

Environmental Politics and Policy in Aotearoa New Zealand

Edited by Maria Bargh and Julie L. MacArthur. Auckland University Press, 2022.

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With an ensemble of experts, Maria Bargh and Julie L. MacArthur have done a timely service to the communities of academic research, teaching-and-learning, and public policymaking by editing the book *Environmental Politics and Policy in Aotearoa New Zealand*. It is timely as we witness another year of record-breaking dramatic weather and climate-related disasters worldwide. More than ever, all sectors of society at large are compelled to learn more about the environment we live in, the histories of the lands, waters, and forests around us, interconnections across complex geological, ecological, and socio-economical systems, and, ultimately, the relationship between individuals and the future of Aotearoa and beyond.

This is an excellent and important volume for both the academics working in the field and the general public in that it offers a holistic introduction to why we have arrived at the current “state of the environment” in Aotearoa New Zealand – the one and only cradle of the Māori culture and a democratic country now over five million call home. From the first page, the editors and chapter authors are not coy about the core of all the issues at hand – the contested history of Māori self-determination, British/European colonisation, and the capitalist and, more recently, neoliberalist economic domination. The book cover boldly uses a photo from Ihumātao: large words painted in red and black ink on a wood board deeply planted along iron fences against a vast piece of dairy cow farmland saying, “This Land is in Dispute”. (My four-year-old, who recently started learning words and reading them aloud, after seeing the book on my home office table for weeks, suddenly asked one day: “What does ‘dispute’ mean?” Even though she never got to open the book, she definitely was impressed by this image and the statement.)

The edited book consists of five main sections. The two-part Introduction (“Te Tūranga Tuatahi: Our Foundation” by both editors and “The State of the Environment” by David Hall) lays down the overtone, central concepts, and barometers of the volume and provides a preview of all the chapters included. The second section, “Theories and Perspectives”, introduces the essential notions in Māori cosmology and thinking that are closely connected to the broad ecological world(s) and seminar works in contemporary English-language academic literature on theorising environmental politics and policy. This section is critical to the volume and its readers, who might well be first-timers of the topics related to Aotearoa and the environment, as it connects the particular environmental issues concerned by the communities in Aotearoa New Zealand with the overarching themes and discussions that transcend localities and are relatable to diverse societies.

The third section, “Institutions and Actors”, further prepares non-specialist readers by introducing not only the main actors, organisations, parties, and movements in Aotearoa environmental politics and policymaking but, more importantly, the relevant socio-political history and macro-economic trends. The Save Lake Manapouri Campaign (1960s-1970s), the birth of the Values Party in 1972, the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, the repeal of the National Development Act 1979, neoliberal economic reforms (1984-1990) are among the defining moments in contemporary history of Aotearoa environmental politics. They also demonstrate the impact of movements and advocacy for the environment and indigenous rights at the international level, neoliberal economic globalisation, and global environmental governance building centred around the United Nations. Some of these important *glocal*

mechanisms linking structural factors at the international levels with environmental-political struggles in local Aotearoa communities are explained explicitly. For example, in the Chapter “Regenerative Economies”, Rod Oram clarifies the impact of neoliberal economics – coming from abroad in the 1980s – on environmental degradation in New Zealand and the challenges of green transition in the coming decades). Others are touched upon or implied. The volume would benefit from adding a designated chapter (or two) that explicates New Zealand’s participation in global environmental governance (not limited to climate change and UNFCCC) and involvement in regional (and international) power politics and, in turn, how such involvement has influenced domestic politics and policymaking related to the environment. Readers would be interested in finding out whether opening up for rapid and voluminous foreign investments from China, Australia, and others in the recent two decades has left any long-lasting environmental impact and whether the rivalry between the U.S. and China has had and will have environmental consequences in Aotearoa (e.g., securitisation of mining and mineral trade, particularly lithium and rare-earth metals). Also, the New Zealand-Australia relationship, probably the most critical pair of bilateral relationships in the context of Oceania regional multilateral governance and environmental cooperation, could have been discussed more systematically.

The empirical core of the volume is its fourth section, “Environmental Issues and Challenges”, where seven chapters go into great detail to unfold the intricacies, uncomfortable memories, and controversies in the fields of climate change, energy, biodiversity and nature conservation, waste, farming and agriculture, mining, and freshwater ownership and management. Each of these fields is compounded with multilayered and multifaceted contentions. Moreover, they are interconnected. The editors and authors have paid particular attention to highlighting the cross-issue linkages and nexus (not just in this section but throughout the book). For example, the links across energy, mining, and climate change. The three cases of nature conservation, farming lands, and ownership and protection of rivers and lakes put the central interrogation of the book - the disruptive impact of the modern and post-industrial socio-economic and political structures on Māori lands and communities – under an analytical microscope and reveal the exact processes and mechanisms of domination and resistance.

The last section, written by the editors, concludes the book with short summaries of chapters and up-to-date reflections on the post-pandemic Aotearoa. Beyond the main texts of the book, the four pedagogical excerpts on “How to make a submission”, “How to write a policy brief”, “How to write a press release”, and “How to organise a protest” are absolute delights for someone who teaches environmental politics and policy to undergraduate students. A glossary of key Māori terms and notions would be helpful and make many parts more accessible to non-local readers and educators. Overall, the volume is a welcoming, engaging, and thoughtful reader’s companion on all the important topics related to the state and future of the environment in Aotearoa New Zealand.