proposed Solution (Action-orientated)

14. Ngāi Tahu have taken legal action to seek recognition of its rangatiratanga (chiefly authority) over freshwater in New Zealand and progressed #SDGAction49300. This presents an opportunity to establish an inclusive and sustainable water governance framework that delivers water security for all.

Proposed Solution (Partnership-orientated)

15. Despite the legal claim, Ngāi Tahu continue to advance the exercise of rangatiratanga to the extent possible. Ngāi Tahu lead extensive research projects to advance inclusive governance and to progress SDG6. Strong relationships with leading academic institutes, like Oxford and Stanford Universities, have been developed to facilitate water-related Indigenous education and internship programmes.

Transformation Action to 2030

16. Ngāi Tahu are seeking reconciliation with the Government to partner in addressing New Zealand's freshwater crisis. Ngāi Tahu worldviews and relationships with nature — grounded in respect and reciprocity — transform how water is valued. Active encouragement from the United Nations for Ngāi Tahu rangatiratanga to be accommodated into water governance systems would enhance Government cooperation.

Keyword: Rangatiratanga.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE FIVE: Water in Multilateral Processes

Key Challenge(s)

17. Since 2023, significant regulatory reforms to freshwater management have continued to progress. Ngāi Tahu invests significant time and effort in these reform processes, but progress has been undermined by changing political agendas, resulting in failed implementation at the catchment level.

Proposed Solution (Action-orientated)

18. The 25-year vision of Ngāi Tahu, Mō Kā Uri, articulates intergenerational aspirations grounded in values, wellbeing, and connection to the environment. Enabling Indigenous models in national and global processes would improve continuity, accountability, and long-term outcomes of the SDGs.

Proposed Solution (Partnership-orientated)

19. Ngāi Tahu is investing in the next generation of leadership through international education and research partnerships across the disciplines, and remains open to exploring new opportunities. Collaborations with universities, research institutes, and global water forums have strengthened Indigenous participation and supported knowledge transmission, contributing to lasting progress on SDGs.

Transformation Action to 2030

20. Global water initiatives and multilateral frameworks must embed intergenerational governance and uphold enduring partnerships with Indigenous nations. Recognising and relying on the stability and foresight of Indigenous communities like Ngāi Tahu will ensure water management transcends political cycles, reflects holistic relationships with nature, and secures sustainability beyond 2030.

Keyword: Continuity.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE SIX: Investments for Water

Key Challenge(s)

21. Environmental data systems in New Zealand suffer from fragmentation, poor coordination, and a lack of investment in infrastructure. This constrains innovation and decision-making across the water sector, leaving entities like Ngāi Tahu with limited access to essential information and tools.

Proposed Solution (Action-orientated)

22. Ngāi Tahu is leading the development of a Freshwater Data Portal shaped by an Indigenous narrative. Consolidating disconnected datasets and exploring innovative approaches will improve coordination, strengthen data integrity, and provide transparent insights into the true state of freshwater.

Proposed Solution (Partnership-orientated)

23. Ngāi Tahu has initiated the Freshwater Data Portal which will collaborate with a range of freshwater data and knowledge partners — including Indigenous communities, researchers, and environmental agencies. This open-source, Indigenous-led design introduces new ways of working with data that empower local knowledge indicators of water quality to complement contemporary scientific approaches.

Transformation Action to 2030

24. The United Nations and its member states ought to reimagine funding mechanisms to accelerate progress on the SDGs. Funding systems often favour well-resourced institutions, yet it is under resourced communities who benefit the most from support. Equitable investment pathways are required to enable Indigenous and community organisations to lead and innovate local solutions that advance SDG6.

Keyword: Pluralism.