

MĀORI PROFESSOR UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR VIEWS ON MĀTAURANGA MĀORI

DR GARTH COOPER HAS DEVOTED HIS CAREER TO HELPING FELLOW MĀORI BUT HE NOW FINDS HIMSELF IN THE GUN OVER HIS OPINIONS ABOUT SCIENCE AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE.

Extract from article by Graham Adams.

While the professors acknowledged "Indigenous knowledge is critical for the preservation and perpetuation of culture and local practices, and plays key roles in management and policy," they concluded that, "In the discovery of empirical, universal truths, it falls far short of what we can define as science itself." They also responded to the working group's claim that science had been used as "a rationale for colonisation of Māori and the suppression of Māori knowledge". The professors conceded that science – like literature and art – "has been used to aid colonisation" but stated: "Science itself does not colonise."

Covid pandemic – went as far as to co-author an open letter, announcing they "categorically" disagreed with the professors' views. Curiously for a pair of prominent scientists, they responded to the professors' assertion that, "Science is helping us battle worldwide crises such as Covid, global warming, carbon pollution, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation" with the baffling statement: "Putting science on a pedestal gets us no further in the solution of these crises." Dr Wiles also tweeted a request for reinforcements:

"Calling all academics in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Add your name to the open letter if you are also appalled by that letter claiming to defend science published last week in the NZ Listener. It's caused untold harm and hurt & points to major problems with some of our colleagues."

More than 2000 academics, students and

alumni from all over New Zealand answered her call and signed (although how many had actually read the original letter to the Listener remains uncertain).

Shortly before news of the Royal Society's disciplinary action against Cooper and Nola broke, the Times Higher Education – the bible for hundreds of thousands of academics internationally – discussed the "unintended consequences" of the push for the "incorporation of Māori understandings into curricula", and asked whether debate was being stifled ...

To read the complete article go to: fsu.nz/news

The reason for the investigation is that Cooper and Nola were among seven professors who wrote to the Listener in July questioning a government working group's proposal to give mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) parity with what were described as other "bodies of knowledge" – "particularly Western / Pākehā epistemologies" – in the school science curriculum. In other words, Māori knowledge would effectively be given equal standing with physics, chemistry and biology.

In the uproar that followed, their views were denounced by organisations including the Royal Society, the New Zealand Association of Scientists, and the Tertiary Education Union – as well as the professors' own Vice-Chancellor, Dawn Freshwater. Notably, none of the professors' critics defended mātauranga Māori as being scientific. Freshwater, for instance, lamented the "hurt and dismay" caused by the professors' stance on "whether mātauranga Māori can be called science" but she never went beyond faintly praising it as a "distinctive and valuable knowledge system".

Dr Siouxsie Wiles and Dr Shaun Hendy – who have been highly visible in providing scientific backing to political judgments by the Prime Minister over the past 18 months during the



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FREE SPEECH UNION IS SUPPORTING DR COOPER AND DR NOLA AGAINST WHAT WE SEE AS AN ATTACK ON THEIR ACADEMIC FREE SPEECH. HELP US HELP THEM - AND OTHERS WHOSE FREE SPEECH IS UNDER FIRE.
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