

Values for Matariki Celebrations

Matariki Advisory Committee.

Prepared by Professor Rangi Matamua on behalf of the Matariki Advisory Committee.

Final Report V2 - 21 May 2021

Executive Summary

The Matariki Advisory Committee has been asked to provide recommendations on how best to celebrate the Matariki public holiday as a nation. This report provides information on the guiding principles, the key values that are associated with Matariki and the Māori New Year celebrations, and how this can be respectfully applied in a modern context.

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Overview

As we move towards the establishment of Matariki as a public holiday, there are questions about the most appropriate and respectful manner to acknowledge and celebrate this annual event. While it is impossible to decree how people should observe any holiday, the Matariki Advisory Committee met in April 2021 to give advice around the major principles and values associated with the traditional celebration of Matariki. The hope of the Matariki Advisory Committee is that these principles and values will underpin our modern acknowledgement of Matariki.

Principles

The Matariki celebration is essentially based around 3 major principles,

- 1: Remembrance – Honouring those we have lost since the last rising of Matariki
- 2: Celebrating the present – Gathering together to give thanks for what we have
- 3: Looking to the future – Looking forward to the promise of a New Year

Remembrance: The re-appearance of Matariki in the morning sky during mid-winter coincided with a traditional ceremony called ‘whāngai i te hautapu.’ During this ceremony food was cooked and offered to the different stars of Matariki while karakia (incantations) were conducted. The first part of this ceremony was dedicated to the dead of the year, honouring those who had died since the last rising of Matariki. The names of the dead were called out during the ceremony and people would weep for their loved ones. One traditional belief states that Matariki carries the dead of the year across the night sky, and upon the return of Matariki in the winter sky, the star cluster is released from its burden. When the names of the deceased were called out, Māori believed the spirits of the dead became stars in the sky. This process also helped to release the emotional burdens and cultural responsibilities Māori had with the dead.

Celebrating the present: Following on from the formal ‘whāngai i te hautapu’ ceremony, Matariki was a period of celebration and festivities. Communities and whānau would gather together to give thanks for all the blessings of the past year, and to reconnect with each other. Mid-winter was a time of rest and relaxation for Māori. The food storage pits and houses were full, and the busy harvest season was over. Food and feasting was a central element in Matariki, and people came together to share the fruits of the harvest. Other forms of celebration included music, dance, art and spending time with one another.

Looking to the future: Matariki was a time where communities and whānau would come together to plan for the impending season. They discussed at length their hopes and desires, concerns and fears and they decided upon how they would approach various activities in the New Year. It was a time of learning, sharing, discussion and decision making. One of the key points of discussion during Matariki was the environment, especially the health of the environment. Māori understood that their lives depended on them maintaining a strong connection to the physical world and caring for nature.

Values

There are a number of key values that were associated with Matariki and the Māori New Year celebrations. The Matariki Advisory Committee feel that such values are still relevant today and can sit at the heart of our modern Matariki celebration. There values are;

Aroha – Love and respect for one another
Whakamaumaharatanga - Remembrance
Kotahitanga – Unity
Manaakitanga – Caring
Tohatoha - Sharing
Mana Taiao – Environmental awareness
Kaihaukai – Feasting
Wānanga – Discussion
Noho tahi – Coming together
Ngākau Atawhai - Kindness
Whakanui – Celebrations
Tuakiritanga - Identity

It is the hope of the Matariki Advisory Committee that these values along with the main principles listed above, remain at the heart of our modern day Matariki celebrations.

Modern Matariki Themes

The Matariki Advisory Committee has proposed two major themes (activities) to support the celebration of the new Matariki holiday. Firstly, there is the belief that Matariki calls people to return home to their family and friends to feast, spend time together and celebrate the New Year. The saying 'Matariki hunga nui' means Matariki who gathers people together. We hope that Matariki can be seen as a beacon calling people to return home to their loved ones, to remember the past, celebrate the present and plan for the future. We hope that this annual pilgrimage home can be part of a nationwide internal tourism programme, where the key messages are home, family and identity.

Secondly, Matariki is intrinsically connected to the environment. The various stars in the cluster are associated with the different domains of the natural world, particularly the earth, the forests, fresh water, salt water, wind and rain. The Matariki Advisory Committee would like to see the Matariki holiday period playing a role in reaffirming our bonds and commitment to the environment. The long-term vision is to encourage positive environmental activities during Matariki including planting trees, cleaning waterways etc. Matariki is more than just our connections to each other, it is also about our connections to our place in the world and our responsibility to the environment. During Matariki we hope people reflect on what they can do to ensure the wellbeing of the earth.

Concerns

One of the major concerns in relation to Matariki is commercialisation. While the Matariki Advisory Committee are not adverse to businesses trading during the Matariki holiday period, the commercialisation of Matariki is a worry. We are aware that business development and commercialism is a part of our modern society, however as a committee it is our belief that the principles and values associated with Matariki should guide all Matariki activities, including those that have a commercial element.

Another area of concern is what sort of celebrations are appropriate. The values of Matariki, as outlined in this document, can assist in the determination of how Matariki can and should be observed. For example, if we ask the question 'are fireworks appropriate to celebrate Matariki?' Using the values of Matariki to form a response we can immediately see that fireworks do not align with one of the core values, Mana Taiao-environmental awareness. Although we acknowledge that New Zealanders have enjoyed fireworks for many years, the environmental impact of fireworks has not been properly assessed, beyond that of fire risk and damage. In addition, fireworks cause light pollution, noise pollution and waste (including plastic waste) that often finds its way onto our beaches and into the ocean. Fireworks may also be at odds with the key principle of Remembrance, that is, honouring those that have passed since the last rising of Matariki. Therefore, the values associated with Matariki would suggest that fireworks do not align with the spirit of this celebration.

Summary

Values and principles form an important role in informing how Matariki can be implemented in a modern context. With many pressures and norms set in society of how occasions are currently celebrated, it is important to reflect on the true meaning and intent of Matariki to honour the significant cultural event that it is. In this document we outline the 3 principles; remembering the past, celebrating the present and looking to the future along with the values that include aroha-love, kotahitanga - unity, mana taiao - environmental awareness and many more. Also discussed in this document were the key ideas of Matariki being a time to come together as family as well as a time to reconnect to the environment. Lastly discussed are the concerns of how Matariki may be celebrated and acknowledged in ways that do not align with the core values and principles of Matariki.