

Societal legacies from a major oil spill – extracting ‘positives’ from disaster and recovery

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The recovery process from New Zealand’s worst oil spill, that from the RV Rena off Tauranga in 2011, involved a national response across numerous governmental, scientific and stakeholder organisations. However, it was evident early in the process that significant involvement of local iwi and citizens were essential to recovery. During the unfolding events of the oil spill, there was both outrage and a strong desire for people to be involved and to help with the clean-up. Here we present some lessons about public participation, the strong mandate to consider the ‘mauri’ of the sea (i.e., a holistic view across the whole ecosystem) and the critical participation of local Maori iwi. We discuss these and the ongoing ‘legacies’ of this involvement, including numerous post-graduate students completing theses, a strong coalition of local groups across the societal spectrum working to improve the coastal environment, and the intimate weaving of Mataranga Maori into present and future planning.