

Guardians of Water: Indigenous Women as Knowledge Holders and Stewards

19 AUGUST 2026

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WEBINAR INFORMATION – HOUSEKEEPING RULES

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WEBINAR INFORMATION – HOUSEKEEPING RULES



- **‘Chat’ box:** please use this for general requests and for interactive activities.
- **‘Q&A’ box:** please use this to send questions to the panelists.
(We will answer these during the discussions)

***Please Note:** Attendees’ microphones are muted. We cannot respond to ‘Raise Hand’.*

AGENDA

- **Introduction to the Webinar and poll**

Dr. Annalisa Contos, Atom Consulting Organiser, Australia

- **Indigenous Women and Water Stewardship**

Balkisou Buba, Vice National Coordinator, REPALEAC Cameroon

- **Cultural Water Knowledge in Practice**

Vanessa Cook, Cultural Heritage Monitor, Ruver Murray Mallee Aboriginal Corporation, Australia

- **Partnerships for Inclusive Water Governance**

Loretta Lovell, Associate Commissioner, Commerce Commission , New Zealand

- **Panel Discussion and Q&A**

Speakers and Moderator

- **Closing Remarks**

Dr. Annalisa Contos, Atom Consulting Organiser, Australia

Cultural water knowledge in practice

WATER IS LIFE. COUNTRY IS EVERYTHING

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SPEAKING FOR COUNTRY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

- Caring for Country
- Protecting biodiversity
- Respecting cultural knowledge
- Supporting future generations
- Ensuring healthy waterways



UNDERSTANDING COUNTRY

Country is more than land, it includes:

- Rivers and wetlands
- Land and ecosystems
- Plants and animals
- People and communities
- Culture and identity
- Ancestors and future generations



WATER CONNECTS EVERYTHING

Rivers are the veins

Water is the lifeblood

Biodiversity is the living system

Communities are the heart

Healthy Country = Healthy People



CULTURAL WATER KNOWLEDGE IN PRACTICE

Water supports:

- Cultural identity
- Ceremony
- Traditional food systems
- Sacred places
- Community wellbeing
- Biodiversity



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN RIVERS LOSE THEIR NATURAL FLOW?

Current pressures

- Intensive water extraction
- River regulation
- Declining biodiversity
- Fish deaths
- Algal blooms
- Climate change impacts

Mass fish deaths feared as Minns government promise to restore Murray-Darling rivers in doubt

Grazier is worried towns will 'run out of water' if flows don't improve, urging state government to take action regardless of federal funds

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📷 A dry river bed in Louth in New South Wales. Stuart Le Lievre, a grazier on land between Louth and Tilpa, says 'don't we deserve fresh water?' Photograph: Mark Evans/Getty Images

Loss of connectivity affects ecosystems, communities and cultural wellbeing

LEARNING FROM THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF STEWARDSHIP

Traditional indigenous fish traps demonstrate:

- Advanced engineering
- Sustainable harvesting
- Ecological understanding
- Long-term resource management

Baiame's Ngunnhu



Traditional knowledge and Western science are stronger together

WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER WATER GOVERNANCE

- **What is needed?**
- Genuine partnerships
- Indigenous leadership
- Cultural water rights
- Transparency in decision-making
- Shared responsibility
- Inclusion of young people

Future leaders matter

Today's youth are tomorrow's Elders



GLOBAL LESSONS

- Water connects all life
- Culture and ecology are inseparable
- Indigenous women hold valuable knowledge
- Traditional knowledge contributes to sustainability
- Future generations must be part of today's decisions



"If we do not stand together now, we will fail the river and future generations."

IWA WEBINAR

Indigenous perspectives in regulation

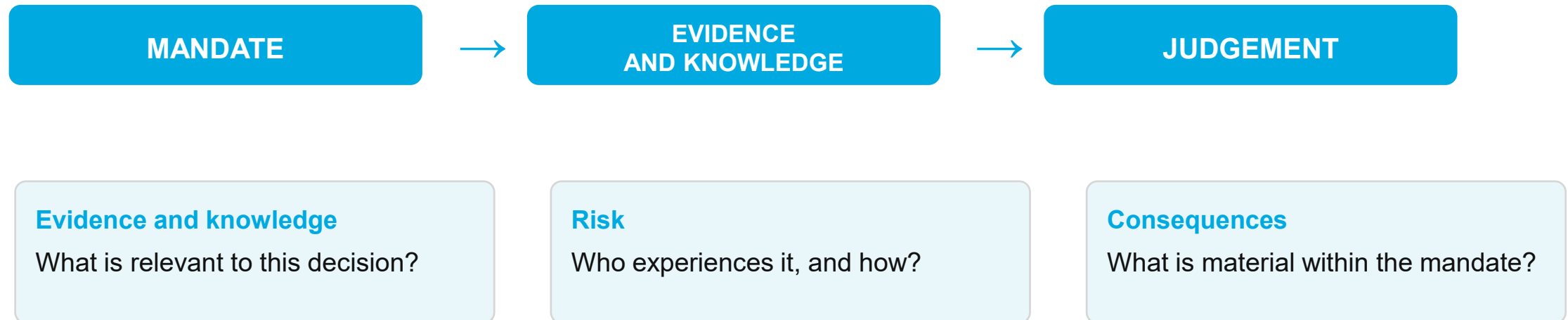
Seeing resilience through a Māori regulatory lens

Loretta Lovell | Aotearoa New Zealand

The regulatory frame

Mandate first. Evidence and knowledge next. Judgement follows.

Regulators make decisions within defined mandates. The evidence and knowledge before them shape how well they understand what is material to that decision.



As regulators, we should ask whether the evidence base captures the perspectives and consequences material to the decision.

How I carry te ao Māori into this mahi

My understanding, shaped by where I come from and the work I do

Whenua

Papatūānuku, home, belonging:

Understanding and respecting the environment affected by the decisions we make.

Whakapapa

Whānau, tūpuna, mokopuna:

Reflecting that the decisions we make now will affect communities now and into the future.

Kaitiakitanga

Guardianship:

Responsibility, care and accountability for the decisions we make.

For wai, these concepts are integral: keeping my decision-making connected to place, people and those who come after us.

One event. Two regulatory lenses.

The community experiences one disruption. Regulators see different statutory tasks.

Common facts
Severe weather → infrastructure stress → drinking-water interruption + wastewater overflows → immediate response complete

Now the question is not the emergency response. It is whether the system can be trusted through the next disruption.

Water quality regulation

Regulator considers

- effects on drinking, waste and stormwater quality, compliance and standards
- post-event assurance
- root-cause correction and contingency planning
- communication and oversight

Examples of iwi Māori knowledge and perspective

- whether water was truly accessible and quality
- how marae, papakāinga and whānau carried the disruption
- local source, place and trust evidence
- whether Treaty settlement obligations apply

Economic regulation

Regulator considers

- investment, performance and risk
- service quality and long-term benefit of consumers
- information disclosure and delivery assurance
- supplier duties, including Treaty settlement obligations

Examples of iwi Māori knowledge and perspective

- existing service baselines
- self-provision costs
- critical community functions
- who carries residual risk over time
- feedback on supplier engagement and Treaty settlement obligations

Same facts. Different mandates. Different pathways for iwi Māori knowledge to affect regulatory judgement.

How Indigenous knowledge can impact decisions

Not by replacing the regulatory test. By changing what the decision-maker understands.

1. Relevance

Brings uses, relationships, service experience and consequences into the evidential frame.

2. Criticality

Shows why a marae, papakāinga, community or apparently small asset may be critical in practice.

3. Options

Reveals options, constraints or consequences that conventional analysis may not identify.

4. Accountability

Affects what regulators require, monitor and report on; how performance and investment are tested; and what action follows if obligations are not met.

The impact is practical: Indigenous knowledge can affect what is measured, what is material, which options are credible, and how the final decision is explained.

What I would leave with water professionals

Be rigorous about the regulatory framework, and equally rigorous about whether the knowledge before us is enough to understand what our decisions mean for the communities and wai affected by them.

Wai • people • place • responsibility over time

Panel Discussion and Q&A

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**Mainstreaming Water Sensitive
Design and Planning:
Tools and Nature-based
Solutions for Resilient Futures**

 the international
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 **27 August 2026**
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 the international
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Co-organiser

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