





# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents both opportunities and challenges for Pacific communities, particularly in the realm of data sovereignty. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in systems that shape everyday life, it is crucial to ensure that Pacific voices, values, and cultural perspectives are at the forefront of these developments. This report explores the intersection of AI and Pacific Data Sovereignty, highlighting the importance of community-driven innovation, ethical governance, and culturally aligned practices.

Through shared presentations and collaborative discussions, Pacific data experts, technologists, and sector, community and cultural leaders have come together to address the gaps in current discourse and advocate for meaningful engagement in the AI space. This report captures the insights, priorities, and recommendations from these events, reinforced by the dearth of literature and references available. It offers a roadmap for protecting Pacific data sovereignty while leveraging AI to empower communities, preserve cultural heritage, and create sustainable opportunities.

Commissioned by the Pacific Data Sovereignty (PDS) committee and Moana Connect, and funded by Te Titoki Mataora (Medtech Research Network based at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute), this report is designed to inform the work of the Pacific Data Sovereignty network and Pacific communities, and to provide guidance for sectors that serve and work with Pacific peoples. This report builds on PDS principles and reflects talanoa/discussions from the 2024 Pacific Data Sovereignty Workshop and the Moana Talks Webinar, offering a foundation for future collaboration and advocacy in the Pacific AI and data space. By focusing on Pacific values and fostering cross-sector collaboration, this report aims to guide future action, ensuring that AI serves as a tool for cultural preservation, equity of participation, and community wellbeing. It is a call to action for Pacific communities to lead the conversation, shape the digital future, and safeguard our rich heritage in the age of AI.



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**We must create data environments that supports and benefits our people.  
Data sovereignty is our cultural imperative**

*Ivan Tava, Chairperson, Pacific Data Sovereignty Committee*

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# Background

Pacific Data Sovereignty is a critical concept that emphasises the rights of Pacific communities to control, manage, and protect their data in ways that align with their cultural values, traditions, and aspirations (Pacific Data Sovereignty Network, 2019). As Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to evolve and integrate into various aspects of society, the implications for Pacific peoples are profound (AI Asia Pacific Institute, 2024). AI systems often rely on vast amounts of data, yet the collection, interpretation, and use of this data frequently occur without the leadership or input of Pacific communities. This raises concerns about exclusion, misrepresentation, and the potential exploitation of cultural and personal information (The Culture and Design Lab, 2023).

In addition to these social and cultural concerns, AI also presents significant environmental challenges. The development and deployment of large AI models require considerable energy, especially during the training and inference stages, which contributes to increased carbon emissions (Watts & Tece, 2024). While AI can support climate action by enhancing energy systems and promoting efficiency, its widespread use may lead to a rebound effect, where these gains are offset by overall growth in energy consumption. This environmental impact adds another layer of complexity to how AI is governed in the Pacific. Addressing these concerns requires a commitment to energy-efficient technologies and ensuring AI is developed in ways that are both environmentally sustainable and culturally respectful.

Despite these risks, AI offers considerable promise for addressing the pressing development challenges facing Pacific peoples. For Pacific Island nations, it can help strengthen disaster response systems, improve communication across isolated communities, support climate adaptation strategies, respond to labour shortages, and contribute to cultural preservation. These applications highlight the value of AI when it is applied ethically and in ways that are relevant to Pacific contexts (AI Asia Pacific Institute, 2024). To realise these benefits, strong governance is required to address potential risks and ensure AI systems are guided by the values and priorities of Pacific communities.

Pacific communities in Aotearoa are migratory, and comprised of diverse ethnicities, languages, and cultural traditions. As diasporic peoples, their identities are shaped by movement across oceans, colonial histories, and transnational connections, and deep genealogical ties to vast networks of islands. Pacific peoples have long histories of navigation, trade, and exchange across Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, with voyaging traditions that predate colonial borders (Salesa, 2023). These patterns of movement, both historical and contemporary, reflect a dynamic relational understanding of place, kinship, and belonging.

While Pacific peoples are not Indigenous to Aotearoa, their presence here is marked by enduring connections and contributions, often shaped by labour migration, educational opportunities, displacement, and intergenerational settlement. As a result, Pacific communities now form a vibrant and integral part of Aotearoa's social fabric, while still maintaining strong links to ancestral homelands and cultural identities.

Advocating for Pacific Data Sovereignty (PDS) in Aotearoa therefore takes place on lands where Pacific peoples are not tangata whenua. However, this advocacy is grounded in the relational model of tuakana-teina, where tangata whenua (as tuakana) provide cultural guidance and Indigenous precedence, and Pacific peoples (as teina) offer solidarity, shared experiences of colonisation, and a deep respect for Indigenous sovereignty. This relationship is not only symbolic; it creates a space of ethical collaboration that enables Pacific communities to pursue PDS in ways that are aligned with Māori aspirations and respectful of the mana whenua.

Through these ties, Pacific communities are not working in isolation but in alliance with tangata whenua, advancing data sovereignty frameworks that reflect both Indigenous rights and Pacific worldviews. The diasporic and relational positioning of Pacific peoples offers a powerful foundation for culturally grounded, community-led approaches to data governance, ensuring that emerging technologies like AI are developed in ways that serve, protect, and uplift Pacific peoples across Aotearoa and the wider region.

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**In the digital world, data is like land. If we do not have control, governance, and ongoing guardianship of our data as Indigenous people, we will be landless in the digital world, too.**

*Peter Lucas Jones, CEO of Te Hiku Media*

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Recognising both the opportunities and challenges, Pacific data experts, researchers, AI practitioners, and Pacific community leaders are committed to working together where feasible, to explore how AI can be used responsibly while upholding Pacific Data Sovereignty. It highlights the importance of ethical governance, cultural authenticity, and community-led innovation in shaping a digital future that serves Pacific peoples and protects what matters most to them.



# AI and Pacific peoples

During the 2024 Pacific Data Sovereignty Workshop (see Appendix 1) and Moana Talks Webinar (see Appendix 2), several critical issues were identified in relation to the intersection of AI and Pacific Data Sovereignty. The benefits of AI were discussed, alongside areas of concern. The following sections outline key themes and summaries from the above engagements with Pacific stakeholders with implications for AI developments and Pacific outcomes. Emerging themes were reinforced by existing reports and calls for action by key stakeholders and sectors both in Aotearoa and abroad.

## Benefits of AI

There is no denying the benefits that AI provides in the speed, efficiency, accessibility and communication of data and data processes. Workshop and webinar participants shared how AI has demonstrated its ability to streamline tasks and processes, reduce administrative workloads and boost productivity for individuals and organisations. This has implications for future planning in all areas of Pacific peoples wellbeing, education and development, career prospects and preservation and expression of culture and identity. As a training and learning tool, AI can simplify complex ideas, making it easier for users to acquire new skills and knowledge. Additionally, AI improves access to information, enabling faster and more effective decision-making across various sectors, including education, healthcare, and governance.

**AI has been around us for a long time, and used for many purposes. Generative AI is evolving quickly going from ‘prediction’ to ‘creation’.**

*Amy Dove, Forensic Partner, Deloitte*

## AI potential for Pacific peoples

Culturally, AI has the potential to play a vital role in preserving and revitalising Pacific heritage. Opportunities shared by participants include supports for Pacific languages through tools such as chatbots and apps, and the creation of better user experiences tailored to Pacific values. Indigenous approaches and case studies provide a blueprint for how data sovereignty can be maintained in the world of AI. The key is to integrate cultural authenticity into its design, but to also ensure ownership of data so that AI developments contribute to outcomes aligned with the needs and aspirations of Pacific communities. AI also has the ability to foster social good by addressing

community challenges, such as improving health services and breaking down barriers to education. The caveat is that these developments must be pursued with Pacific peoples’ participation, collective values and sovereignty.

Economically, AI can open up opportunities for Pacific peoples to participate in emerging industries and to create high-value jobs that align with their purposes and goals. By investing in AI education and innovation, Pacific peoples can harness its potential to strengthen their cultural identity while contributing to global advancements in technology.

**It’s about allowing people to speak in their mother tongue. Creating a more comfortable and engaging environment.**

*Luke Fitzgerald, AI Developer, FranklyAI*

## Exclusion and misuse of Pacific Perspectives in AI Development

Participants often referred to Pacific communities being excluded from decision-making processes in AI development, leading to systems that fail to reflect their cultural values and worldviews. This exclusion risks perpetuating patterns of misrepresentation and systemic inequities that can have negative impacts on Pacific peoples, particularly in areas such as health, education and employment. AI systems often create algorithmic biases that reflect dominant cultural values and biases embedded in datasets, which can result in discriminatory outcomes for Pacific peoples – as demonstrated in Rotorua, where a Māori woman was wrongly identified by facial recognition technology as a shoplifter (Paewae, 2024). Furthermore, the misuse of traditional knowledge and indigenous data by corporations was highlighted as a significant risk. Entering cultural data into open source systems can lead to loss of authenticity or exploitation. Participants stressed the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage and ensuring that sacred knowledge remains undigitised where appropriate.

**Māori & Pasifika are at a crossroads with AI – we maintain the status quo or decolonise and empower ... There are no rules against cultural appropriation/ misappropriation. It is not illegal, but it is immoral.**

*Dr Karaitiana Taiuru, Founder, Te Kete AI*

However, AI experts spoke of the challenge in progressing developments that may also be of benefit for Pacific peoples yet risks the giving away of ancestral data. Making these decisions can be daunting for Pacific peoples in tech, but without immediate solutions, the option is sometimes to proceed with existing data systems until a data sovereignty-aligned option is established.

Concerns were also raised about the lack of trust in AI systems, exacerbated by privacy breaches and inaccurate use or misuse of personal and cultural data. Participants emphasised the need for ethical governance to protect Pacific data from exploitation.

**Digital Divide and Accessibility**

Many Pacific communities face barriers to accessing digital technologies, including limited infrastructure, appropriate digital skills training, and access to digital tools. Digital exclusion has been linked to social isolation, loneliness, and poor mental wellbeing (Chopik, 2016). Although COVID-19 saw Pacific people transition online for essential services, work, education, and healthcare, Pacific communities continue to face persistent barriers (Matenga-Ikihele, 2023).

AI experts spoke of the exponential worsening of this divide with the growth of AI. Without due attention, Pacific peoples will be heavily impacted by shifts in AI across all systems. Career pathways will shift and the digitising of roles and tasks may negatively impact on Pacific peoples employment opportunities. Being equipped with the right digital skills, support and access to digital tools is necessary for individual to interact in a digitally connected world (Matenga-Ikihele et al., 2023).

**This is an opportunity to uplift our communities – If we are not ready and comfortable with that, we will be left behind**

*Nu’uali’i Eteroa Lafaele, Co-founder & Director, Fibre Fale*

Bridging this divide is now an urgent call by digital and AI experts, to ensure equitable participation in the digital age for Pacific peoples. While AI offers potential for economic growth, there is a risk of Pacific communities being left behind without targeted investment in skills development, training, and leadership in the tech space.

Participants expressed the need for solutions that acknowledge root causes rather than adopting a single focus on distributing devices and tools. As Samoan scholar Lopesi (2018) highlights “To understand Moana peoples in the twenty-first century, we have to do a better job of understanding the significance and power of the online environment and understanding ourselves moving alongside technological developments” (p. 103).

**The risk of doing nothing has a ripple effect to our current and future generations – there will be missed opportunities and job losses**

*Nu’uali’i Eteroa Lafaele, Co-founder & Director, Fibre Fale*

**Lack of Policy and Regulation**

Data experts referred to the inability of AI policies to keep up with the rapid movement and evolution of the AI landscape. The few AI policies that do exist lack Pacific alignment and fail to address the unique needs of indigenous communities. Participants called for Pacific visibility within existing frameworks and Pacific-led policies grounded in cultural values and self-determination that ensure a range of positive wellbeing, social and economic outcomes for Pacific peoples.

Policies, much like Māori principles and approaches, would account for the impacts of the environment, and the connection of people to land, sea and sky, especially as the rapid growth of AI technologies, including data centres, poses environmental challenges, such as increased electricity usage and carbon footprints. Pacific communities emphasised the need for climate-aware AI solutions particularly in light of the impact of climate change on the wider Pacific region.

**Costs aren’t just monetary but consider other costs such as environmental**

*Amy Dove, Forensic Partner, Deloitte*

## Summary

The issues raised at the workshop and webinar underscore the urgent need to prioritise Pacific Data Sovereignty in the age of AI. At its core, Pacific Data Sovereignty is about ensuring that Pacific communities retain control over their data, cultural heritage, and intellectual property. The discussions highlighted the importance of ethical governance, community-driven innovation, and culturally aligned practices to address the risks and challenges posed by AI.

By centering Pacific voices and values, AI can be harnessed as a tool for empowerment rather than exploitation. This requires strong leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and investment in education and infrastructure to bridge the digital divide. Protecting Pacific Data Sovereignty is not only about safeguarding cultural identity but also about creating pathways for Pacific peoples to lead in AI development, policy, and innovation. Through collective action, Pacific communities can shape a digital future that reflects their values, preserves their heritage, and uplifts their wellbeing.



## Priorities for Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa

The engagement process with key stakeholders identified several key priorities for advancing Pacific Data Sovereignty in the context of AI. Three key priority areas for Pacific peoples are leadership and participation in AI systems, ethical governance and protection and increasing education and employment opportunities.

### Pacific Leadership, Participation & Ownership

The call for action is clear. Pacific communities must be equipped to participate meaningfully and safely in AI systems. Just as the application of AI in health care requires strong clinical reasoning to ensure that algorithmic outputs are understood correctly and used safely in real-world settings (Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, 2023), cultural reasoning for Pacific communities is equally important. More Pacific peoples are therefore needed to lead AI developments, input and ownership, to ensure that more systems align with Pacific values, traditions, and aspirations. This includes ownership through entrepreneurial and community partnership approaches to cultural and personal data to prevent external exploitation and ensure reciprocal benefit for Pacific peoples. Finding ways to make AI accessible while safeguarding Pacific heritage is a tricky balance but one that must be at the forefront of all AI governance frameworks and developments. The use of AI must be both trusted and trustworthy for Pacific communities.

The pursuit of retention and ownership of data opens up community and commercial opportunities such as the ownership of databases and servers. Collaborating with communities and organisations with aligned values and interests can help to leverage the establishment of new opportunities. This process may also lead to the repatriation of data to ensure its rightful and ethical use.

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**You too have responsibility to make this change: no-one will save us, we need to save ourselves**

*Nu'uali'i Eteroa Lafaele, Co-founder & Director, Fibre Fale*

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Improving access and participation for all members of the Pacific community will require a different approach with children and young people requiring a mandate across the education system, while older adults have opportunities for group-based, intergenerational learning approaches. AI should be used to support the preservation and revitalisation of Pacific languages, traditions, and knowledge. This includes integrating indigenous languages into AI tools and ensuring cultural authenticity in digital solutions.

**What connects us? It's not just the ocean, it's our culture, our traditions, our language. Language is key to culture. Culture is the key to understanding.**  
*Peter-Lucas Jones, Founder & CEO, Te Hiku Media*

**Ethical frameworks for human and environmental wellbeing**

Human and environmental wellbeing must be at the heart of all advancements. For Pacific peoples, AI priorities must consider precautions against causing harm or inequity. Establishing clear policies and ethical frameworks is essential to safeguard Pacific peoples knowledge, intellectual property, and data sovereignty. This includes creating culturally informed guidelines and governance structures, with Pacific input and applications in existing and new AI/data equity and ethics frameworks. For this to proceed, communities will need to decide and inform which data they want sovereignty over and which data they are willing to share. Trust will be central to these decisions, requiring transparent processes, meaningful engagement, and assurances that community voices will guide both data governance and use. There is an urgent need to bring together experts in technology and ethics to collaborate and make decisions on key policies to ensure they are both enabling and protective, and that they uphold the trust of Pacific communities throughout the lifecycle of data and AI systems.

Emerging frameworks and discourse related to data and/or AI ethics provide varying levels of guidance such as Aotearoa’s AI Governance Framework, and the Data Equity framework released by the World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, 2024). Aotearoa New Zealand’s new Public Health Service AI Framework sets out clear expectations for AI transparency and accountability. The AI Governance framework provides a range of guidelines and toolkits to consider the risks and impact of AI use, including the impacts of AI for Māori.

**AI governance is a system of rules, practices, processes, and technological tools that are employed to ensure an organisation’s use of AI technologies aligns with the organisation’s strategies, objectives, and values; fulfils legal requirements; and meets principles of ethical AI followed by the organisation.**  
*AI Forum New Zealand*

Similarly, the Word Economic Forum (2024) framework provides guidelines for the review of data use within organisations and communities, drawing on three categories – data, purpose and people – and 10 characteristics. The framework also acknowledges the impact on indigenous communities around the world:

**Essentially, this framework should be regarded as a “framework for inquiry”, i.e. a guide to help spur conversations and evaluation inside organisations and communities as they consider using data, whether in AI-enabled systems or elsewhere**  
*Advancing data equity, World Economic Forum, 2024, pg 7*

Addressing the environmental impacts of AI, such as energy consumption and carbon footprints, is crucial. Pacific communities must lead in advocating for climate justice in the AI space. The Pacific context of climate change impacting real-time. Pacific leadership in the area of AI policy development is an essential priority.

**Education and Capacity Building to build Economic Opportunities and Sustainability**

Bridging the Pacific digital divide and now the AI divide requires targeted investment in education, AI upskilling, and digital literacy, particularly for youth. Early education on digital rights and cultural literacy is critical. This includes increasing AI understanding and participation among Pacific peoples both within and outside the tech industries.

In May 2025, the World Economic Forum (2025) introduced a new AI Literacy Framework (AILit), defining AI literacy as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to engage with AI responsibly and effectively. The framework is structured around four key domains: Engaging with AI, Creating with AI, Managing AI's Actions, and Designing

AI Solutions. The Forum emphasises that education systems must move beyond digital literacy and treat AI literacy as a core priority. The AILit Framework offers a roadmap to achieve this, aiming to equip learners with the tools, mindsets, and confidence needed to navigate and succeed in an AI-driven world (World Economic Forum, 2025).

**There is a better future for AI ... it's about creating high value jobs for our families and communities ... we must harness economic activity now**  
*Peter-Lucas Jones, Founder & CEO, Te Hiku Media*

For many, there is a fear that AI will replace people. However experts state that AI will more likely transform how work is done, highlighting the need for Pacific peoples to embrace AI tools. While there are risks that must be managed, it is important to dispel myths about AI that can hinder Pacific peoples participation and development.

AI offers potential for economic growth, but Pacific communities must be equipped to seize these opportunities through workforce development, ethical investment, and sustainable practices. Protecting Pacific economies and ensuring equitable access to AI benefits are key priorities.

**If we are going to actually be financial sustainable and contribute to the economy we need to consider upskilling and training in AI.**  
*Dr Karaitiana Taiuru, Founder, Te Kete AI*

# Summary

These priorities directly align with the principles of Pacific Data Sovereignty, which emphasise the rights of Pacific peoples to control and manage their data in ways that reflect their cultural values and self-determination. By focusing on community leadership, ethical governance, and cultural preservation, Pacific Data Sovereignty ensures that AI development serves the interests of Pacific communities rather than external entities.

Education, collaboration, and economic investment are essential for empowering Pacific peoples to actively participate in shaping AI technologies and policies. Additionally, addressing environmental concerns and advocating for climate-aware solutions reflect the holistic approach of Pacific Data Sovereignty, which considers the wellbeing of both current and future generations.

Ultimately, these priorities aim to create a digital future where Pacific communities are not only protected but also empowered to lead, innovate, and thrive in the AI space while preserving their rich cultural heritage and identity.



# Recommendations & Guidelines

Several actionable recommendations to advance Pacific Data Sovereignty and ensure AI development aligns with Pacific values emerged throughout the engagement with stakeholders. These recommendations aim to protect Pacific Data Sovereignty while empowering communities to lead in the AI space, ensuring a future that uplifts Pacific cultural identity, heritage, and wellbeing.

## Empower Pacific Leadership in AI Development

Support Pacific communities to lead AI initiatives, ensuring their voices and values are central to decision-making processes. Include Pacific peoples in the governance, advisory and establishment phases of AI and AI-related projects across research, policy and commercial interests. Avoid token engagement by recognising and remunerating Pacific expertise, leadership, and time in ways that affirm mana and self-determination.

## Form Meaningful partnerships to co-create AI solutions

Build partnerships between tech and community stakeholders including digital/technology experts, ethicists, researchers, and community leaders to co-create culturally responsive AI solutions. Collaboration must reflect Pacific principles of reciprocity, mutual benefit, and long-term commitment. Partnerships should not only seek AI outputs but also ensure integrity and positive outcomes that improves wellbeing for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa.

## Develop Pacific-Led Policies and Ethical Frameworks

Create AI policies grounded in Pacific values, led by Pacific thinkers, and informed by existing frameworks. Policies must ensure positive outcomes for all people including Pacific peoples. Regularly review and update existing guidelines to ensure ongoing relevance and accountability back to Pacific peoples.

## Embed Cultural Authenticity in AI Design and Protect Indigenous Knowledge and Data

Ensure AI systems reflect Pacific worldviews and values by integrating cultural authenticity and community-driven approaches into their design and implementation. Safeguard cultural heritage and intellectual property by ensuring ethical governance of data. Avoid digitising sacred knowledge where appropriate and prioritise community ownership of data systems.

## Invest in Education and Capacity Building

Embed AI education in schools, workplaces, and community programs, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Increase investment in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) education that includes AI across the school curriculum. Focus on culturally grounded learning that affirms Pacific knowledge systems and ways of learning. Ensure Pacific communities in rural, underserved, and urban areas have the tools and support to navigate and shape the AI landscape.

## Invest in community-led innovations and promote economic development

Invest in community-led innovations and start-up ideas, including pedagogical development. Fund workforce development, and development of ethical AI practices that protect Pacific economies and create high-value jobs. Be proactive in preparing for shifts in the future workforce. Advocate for climate-aware AI solutions to address environmental impacts.

## Establish Global Indigenous AI Council

Establishing governance structures to guide AI development and policy, which would have significant impacts not just for Pacific peoples, but for indigenous communities worldwide. PDS as a member of the Global Indigenous Data Alliance, has the potential to be involved in global collaboration on AI and data sovereignty principles and policies. Include Pacific voices in international AI and digital policy discussions to ensure their perspectives are not sidelined.

## Address the digital and artificial intelligence divide

Address barriers to technology access by investing in infrastructure, resources, and culturally informed programmes. Ensure equitable access to AI opportunities for all Pacific communities, which provides holistic support. Ensure that every Pacific person in Aotearoa, regardless of location or income, can engage with and benefit from the digital world and AI innovation.

## Community ownership of data systems

Addressing the environmental impacts of AI, such as energy consumption, water usage, and carbon footprints, is crucial. Pacific communities must lead advocacy for climate justice in the AI space, especially given the Pacific's real-time experience of climate change. Embedding Pacific leadership in AI policy development is not only timely, but an essential priority.



# Conclusion

The journey toward Pacific Data Sovereignty in the age of AI is not just about technology. It is about protecting the heart of who we are as Pacific peoples. It is about ensuring our languages, traditions, and values are not only preserved but empowered to thrive in a digital future.

To achieve this, Pacific communities must lead with courage, wisdom, and unity. We must embrace innovation while staying deeply grounded in our cultural identity. This means advocating for ethical governance, prioritising community-led design, and investing in the education and empowerment of our youth.

By taking ownership of our data and driving AI development, we can shape digital tools that reflect our values, protect our knowledge systems, and open new opportunities for our people. Our heritage does not belong on the margins of technological change. It must be at the centre.

To our allies, we ask for true partnership. Stand with us as equals. Amplify Pacific voices. Respect our values. Invest in solutions that are shaped by our aspirations. Work with us in ways that honour reciprocity and shared benefit. Commit to ethical practices that protect our cultural and intellectual property, and ensure that AI serves people, not profit.

Together, we can build a digital world that uplifts Pacific peoples, strengthens our communities, and ensures that our heritage continues to inspire generations to come. Let us move forward with boldness, guided by the wisdom of our ancestors and the promise of a more inclusive, just, and culturally grounded future.

## *The Pacific Data Sovereignty Committee and Moana Connect*

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**What's important is that we are in control of the technology that we build. We are in control of the infrastructure that runs it. We determine how the technology should be used, and who should use it. That is the key part of this digital sovereignty.**

*Keoni Mahelona. Chief Technology Officer at Te Hiku Media.*

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# APPENDIX 1: The 2024 Pacific Data Sovereignty Workshop October 2024

6 Speakers

38 Attendees

44 Total registrations

1 Table Talanoa  
Workshop Session

‘AI – ‘to eat’

*We will be nourished by new knowledge to help our people*





# Pacific Data Sovereignty Workshop

## Purpose

The purpose of this workshop was to bring together Pacific data experts and AI development professionals to explore the intersection of artificial intelligence and Pacific Data Sovereignty.

## Objectives of Workshop

- To highlight and address the noticeable gap in current discourse on AI and Pacific Data Sovereignty.
- To create space for talanoa between Pacific data experts and AI specialists on the implications of AI for Pacific peoples.
- To generate shared insights that can guide future action and advocacy in the Pacific data and AI space.
- To strengthen connections across sectors committed to protecting and progressing Pacific digital futures.

## Target Audience

The workshop was targeted at individuals and organisations working at the intersection of Pacific data, AI, digital innovation, and community wellbeing. Participants included representatives from government agencies, health institutions, universities, AI forums, consulting firms, social enterprises, and tech platforms.

This diverse group brought together expertise in data governance, AI development, healthcare, education, Indigenous innovation, and Pacific-led research to inform meaningful dialogue and future collaboration.

## Background

Pacific peoples continue to be impacted by the ways in which data are collected, interpreted and used, often without their leadership or input. As artificial intelligence becomes more embedded in systems that shape everyday life, there is growing concern about how these technologies will interact with Pacific data. The lack of Pacific perspectives in AI development risks repeating patterns of exclusion and misrepresentation. Opening speakers acknowledged this gap and emphasised the importance of involving Pacific data experts early in the conversation. They reinforced that protecting Pacific Data Sovereignty in the context of AI requires strong leadership, cultural understanding and cross-sector collaboration.

## Speakers

**Nu’uali’i Eteroa Lafaele**  
**Co-founder & Director**  
**Fibre Fale**

Nu’uali’i Eteroa Lafaele is a software engineer and award-winning tech leader from Cannons Creek, Porirua, with ancestral ties to Fogapoa, Leulumoega Tuai and Tafag-amanu Lefaga in Samoa. She is the co-founder of Fibre Fale, a collective focused on creating pathways for Pacific peoples in tech. Her work champions digital equity and has earned national and international recognition, including being named in 2023 Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia List.

**Dr. Karaitiana Taiuru**  
**Founder**  
**Te Kete AI**

Dr Karaitiana Taiuru is a Māori technology ethicist and expert in Māori rights in AI, data sovereignty and emerging technologies. He brings deep knowledge of IP, mātauranga, tikanga Māori and te Tiriti, with a strong focus on digital rights and ethical governance for Māori in the tech space.

### *Key Themes / Ideas from morning session*

- Māori and Pacific need to work together. Collaboration is crucial for strengthening the impact of initiatives, particularly around data sovereignty and cultural considerations in AI.
- Communities should decide which data they want sovereignty over and which data they are willing to share. This ensures that people maintain control over their cultural and personal information.
- It's important to bring technologists, ethicists, and academics together as soon as possible. The sooner these groups collaborate, the better the outcomes will be for Māori and Pacific communities in AI.
- A lot of the language and concepts around AI might be challenging for our communities, particularly elders. We need to find ways to make AI more accessible so people can understand its potential and benefits.
- For Māori and Pacific communities to be financially sustainable and contribute to the economy, investing in AI upskilling and training is essential. This will ensure the communities aren't left behind in the fast-moving tech landscape.

### **Current AI Innovations and Initiatives**

#### *Speakers*

**Peter-Lucas Jones**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Te Hiku Media**

Peter-Lucas Jones (Te Aupōuri, Ngāti Kahu, Te Rārawa, Ngāi Takoto) is CEO of Te Hiku Media and a leading figure in the development of AI for te reo Māori. A kaitiaki of iwi radio data, he advocates for Māori data sovereignty while advancing language revitalisation through technology. He was recently recognised in the TIME100 AI list for his work in this space.

**Matt Ensor**  
**Director**  
**Kia ORA AI**

Matt Ensor is the founder of FranklyAI, an Aotearoa-based startup focused on creating culturally responsive AI solutions. He led projects developing Samoan and Tongan language chatbots to improve access to online services, and now continues this work through Kia ORA AI, ensuring no voice is left behind.

**Luke FitzPatrick**  
**Artificial Intelligence Developer**  
**Frankly AI**

Luke FitzPatrick, of Samoan descent (Afega, Manunu, Tiavea, Sagone), is an AI Developer at FranklyAI. He works on creating Samoan and Tongan language chatbots designed to respond with cultural understanding and respect, helping to make AI tools more accessible and appropriate for Pacific communities.

### *Key Themes / Ideas from afternoon session*

- Digital equity and accessibility must be addressed to remove barriers in technology, and language, and ensure inclusive experiences for all.
- Integrating indigenous languages in AI is essential, using tools such as chatbots and apps to support Pacific communities in Māori, Samoan, Tongan, and other languages.
- AI holds immense potential to empower communities, especially in areas such as health, and it's crucial to get involved with AI now to influence its future benefits.
- Communities must retain control over their cultural and personal data, ensuring data sovereignty and protection against external control.
- Māori and Pacific communities should seize the economic opportunities AI offers, investing in skills and tech training to create high-value jobs and avoid being left behind.
- Collaboration with organisations like Te Hiku Media is key, leveraging their cultural intelligence and expertise to work effectively with indigenous communities in AI and tech.
- Data repatriation is vital, ensuring indigenous data are returned to and controlled by their rightful owners for the benefit of both current and future generations.

**Amy Dove**  
**Forensic Partner - Deloitte**

Amy Dove is a forensic partner at Deloitte, specialising in data management and litigation technology. Of Samoan (Safune, Falefa) and English (Yorkshire) descent, she grew up in Manurewa and returned to Aotearoa after working in the US. Amy leads national projects on ethical AI use and is Deloitte NZ's first Pacific woman partner, advocating for Pacific leadership in tech.



#### *Key Themes/Ideas on final session*

- AI is rapidly evolving, transitioning from prediction to creation, and organisations are recognising its transformative potential.
- AI won't replace people but will transform how work is done, highlighting the need to embrace AI tools.
- There are myths around AI, but it's essential to understand its truths and the risks it carries, such as bias in data.
- AI's rapid development means technology may quickly become obsolete, with costs extending beyond money to include environmental factors.
- AI policy struggles to keep up with technological advancements, with New Zealand lagging behind in policy development.
- Striking a balance between risk and innovation is crucial for AI's successful implementation.
- Key principles for trustworthy AI include safety and security, fairness, impartiality, and diversity in datasets, with an emphasis on maintaining the human touch, empowering efficiency, and truth testing.
- Protecting indigenous data is vital to prevent AI from infringing on cultural and intellectual property, with clear governance to safeguard heritage and traditional knowledge.





# Table Talanoa

## Purpose

The purpose of this table talanoa was to create a safe and inclusive space for meaningful conversation around the opportunities and challenges of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Pacific Data Sovereignty (PDS). It was a time to come together and talanoa, grounded in our values of respect, reciprocity, and collective wisdom, to help shape shared guidance and future direction.

## Guided by key questions, participants explored:

- The potential benefits of AI for Pacific communities
- Risks and concerns we should be mindful of
- Ideas and suggestions for PDS-aligned guidelines and policies to help mitigate those risks
- Additional thoughts, concerns, or opportunities that may not have yet been considered
- The role the private sector should play in promoting best practice for Pacific data sovereignty.

This table summarises key themes from the table talanoa on Pacific perspectives of AI, including its benefits, risks, guidelines for mitigating those risks, and opportunities for the private sector. The insights reflect collective community voices, grounded in cultural values and future-focused thinking.

# Benefits

Boosts efficiency in tasks and processes
Acts as a training tool for learning new skills
Works as a reference tool for quick access to information
Supports the growth of new economies and job opportunities
Helps build individual and organisational capabilities
Improves communication and knowledge sharing
Makes information more accessible
Reduces admin workload
Can help modernise cultural practices like tikanga, where appropriate
Supports the preservation and revitalisation of endangered languages
Creates better interfaces and experiences for service users
Opens up educational opportunities in AI and digital tech
Enables AI to be used for social good (AI for GOOD)
Helps break down complex ideas into simpler terms
Leads to better outcomes when used with purpose and cultural awareness

# Risks or concerns

Privacy breaches and misuse of personal data
Lack of trust in AI systems and their decision-making
Reduced meaningful relationships and human connection
Limited understanding of the risks and implications of AI
Data sovereignty concerns, especially for Māori and Pacific peoples
Cultural appropriation and misuse of indigenous knowledge
AI often reflects dominant cultural values, not indigenous worldviews
Lack of Māori and Pacific-led policy and regulation in AI
Risk of harm to rangatahi without proper safeguards
Over-reliance on technology reducing critical thinking and resilience
Misuse of AI in harmful or unethical ways
Systemic racism in datasets and algorithmic bias
Inadequate balance between open data and data protection
Over-engineered solutions that ignore root causes (e.g., giving devices without providing community support)
Sustainability concerns — not all AI solutions fit long-term community needs
Doubts about whether new jobs will truly replace those displaced by AI
Risk of weakening human connection, a key part of wellbeing

Lack of local AI expertise and culturally informed consultancy
Low transparency and insufficient governance of AI systems
Need for education that supports both tech literacy and cultural thinking
People may not know or understand their digital rights
If Pacific peoples don't lead, we risk being mined for our information
Pacific must lead climate justice in the AI space
Data centres are growing rapidly and will heavily impact electricity usage
Environmental impacts of AI highlight the need for climate-aware solutions
Inequities in capability and capacity – we need to create space for Pacific voices
Concerns around where data is stored and who controls that place
Intellectual property (IP) infringement and lack of protection for indigenous knowledge
No clear benchmarks for quality or precision in many AI tools
AI policies often exclude the Global South and the Asia-Pacific region
Cross-border regulations, storage laws, and jurisdictional gaps remain unclear
Uncertainty around who defines “best practice” for each sector
Widening digital divide and unequal access to AI opportunities
Risk of shifting burdens onto already underserved communities

# Guidelines to mitigate risks

- Ensure partnerships are aligned with Pacific values, missions, and long-term goals
- Recognise the value of Pacific expertise – avoid doing work for free, and affirm our worth
- Embed humility in leadership and decision-making without compromising cultural authenticity
- Create open spaces to discuss cultural barriers (e.g. is the va sometimes a challenge?) in context
- Educate young learners early on about digital and cultural literacy
- Invest in building trust and meaningful relationships within our own communities
- Strengthen cultural competency within Pacific cultures, not just externally
- Focus on long-term relationships, not transactional engagement
- Regularly update and review existing AI and digital guidelines
- Develop policy grounded in Pacific values, led by Pacific thinkers
- Build on existing Pacific Data Sovereignty (PDS) principles
- Engage elders, leaders, and knowledge holders in AI-related decision-making
- Prioritise partnership and collaboration over competition

- Learn from the approaches and successes of Māori leadership in tech and policy
- Empower Pacific communities to lead AI development and governance
- Make space for youth development and innovation
- Maintain ethical oversight in AI design and implementation
- Be transparent about data inputs and outputs, and who is involved
- Include lists of authors and expertise when using or co-developing with AI tools
- Leverage existing frameworks like Te Tiriti o Waitangi in digital governance
- Align with AI Forum NZ guidelines where appropriate, adapting for Pacific contexts
- Create and protect opportunities for Pacific communities through AI
- Commit to regular review and reflection to ensure ongoing relevance and accountability





# Thoughts and opportunities for Private Sector Collaboration & Partnerships

- Form meaningful partnerships that align with Pacific cultural values
- Foster collaboration based on reciprocity and shared benefits
- Engage elders, youth, and community leaders in intergenerational learning and decision-making
- Co-develop AI and digital solutions through community-driven networks (e.g. across Sāmoa, Hawai'i, Aotearoa)
- Support and invest in pathways that grow Pacific leadership and workforce in tech and innovation

## Investment & Capacity Building

- Invest in community-led innovation, including pedagogical development
- Support Pacific-owned and governed data systems
- Recognise data as the new land – uphold Indigenous data sovereignty
- Protect and future-proof Pacific economies through ethical, sustainable investment
- Ensure Pacific peoples are included in global policy and investment discussions, not sidelined
- Build capacity by enabling equitable access to education, health, and digital skills

# Community-Driven Innovation

- Create mini systems and distributed networks driven by communities themselves
- Develop AI using the lens of lived Pacific realities, values, and energy
- Use AI as a tool to support equity in rural education, healthcare, income, and opportunity
- Design solutions that respond directly to community needs and aspirations

## Accountability & Ethics

- Promote ethical AI practices through regular review and annual certification
- Establish an Indigenous Council of Authority or similar governance body to guide sector decisions
- Encourage models such as 50/50 shareholding and equity-centred business practices
- Ensure accountability across all stages of development, from concept to impact
- Revisit and adapt value systems to remain relevant to current Pacific needs

## Global Influence & Representation

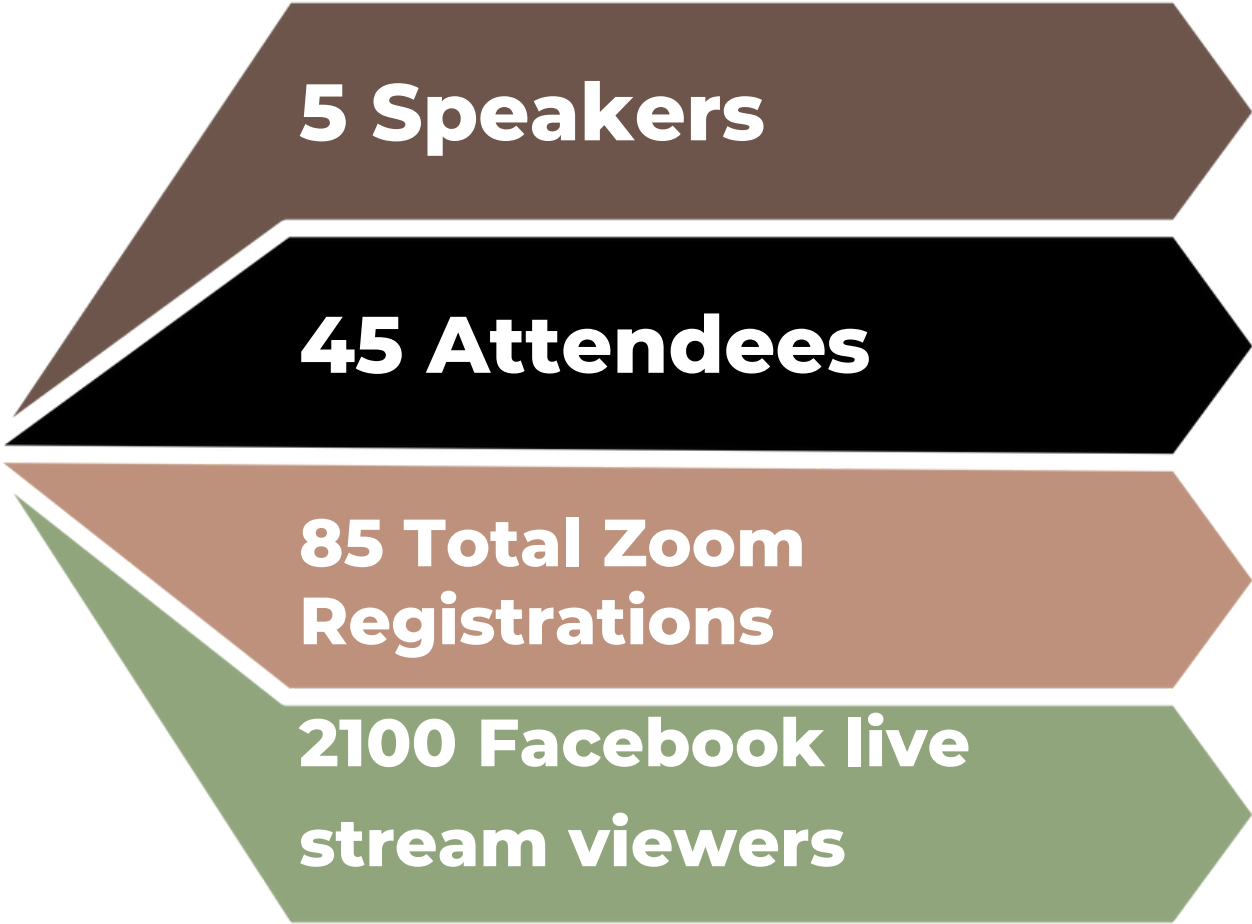
- Include Pacific voices in international digital and AI discussions, where they're currently often excluded
- Move from token engagement to genuine leadership and influence
- Learn from Māori-led governance models in the tech space and apply these in Pacific contexts
- Encourage private sector stakeholders to pay serious attention to Pacific concerns, realities, and strengths

Education & Youth Empowerment

- Embed AI education in schools and workplaces, especially in rural and remote areas
- Support culturally grounded learning for Pacific youth in the digital space
- Promote youth development through programmes that blend cultural values and tech skills
- Develop learning pathways that are grounded in Pacific worldviews and philosophies



Appendix 2: Moana Talks  
Webinar – Pacific data  
sovereignty & AI



[Click to Watch Full Webinar](#)

# Moana Talks Webinar – Pacific Data Sovereignty & AI

Following our workshop, we hosted a Moana Talks Webinar on Pacific Data Sovereignty (PDS) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), featuring several presenters. The webinar, held on 13 November 2024, was facilitated by Ivan Tava, Chairperson of the Pacific Data Sovereignty Network, and brought together thought leaders, technologists, and cultural guardians to discuss the intersections of artificial intelligence (AI), traditional knowledge, and Pacific cultural practices.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of the webinar was to explore how Pacific communities can engage with AI in a way that respects and enhances their cultural values. It aimed to highlight the importance of community-driven AI, the role of traditional knowledge in shaping data practices, and how to empower Pacific communities through technology.

**Target Audience:**

The webinar was open to anyone interested in AI, particularly those from Pacific communities, technologists, educators, cultural experts, and communities. It was designed for anyone who wanted to understand how AI could be shaped by Pacific values and used responsibly to benefit the community.

**Key Insights:**

Community-first AI: AI systems must align with Pacific values, prioritising local control and cultural preservation.

Traditional Knowledge as Data: Language and customs as data require ethical management and protection against exploitation.

Empowering Communities: Open-source tools can help Pacific technologists develop culturally tailored AI solutions.

Bridging the Digital Divide: Education and engagement are key to equipping Pacific communities to harness AI responsibly.

With the Pacific AI Summit 2025 on the horizon, the conversation continues. By focusing on Pacific voices and values, we aim to build a digital future that strengthens our cultural identity.

**Speakers**

**Nu’uali’i Eteroa Lafaele**  
**Co-founder & Director**  
**Fibre Fale**

Nu’uali’i Eteroa Lafaele is a software engineer and award-winning tech leader from Cannons Creek, Porirua, with ancestral ties to Fogapoa, Leulumoega Tuai and Tafagamanu Lefaga in Samoa. She is the co-founder of Fibre Fale, a collective focused on creating pathways for Pacific peoples in tech. Her work champions digital equity and has earned national and international recognition, including being named in 2023 in the Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia List.

**Dr. Karaitiana Taiuru Founder Te Kete AI**

Dr Karaitiana Taiuru is a Māori technology ethicist and expert in Māori rights in AI, data sovereignty and emerging technologies. He brings deep knowledge of IP, mātauranga, tikanga Māori and te Tiriti, with a strong focus on digital rights and ethical governance for Māori in the tech space.

**Peter-Lucas Jones**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Te Hiku Media**

Peter-Lucas Jones (Te Aupōuri, Ngāti Kahu, Te Rārawa, Ngāi Takoto) is CEO of Te Hiku Media and a leading figure in the development of AI for te reo Māori. A kaitiaki of iwi radio data, he advocates for Māori data sovereignty while advancing language revitalisation through technology. He was recently recognised in the TIME100 AI list for his work in this space.

**Malaetogia Dr Jacinta Fa’alili Fidow**  
**General Manager Research**  
**Moana Connect**

Malaetogia Dr Jacinta Fa’alili Fidow (Samoa: Levi Saleimoa, Faleula, Saleaula) is a leader in health research and Pacific wellbeing. As the founding Managing Director of Moana Connect and General Manager of Research, she advocates for Pacific worldviews and self-determination in research, evaluation, and advocacy. Jacinta’s recent PhD, ‘Vā o Tamaiti’, explores Pacific child resilience pathways. She has held key roles at the Health Research Council of NZ, Ministry of Health



**Keoni Mahelona**  
Chief Technology Officer  
Te Hiku Media

Keoni Mahelona (Kanakanaka 'ōiwi) is the Chief Technology Officer of Te Hiku Media. A key advocate for Indigenous data sovereignty, he champions projects that advance digital tools for te reo Māori while ensuring data are stored, shared, and managed in culturally safe ways. Originally from Anahola, Kaua'i, Keoni came to Aotearoa as a Fulbright Scholar and has dedicated over a decade to empowering Indigenous language revitalisation through technology.



## Key Takeaways from the Event

### 1. AI for Language and Connection

Keoni Mahelona shared how his team uses open-source tools to develop AI solutions for Te Reo Māori. He emphasised the importance of community ownership over technology and cautioned against sharing language and culture with profit-driven corporations. “Find a specific problem,” he advised, “and build a solution that aligns with community values.”

### 2. AI Must Serve Community Values

Dr. Karaitiana Taiuru emphasised that AI must be guided by Pacific values. He advocated for local control over data and the creation of systems that do not rely on foreign corporations. “Be staunch for our traditional knowledge,” he said, adding that some sacred knowledge should remain undigitised and preserved through traditional means.

### 3. Bridging the Digital Divide

Nu'uali'i Eteroa Lafaele spoke about the digital divide still affecting many Pacific communities. Through education, workshops, and community engagement, she called for action to prepare our people to safely and confidently explore the world of AI.

### 4. Traditional Knowledge as Data

Peter-Lucas Jones highlighted the significance of recognising traditional knowledge as a valuable form of data. “Language is the key to culture,” he said. He warned against the risk of cultural data being exploited by corporations and stressed the importance of strong intergenerational and community relationships to guide how data is used in alignment with cultural values..

### 5. The Risks of Data Misuse

Jacinta Fa'alili-Fidow, a member of the Pacific Data Sovereignty Committee, discussed the risks involved in sharing data with systems that may not prioritise security or cultural understanding. She emphasised the need for safe and ethical data tools and encouraged early education for Pacific youth to ensure they are prepared for the opportunities and challenges ahead.

### 6. Open Source as a Gateway

Several speakers championed the use of open-source tools, highlighting how accessible technologies can empower Pacific technologists. From Raspberry Pi hardware to platforms like Hugging Face, these tools allow communities to experiment and develop tech solutions that reflect their cultural context and needs.



### Looking Ahead

Ivan Tava, Chair of the Pacific Data Sovereignty Committee, said the webinar demonstrated the importance of Pacific communities leading the conversation on AI and data sovereignty. Attendees were encouraged to build networks, advocate for culturally aligned tech, and help prepare future generations. As one speaker said, “Just do it. Explore new opportunities, be brave, and take the first step.”

With the Pacific AI Summit planned for 2025, this conversation is just beginning. Pacific data sovereignty is not only about new technology. It is also about preserving and enhancing the cultural, linguistic, and community bonds that define our Pacific identity in a digital world.

### Call to Action

To ensure Pacific voices lead in this space, communities need to engage with AI, promote culturally aligned practices, and educate themselves on the opportunities and risks involved. Together, we can shape a digital future that protects and uplifts our rich heritage.





