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# **The Foxton Loop Conflict: An Investigation of Nature**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the social construction of nature. The focus of this thesis is on how conflict can arise from different social constructions of the same 'natural' phenomenon. A 'constrained constructivist' approach is used through which it is argued that in addition to people's constructions of nature, nature retains an inherent physicality. Social constructions of nature are explored through the examination of the Foxton Loop, a cutoff meander bend on the Manawatu River. The Save the Foxton River Association contested the changes to the Loop through a petition to Parliament in 1986. They sought to re-establish a flow through the Loop to benefit Foxton and the greater Manawatu region. The way in which the two primary groups, the Manawatu Catchment Board and Save the Foxton River Association constructed the river environment is discussed, and how these constructions were used to legitimate their positions within the conflict is highlighted. Discourse analysis of key texts and semi-structured interviews is used to determine how nature was constructed. The Save the Foxton River Association drew from a Judeo-Christian perspective, which identified 'right' and 'wrong' nature, and a conventional Western discourse which understood nature primarily as a resource. The Manawatu Catchment Board also utilised this latter perspective, but within the context of a scientific worldview that upheld them as the 'managers' of the river environment for the good of the Manawatu Region. The Manawatu Catchment Board and Save the Foxton River Association differed in their interpretations of 'true' nature, although a technocentric worldview of nature underlined both of their arguments regarding the Loop. These technocentric ideas were used in opposition to each other. It is argued each of these perspectives were inscribed with differing amounts of power which defined their influence in the debate. The thesis concludes with the suggestion that a balance between a constructionist viewpoint and one that acknowledges the inherent physicality of nature may assist in creating an approach to nature which ensures its intrinsic value is not threatened.

## Acknowledgments

On the wall of my study is a magnificent picture of Mount Taranaki taken by Craig Potton during what appears to be a midwinter sunset. I am reminded of the exquisite beauty of nature in all its forms and henceforth a reason for this project. This project has been a long time in the making and I have many people to thank. Firstly, to my chief supervisor, Dr. Juliana Mansvelt who has tirelessly worked to help me through the system and has always had an encouraging word. Thank you for your patience and assistance in all aspects of this work. Sincere thanks must also go to Mr. Geoff Thomas, Dr. Lawrence Berg and Mr. Richard Heerdegen for your involvement with this project, ideas and other assistance. I also need to thank those people who provided sources of information during the course of this project, particularly those people I interviewed and those who assisted with archival and other data retrieval. Thanks to the Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council and Massey University Research Fund for their financial assistance.

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## List Of Abbreviations

SFRA	Save the Foxton River Association
MCB	Manawatu Catchment Board
CDCB	Central Districts Catchment Boards
MWRC	Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council
FBC	Foxton Borough Council
MORB	Manawatu-Oroua River Board
PWD	Public Works Department
SCRCC	Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council
IALGSC	Internal Affairs and Local Government Select Committee
NWSCA	National Water and Soil Conservation Authority
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
MWD	Ministry of Works and Development
MFE	Ministry for the Environment
RMA	Resource Management Act
OCHR	Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives