



MOUNTAINS TO SEA
CONSERVATION TRUST

ŌNUKU WĀNANGA
2025



Celebrating our
Impact
and Building
Resilience

WAITM
CONNECTION
TATAI KI TE WAI



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao

Onuku
Rūnanga Inc Soc

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Acknowledgements

Big acknowledgements to the haukāinga of Ōnuku Marae for their welcome and sharing their beautiful space, kōrero and taiao with us.

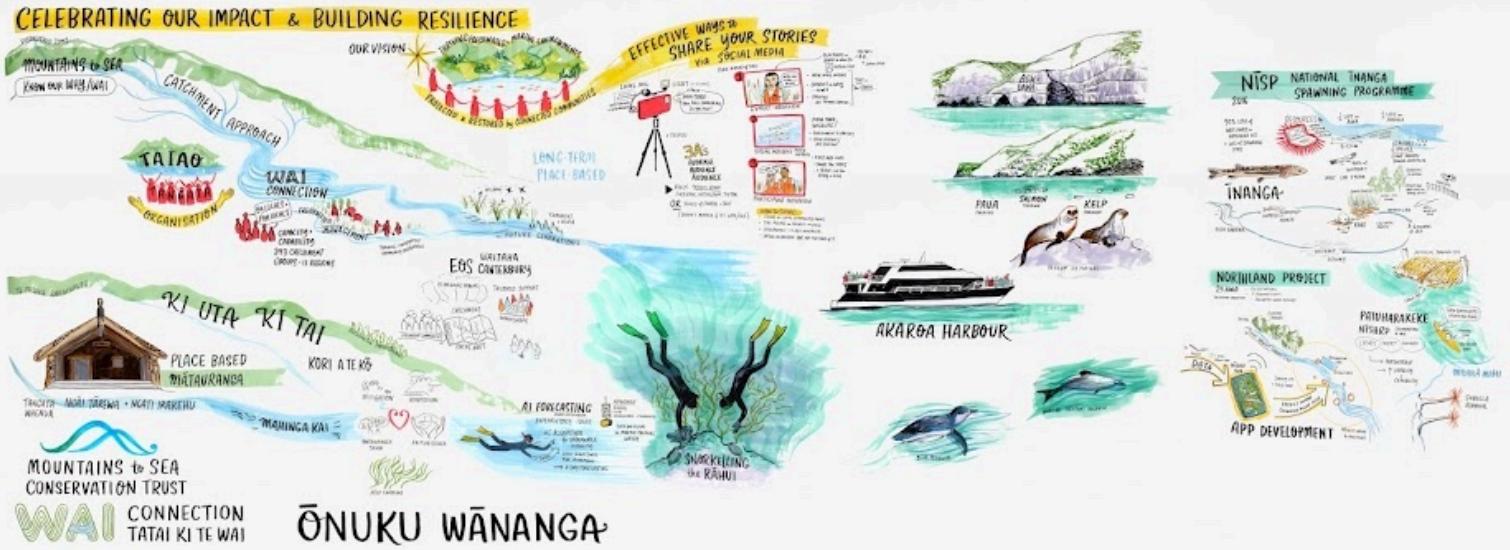
EOS Ecology - for hosting Mountains to Sea and the amazing mahi put into planning, local logistics and use of vehicles.

Ōnuku ringawera for keeping us well fed, Duvauchelle for the social evening, Akaroa Yacht Club for the use of their facilities and to Black Cat Cruises for getting us out onto the harbour.

Photography and videography by Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust - Lorna Doogan. Additional media by EOS Ecology and other Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust crew.

This event was made possible with funding from the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) through our Wai Connection project.





Introduction

Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust (MTSCT) - Ngā Maunga ki te Moana, was created in 2002 as a vehicle and guiding entity to enable a team of extremely motivated individuals to effectively communicate marine and freshwater science to NZ communities, involve them in experiencing those environments first-hand and in taking action for it, believing that the end result will be an improved environment. All via the programmes; Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) and Whitebait Connection (WBC).

MTSCT has been facilitating wānanga since 2006 for each of our programmes, then in 2010 we combined resources to run the EMR and WBC annual coordinator training events as one and invite a wider range of people – making it a mountains to sea focus, always with a different theme. These gatherings serve as both a platform for professional development and a space for collaborative action.

The theme for our 2025 event was “Celebrating our Impact and Building Resilience” which reflected on the successes of the Wai Connection project to date and going forward. ‘Wai Connection – Tatai Ki Te Wai’ is a Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust (MTSCT) community catchment group engagement and support project, funded largely by the Ministry for the Environment’s essential freshwater fund and delivered through a range of provider organisations nationally.



The full gallery of images can be found [here](#)
A video of the wānanga can be found [here](#)



Haukāinga – Ōnuku Rūnanga

Ōnuku Rūnanga, the modern-day representative of the hapū Ngāi Tarewa and Ngāti Irakēhu, is located on the shores of the Akaroa Harbour. The takiwā of Ōnuku Rūnanga, as defined by the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998, is centred on Ōnuku and the hills and coasts of Akaroa Harbour to the adjoining takiwā of the Te Rūnanga o Koukourārata and Wairewa Rūnanga. - www.onuku.nz

Ōnuku Marae holds significant historical and cultural importance, being the first site in Te Waipounamu (South Island) where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, on 30 May 1840. The whare tīpuna (ancestral house), Karaweko, stands as a tribute to a revered ancestor, symbolising the strength and continuity of leadership that continues to guide Ōnuku Rūnanga today.

Ōnuku Rūnanga continues to uphold its role as kaitiaki of the harbour and its surrounding lands, leading initiatives grounded in mātauranga Māori, whakapapa, and intergenerational responsibility. They have built strong partnerships with iwi, hapū, and key agencies including EOS Ecology, Environment Canterbury (ECan), Christchurch City Council (CCC), Christchurch District Health Board (CDHB), Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust (BPCT), and NIWA.

With support from these partners, Ōnuku has hosted wānanga to integrate mātauranga Māori and mainstream environmental monitoring, helping to build shared capability across the community. They are also leading a long-term climate and environmental kaupapa. This work reflects a commitment to restoring the mauri of the harbour and fostering resilient, connected communities in the face of climate change.

Mountains to Sea and Wai Connection – Past, Present, Future

Kim Jones - Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust - Poutokomanawa/ Co-Director



The Mountains to Sea (MTS) Conservation Trust presentation celebrated two decades of fostering environmental stewardship and resilience through community-led action. Founded in 2002, MTS has grown from a small team into a national network committed to freshwater and marine ecosystem restoration. The kaupapa (purpose) centres on building strong foundations, collaborative partnerships, and empowering local communities to be kaitiaki (guardians) of their environments.

Key to MTS's success is the **Wai Connection** initiative, launched in 2023 and supported by the Ministry for the Environment through the Essential Freshwater Fund (EFF). This programme has worked with 393 catchment groups across 13 regions, building capacity through catchment coordinators, connectors, and regional teams. The trust's approach combines scientific monitoring, education, and local engagement, supporting both restoration and resilience.

The presentation highlighted impactful stories and key successes from the 13 Wai Connection delivery regions. These stories demonstrated enhanced water quality monitoring, habitat restoration, community pride, tamariki involvement, and increased local employment and environmental awareness. Collaborative relationships with schools, landowners, and local authorities were emphasised as critical to success.

MTS's strategic pillars (2024–2027) focus on immersive environmental experiences, catchment-level approaches, and national collaboration. Guiding principles include inclusivity, co-design, and long-term thinking. Visual storytelling through Jacqui Chan's illustrations has helped unify and energize the vision.

Challenges such as regional onboarding delays and the need for stronger communications were acknowledged, along with the necessity for long-term funding. Looking ahead, MTS aims to strengthen local networks, expand data collection tools, and advocate for enduring community-based roles in freshwater management.

To learn more about Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust and Wai Connection please visit www.mountaintosea.org.nz

Keynote Speakers

Ōnuku Rūnanga: Climate Resilience and Environmental Stewardship

Debbie Tikao



Debbie Tikao's presentation highlighted a holistic, community-led approach to climate change adaptation and catchment management in the Akaroa Harbour. She shared the vision and aims of the *Te Kete o Te Ao* project (www.onuku.nz/te-kori-a-te-ko), which weaves mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), environmental science, and design thinking into a unified and dynamic framework.



The kaupapa centres on reconnecting with whakapapa (genealogy) and whenua (land), guided by origin stories and traditional roles as kaitiaki (guardians). The Akaroa catchment is ecologically and culturally significant, but also vulnerable to sea-level rise, groundwater intrusion, erosion, and ecosystem degradation. Despite this, local pressures from tourism, marine farming, and limited freshwater infrastructure present ongoing challenges.

Ōnuku's approach involves sub-catchment planning shaped by community vision and supported by adaptive pathways. Key initiatives include kelp farming research, stream health monitoring, food security projects like community orchards and māra kai (food gardens), and the restoration of culturally significant sites such as Takapūneke. Engagement spans all ages and sectors, with rangatahi (youth), whānau, scientists, and agencies working together through workshops, games, and hands-on activities.



The overarching vision is to restore abundance—revitalising mahinga kai, biodiversity, and water security—while building climate and economic resilience and embedding cultural values in environmental action. Collaborative governance, inclusive planning, and shared resources are essential to scaling this work.

Under the Wai Connection project, EOS Ecology has supported the development of a Focus Catchment Map Series for Akaroa's nine sub-catchments. The next phase involves co-developing sub-catchment management and climate adaptation plans led by Ōnuku Rūnanga, with support from EOS Ecology, Environment Canterbury (ECan), Christchurch City Council (CCC), and Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust (BPCT). A steering group—comprising Ōnuku Rūnanga, partner agencies, and nine community group leaders—will guide the project's future through shared technical expertise and funding pathways.



Wai Connection in Canterbury

Jessica Halsey - EOS Ecology - Engagement Services Manager & Wai Connection Regional Manager



EOS Ecology is the National Technical Support Team provider for Wai Connection and the regional provider for Waitaha/Canterbury. In her presentation, Jessica shared reflections on the delivery of Wai Connection in Canterbury so far, highlighting the evolution of the programme and the value of local partnerships.

EOS has supported communities across the region through tailored planning, needs assessments, and hands-on facilitation to help groups progress their aspirations. From early-stage road trips and hui to ongoing collaboration, the programme now works alongside a wide range of catchment groups—from long-standing collectives to newly emerging initiatives—providing practical support such as technical training, mapping tools, and monitoring guidance.



Regional highlights include the Jed River Catchment Project and relationships with Banks Peninsula communities, including Ōnuku, Wairewa and the Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust (BPCT). Initiatives like the Focus Catchment Map Series have enabled communities to better visualise their data, spark new connections, and support locally driven action.

The presentation reinforced the importance of listening first, adapting to the unique context of each group, and celebrating community-led solutions. Collaborations with schools, rūnanga, landowners, and councils have helped strengthen both monitoring practices and ecological understanding.

Backed by a multidisciplinary team with expertise in science, GIS, and design, EOS continues to support place-based mahi that builds regional resilience and fosters genuine community engagement.

Mātauranga in Freshwater Monitoring

Environment Canterbury - Channell Thoms



Channell Thoms presented on integrating mātauranga Māori into freshwater monitoring. With a Master's on kēkēwai (freshwater crayfish) and a PhD on kākahi (freshwater mussels), Channell is uniquely placed to bridge classical science and mātauranga knowledge. Mātauranga, she explained, is not only about observation and intergenerational knowledge - it is lived, applied, and deeply place-based.



She shared compelling examples, including discovering kākahi in unexpected habitats like boulder beds and caves - sites identified by local mana whenua but overlooked by western science. This highlighted the importance of whakapapa, local knowledge, and kaitiakitanga in designing monitoring that reflects both cultural and ecological values.

Another example Channell shared was a project trialling various methods for monitoring kēkēwai, including gee minnow traps, electric fishing, and whakaweku (bracken fern bundles), revealing that integrating tools can give a fuller picture of species recruitment and ecosystem health. Channell emphasised that off-the-shelf frameworks often don't fit - monitoring must be tailored to the purpose, place, and people involved. Channell is co-designing monitoring tools with rūnanga to support aspirations for mahinga kai and restoration outcomes.

National īnanga Spawning Programme & the Northland īnanga Spawning Habitat Restoration Project

Nicholas Naysmith - Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust - National īnanga Spawning Programme National Coordinator & Hollie Kereopa - Patuharakeke



Nic and Hollie presented an in-depth overview of the National īnanga Spawning Programme (NISP) and the Northland īnanga Spawning Habitat Restoration Project (NISHRP). The National īnanga Spawning Programme launched in 2016 by Kim Jones, aims to empower community to identify, protect, and restore īnanga spawning habitats.

In his presentation Nic outlined the biology and life cycle of īnanga (a threatened migratory galaxiid), emphasising their annual spawning in estuarine zones where freshwater and saltwater mix. īnanga lay eggs in riparian grasses during high tides, making their habitat highly sensitive to environmental disruption. The NISP programme has developed comprehensive resources and methodologies, including resources on how to do salt water wedge surveys, habitat assessments, egg identification, and restoration techniques such as riparian planting and artificial spawning habitat installation.



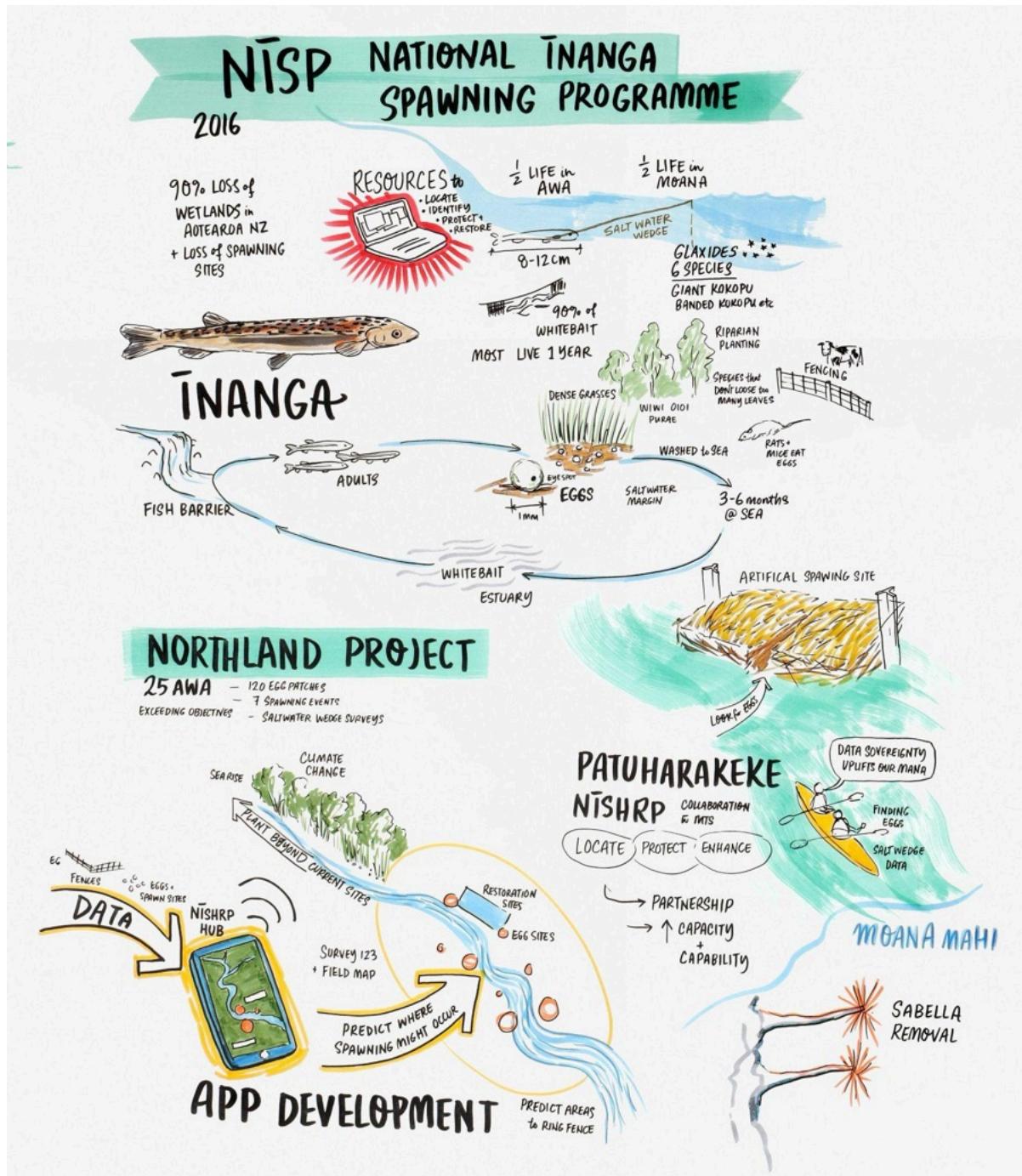
The Northland īnanga Spawning Habitat Restoration Project (NISHRP) utilises the resources of the NISP programme for on the ground implementation and collaborative action in Northland. The project, active since mid-2022 is largely funded by the Ministry for the Environment through their Freshwater Improvement Fund. Additional funding is sourced from Fonterra, DOC & Foundation North. Project partners include Northland Regional Council, DOC, Fonterra, Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board, Ngāti Manu, Whirinaki Trust & local landowners.

The project focuses on 25 rivers across Northland and has achieved significant milestones, including identifying 120 unique spawning sites, conducting over 240 salt wedge surveys, and planting over 15,000 native plants.

Hollie Kereopa shared efforts led by Patuharakeke hapū in their rohe a part of the project. This has included salt wedge surveys, egg detection, pest control, fencing, and community engagement. The partnership with Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust has enabled long-term mahi, upskilled local kaitiaki, and expanded conservation education in schools.

As part of the NīSP project a digital data hub has been developed for real-time field data entry and visualisation, with predictive mapping tools under development to enhance future protection and restoration efforts. Mountains to Sea is about to begin a scoping project to implement the roll out of this hub nationally with funding from DOC.

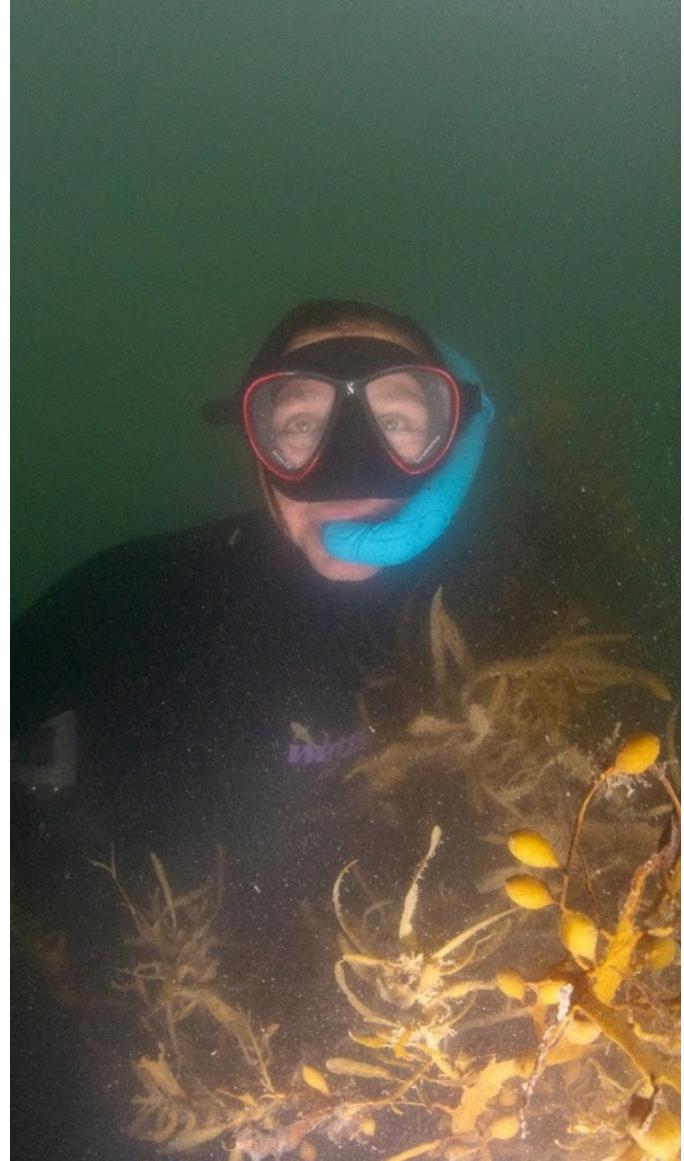
You can find the NīSP resources can be found at www.mountaintosea.org.nz/resources



Exploring Akaroa – Field Trips

Snorkelling the rāhui

The snorkelling session took place directly in front of the marae, within the rāhui zone within the broader Akaroa Harbour mataitai area. Participants geared up on the marae's front deck, received safety briefings, and entered the water via the rocky beach. Although a school of fish dispersed just before entry, snorkelers explored shallow paua beds and *Macrocystis* (kelp) forests in chest-deep water. Despite limited visibility, the experience was memorable—highlighted by encountering pāua as large as a person's head. A nearby hot shower provided welcome comfort afterwards.



Takapūneke Reserve Hīkoi

Wānanga participants who chose the walking option, explored Takapūneke Reserve. The reserve is a culturally and historically significant Wahi Tapu located between Akaroa and Ōnuku, overlooking Wainui across the harbour.

The group explored recent developments to the reserve including a pou and two takarangi (double spiral pathways) inspired by the local abundance of harakeke. Using QR codes on signage around the reserve, participants went on a self guided audio tour learning about the historical and cultural importance of the location. *Image taken by EOS Ecology.*



Spotlighting Awaiti

After darkness set in, some wānanga participants explored Awaiti on a spotlighting excursion. A variety of fish species were observed including shortfin & longfin tuna, īnanga, banded kōkopu and bullies. Macroinvertebrates were also encountered including dolomedes (water spiders), spiral cased caddisflies and various mayfly species. *Image by Sophie Journée.*



Black Cat Cruise

Following the morning show and tell presentations, wānanga participants took a short walk to Akaroa's main boat ramp and boarded the *Black Cat* catamaran. Despite the cold southerly winds and overcast skies, the harbour delivered an impressive display of wildlife. Sightings included little blue penguins, Hector's dolphins, and a colony of New Zealand fur seals. Southern giant petrels glided close to the waves, providing a striking spectacle. Throughout the trip, guides shared insights into Akaroa's unique geology and ecology.



Takamatua Investigation

Bracing against the cold southerly, participants met at the planting site at the Takamatua waterfront. Chris McGill introduced the work of the Takamatua Environmental & Kaitiakitanga group who has been restoring īnanga spawning habitat. There was a short guided walk to see the restoration efforts and to feed the pet eels, then it was time for dinner. *Image by Adam Hughes.*

Catchment Group Showcases

On Tuesday and Wednesday we had presentations from catchment group members and Wai Connection team members from across the country. These presentations celebrated the success of Wai Connection to date, showcasing the mahi that has been achieved across the country through the project.

We were fortunate to have the amazing artist Jacqui Chan to scribe and visually tell the stories of our catchment groups. All the illustrations in this proceedings documents were done by Jacqui.



Piroa Conservation Trust

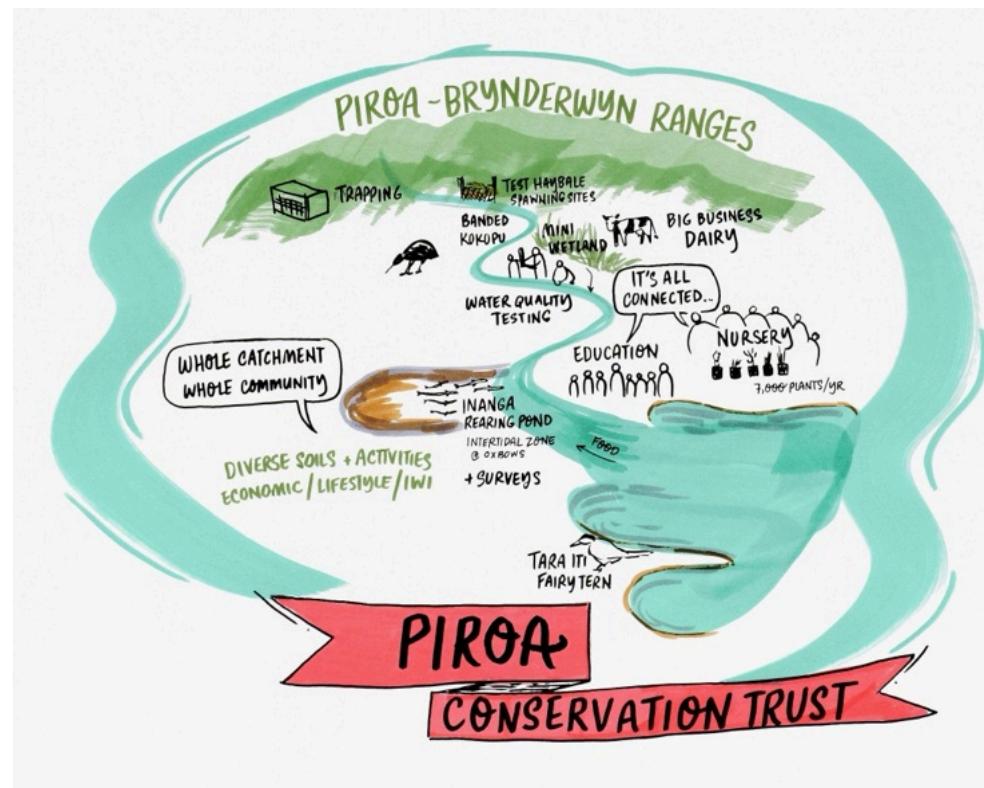
Graham Matthews



The Piroa Conservation Trust, based around Northland's Piroa (Brynderwyn) Ranges, is a collaboration of local conservation groups focused on trapping, weeding, and restoring native biodiversity. A major goal is kiwi reintroduction, already showing success with kiwi and native birds like bellbirds returning. The Trust partners with Patuharakeke, integrating mātauranga Māori and working across diverse land types.

Under an MPI-funded catchment group model, five sub-catchments are active, with community engagement through nurseries, education, and riparian planting. Nurseries also help connect new residents through volunteering. Key innovations include biodiversity planning, constructing wetland rearing ponds to support fish species and in particular īnanga, and small-scale wetland trials to reduce contaminants from farm drainage. Educational work with schools and community events further connects people to their environment.

Emphasizing long-term, intergenerational outcomes, the Trust seeks to restore ecosystems through collaboration, local leadership, and recognition of the interconnectedness of land, water, people, and species. Piroa Conservation Trust has worked alongside the Wai Connection project to deliver īnanga spawning work and a community spotlighting event in Waipū.



Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust

Josh Foster & James Wright

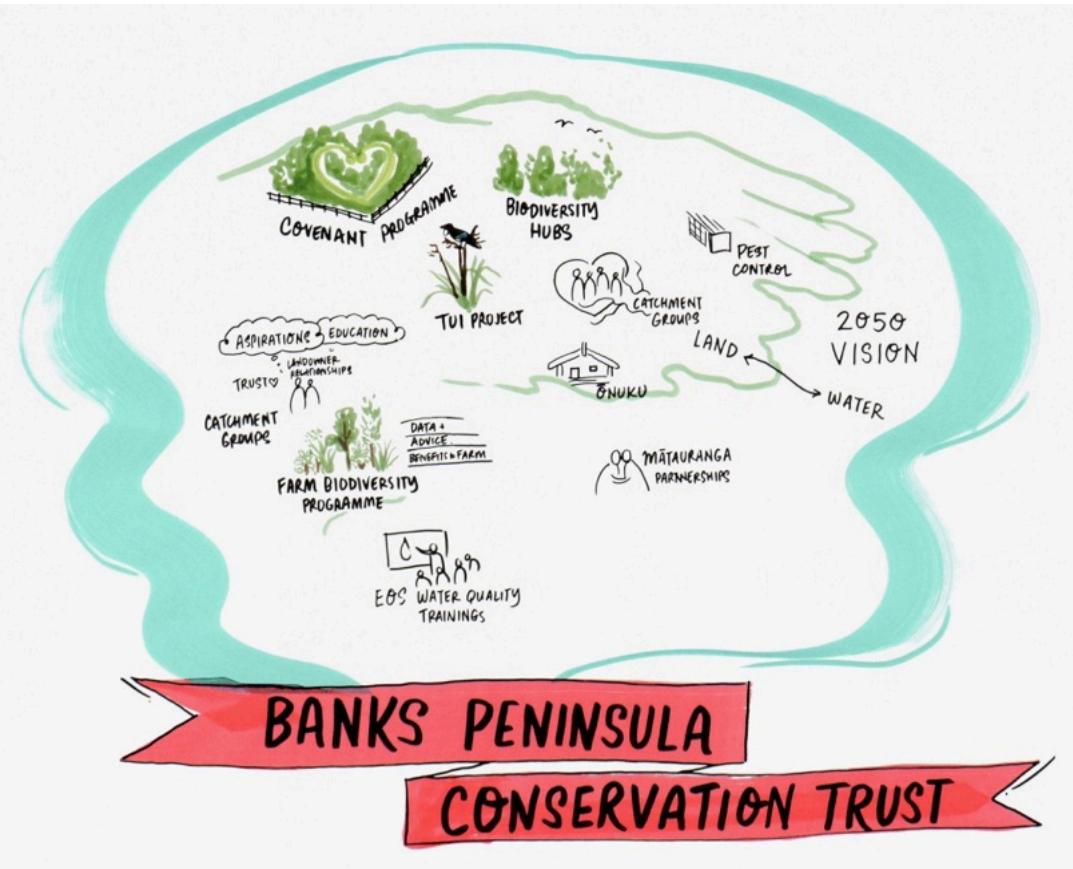


James and Josh from the Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust shared their mahi in protecting biodiversity and supporting sustainable land management across the peninsula. Formed in 2001 by eco-conscious farmers, the Trust has built strong partnerships with rūnanga, landowners, local authorities and conservation groups. With a 2050 ecological vision guiding their work, the Trust runs six key programmes, including legal land covenants, biodiversity hubs, pest control, species reintroductions, and a farm biodiversity programme.

The farm programme, launched 18 months ago, supports landowners with biodiversity planning, monitoring tools, and practical advice—building trusted relationships to navigate perceived regulatory risks. They provide digital mapping tools and work one-on-one and

with catchment groups to build capability and momentum.

The team collaborates with local experts and ecologists to deliver meaningful, on-the-ground change. With funding through 2026, they aim to support 50 farms and 10 catchment groups, proving the long-term value of locally driven, relationship-based conservation.



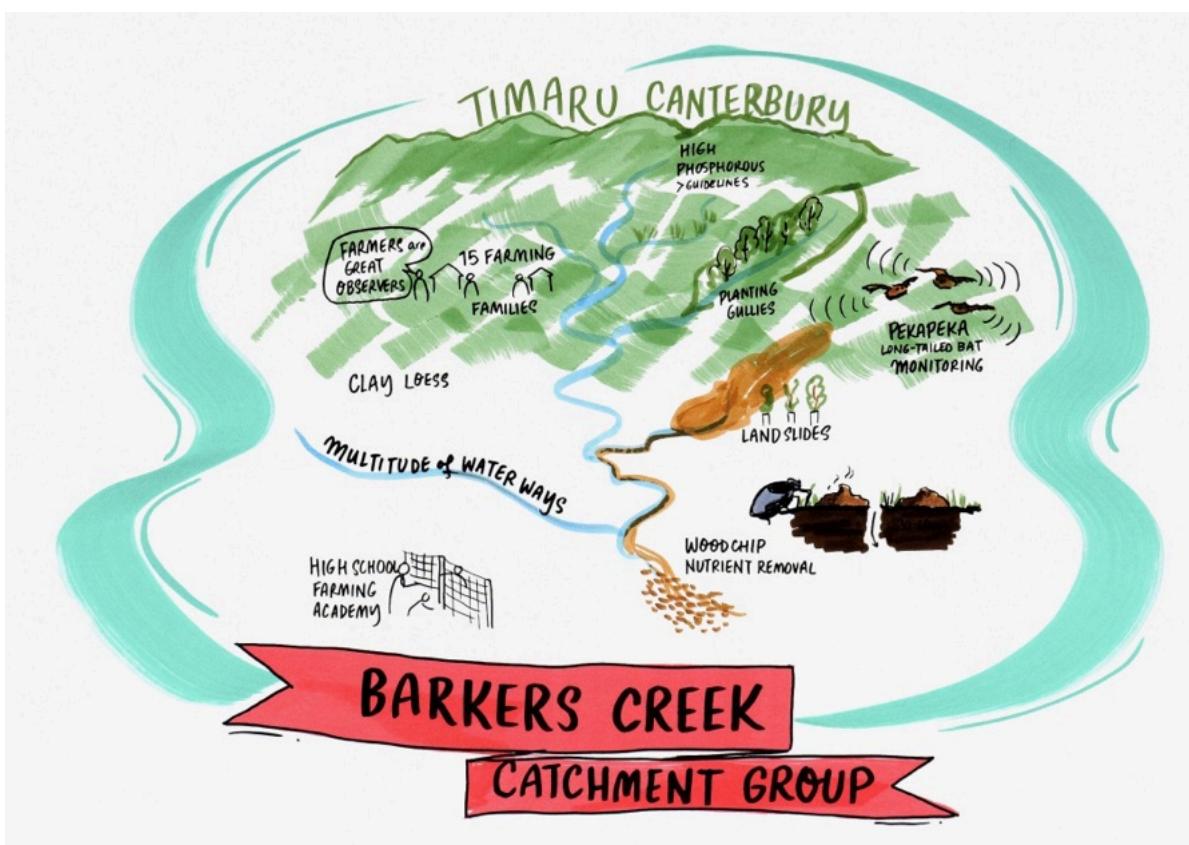
Barkers Creek Catchment Group

Danette McKeown



The formation of the Barkers Creek Catchment Group was sparked in response to a report labelling

Barkers Creek as a major polluter of the Waihi River. With a science background, Danette sought context, recognising the unique soils and landscape of Barkers Creek. From that drive, a catchment group formed engaging local farmers. Community-led efforts have included eDNA testing, fencing, planting 15,000–18,000 natives, and discovering endangered long-tailed bats. Key innovations include a stream woodchip denitrification bioreactor and a community-led water monitoring programme, supported through the Wai Connection network. A recent focus is dung beetles - funded through a \$20,000 co-investment by farmers and the local zone committee, to improve soil and water quality from the ground up.



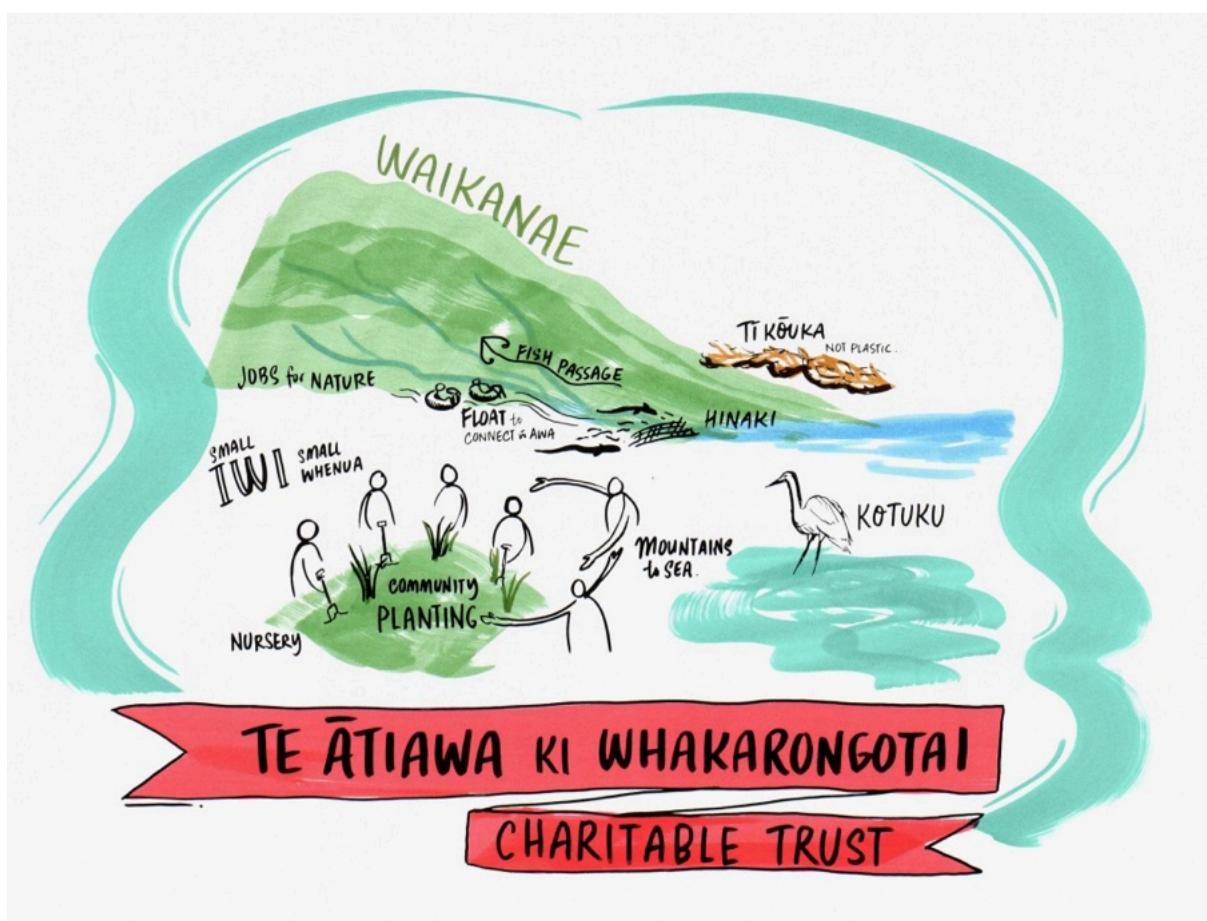
Te Ātiawa Ki Whakarongotai Charitable Trust

**Mohi Edwin, Kristie Parata &
Donna-Mari Ropata**



Representatives from Te Ātiawa Ki Whakarongotai Charitable Trust shared the highlights of their four-year Jobs for Nature project. Working in partnership with Mountains to Sea Wellington, their mahi has ranged from tamariki-focused education programmes and river floats to native planting, nursery development, and innovative habitat restoration. A strong theme of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga is embedded in their mahi.

The project run by Te Ātiawa Ki Whakarongotai Charitable Trust has reconnected whānau with their awa, their identity, and each other. Practical highlights included developing non-plastic fish passage solutions from tī kōuka, discovering tuna and kākahi in local streams, and fostering leadership and science and mātauranga skills among tamariki.

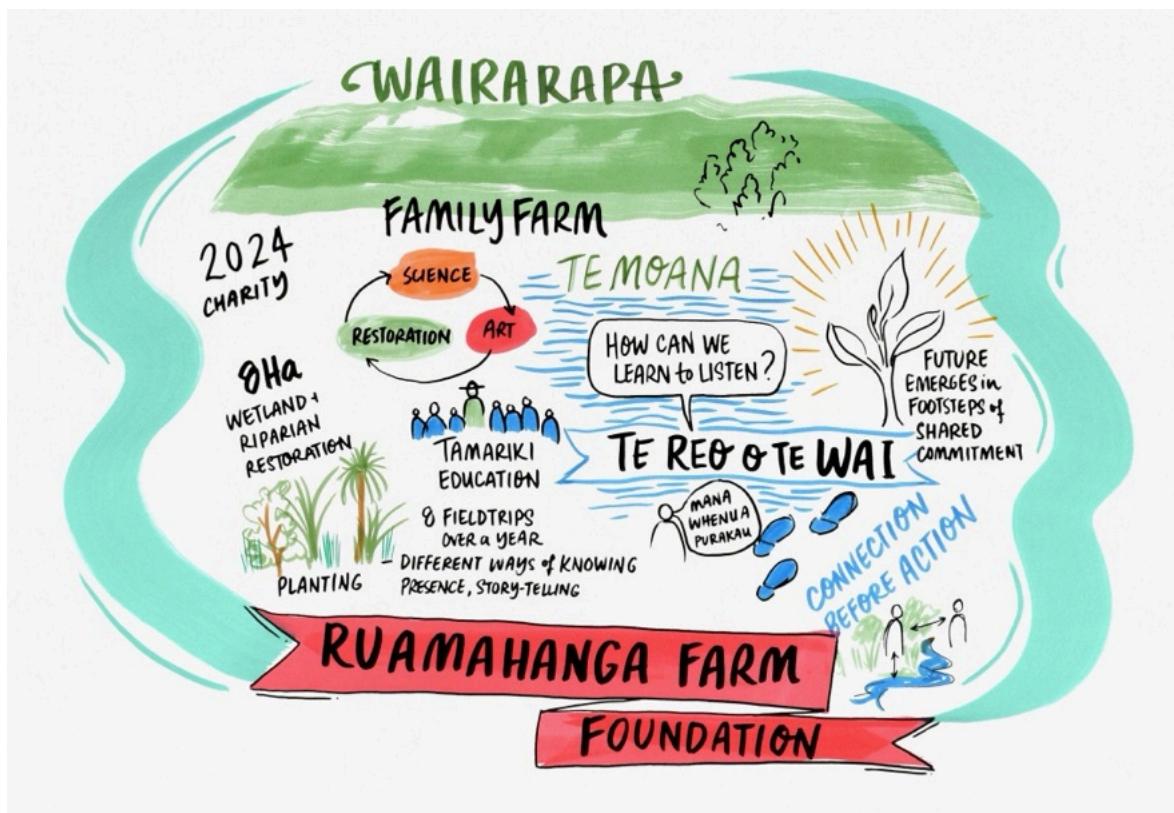


Ruamāhanga Farm Foundation

Jane Riddiford & Maddy Glover



Jane Riddiford and Maddy Glover shared their unique, values-led approach to catchment work in the Wairarapa through the Ruamāhanga Farm Foundation & Mountains to Sea Wellington. Grounded in intergenerational connection to the land, their mahi is deeply relational—beginning not with a catchment group, but with years of quiet listening, planting, environmental education, and community building. Returning from decades in environmental education abroad, Jane reconnected with her family farm and along with other members of her whānau began reimagining what it could mean to be kaitiaki. Together with her husband Rod and Maddy and Kara from Mountains to Sea Wellington, they've developed immersive, place-based experiences for tamariki, weaving science, story, silence, and restoration. Tamariki voices are central, with their reflections curated into powerful audio pieces envisioned for riverside walkways. Now, they are preparing to host their first formal catchment group hui - bringing together neighbours already connected through shared experience.

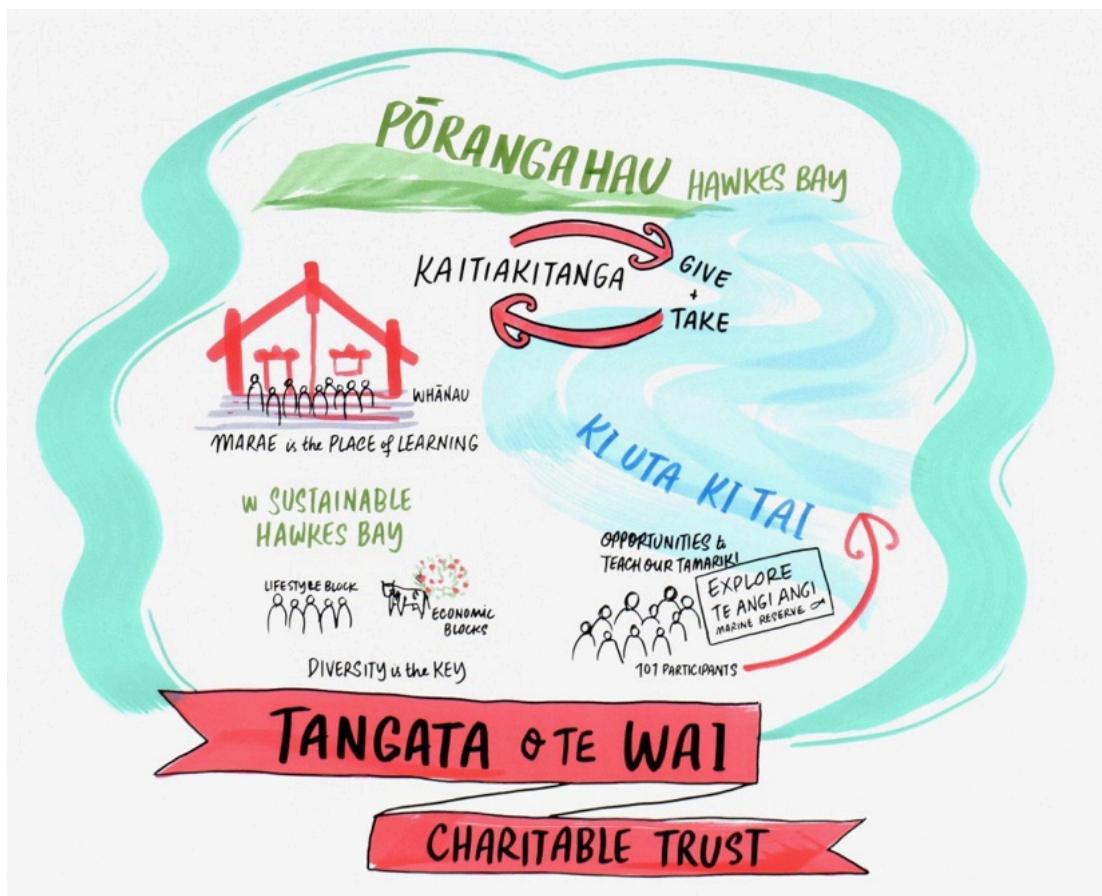


Tāngata o te Wai Charitable Trust & Sustainable Hawkes Bay

Robert Houkamau & Jae Whelan



Robert Houkamau and Jae Whelan shared their mahi in Hawkes Bay combining underwater education and environmental restoration. Robert founded Tāngata o te Wai Charitable Trust to connect rangatahi to the moana through dive training, water safety, and cultural reconnection after seeing the disconnect many had from both the sea and its safety practices. Their work fosters kaitiakitanga, reframing gathering from “what we take” to “what we give.” A recent community event hosted by the trust attracted over 100 participants and strengthened relationships with agencies, kura, and whānau. Jae spoke to Sustainable Hawke’s Bay’s decades-long mahi supporting resilient communities through biodiversity, circular economy, and engaging landowners and community in restoration. As the provider organisation of Wai Connection in the Hawkes Bay region they have been working with and supporting catchment groups, schools and communities in the region.

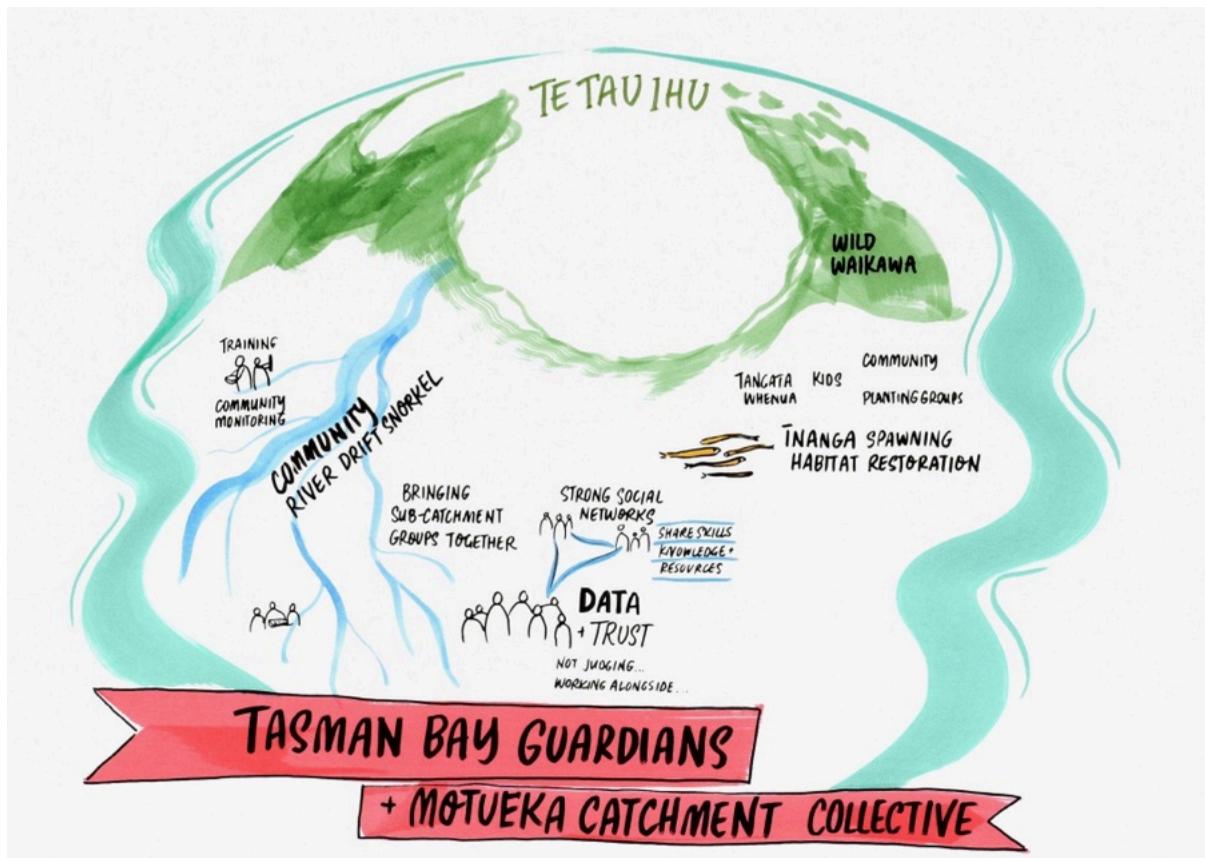


Tasman Bay Guardians & Motueka Catchment Collective

Debbie Win, Thalassa Kawachi, Monique Patterson, Mel McColgan, Kate Radloff



The Tasman Bay Guardians and Motueka Catchment Collective team shared their collective mahi supporting freshwater health and community connection across Te Tauihu. Their work includes catchment activation, whānau-friendly events like river drift snorkels, and expanding community-based monitoring (CBM) across ten sub-catchments. A key learning has been that trust and relationships matter as much as data - especially in rural areas. Many groups are now independently monitoring, supported through training, knowledge-sharing networks, and regular events. The team highlighted how combining mātauranga Māori and science is deepening community engagement. They also celebrated the power of tamariki-focused wānanga, cross-regional collaboration, and discovering taonga species like migratory galaxiids and īnanga spawning grounds. Even highly established groups benefited from new knowledge and support. A focus now is on sustaining momentum, supporting local leadership, and weaving connections to strengthen long-term freshwater outcomes.

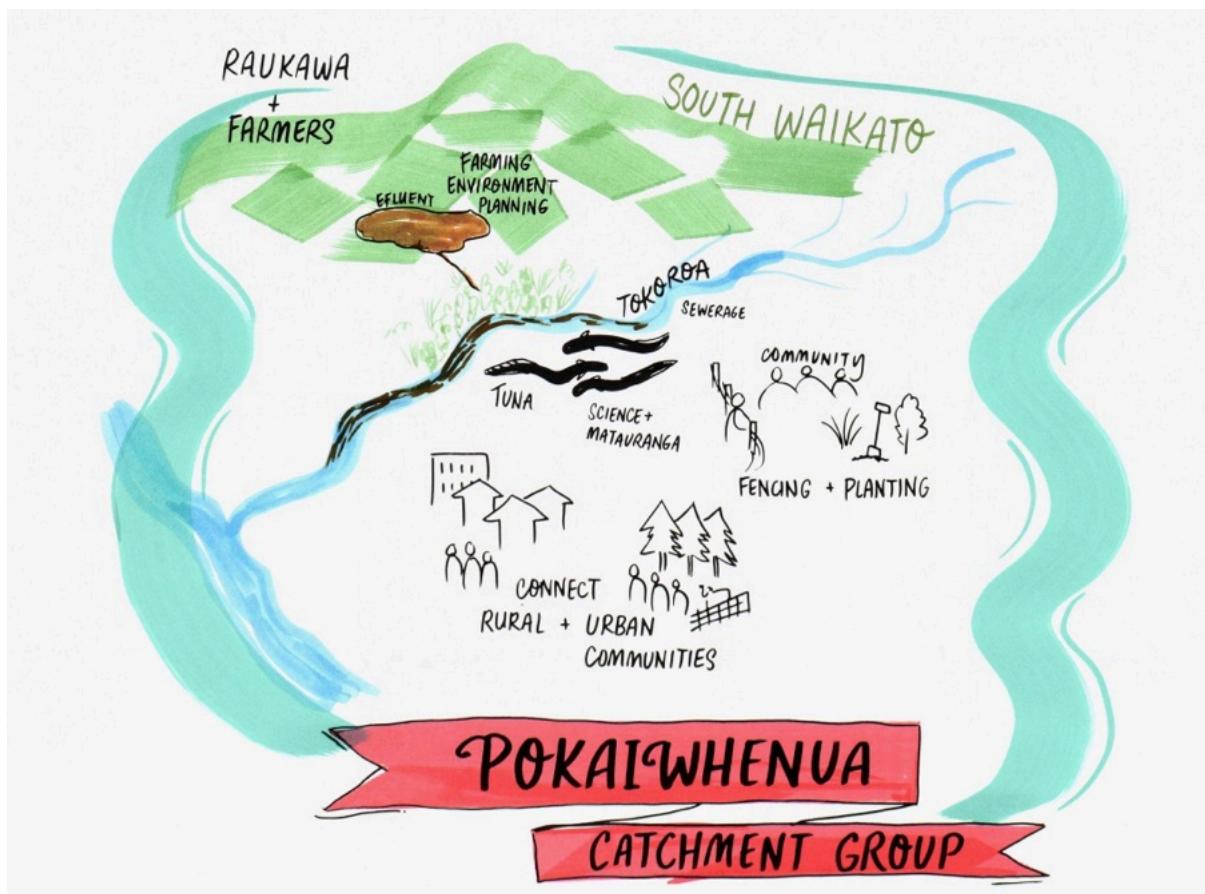


Pokaiwhenua Catchment Group

Amelia Paget



Amelia Paget shared the journey of the Pokaiwhenua Catchment Group, which began in 2021 with a farmer-led call to action. The catchment spans 430km² and is predominantly dairy, with over 250 landowners and 250km of tributaries feeding into the Pokaiwhenua Stream, which flows into the Waikato River. Early projects focused on community planting and creating access to the awa, including aspirations for a 56km walkway. The group has delivered field days, pest control workshops, school education sessions, and collaborative mahi with mana whenua. Urban engagement has been a key focus, including litter cleanups and wastewater advocacy. Despite some setbacks, like unsuccessful monitoring trials, the group has grown through partnerships with Raukawa, local councils, and support from MPI and MfE. Amelia highlighted the value of combining mātauranga Māori with scientific methods to understand and restore freshwater health, and expressed pride in building community momentum to clean and protect the awa for future generations.

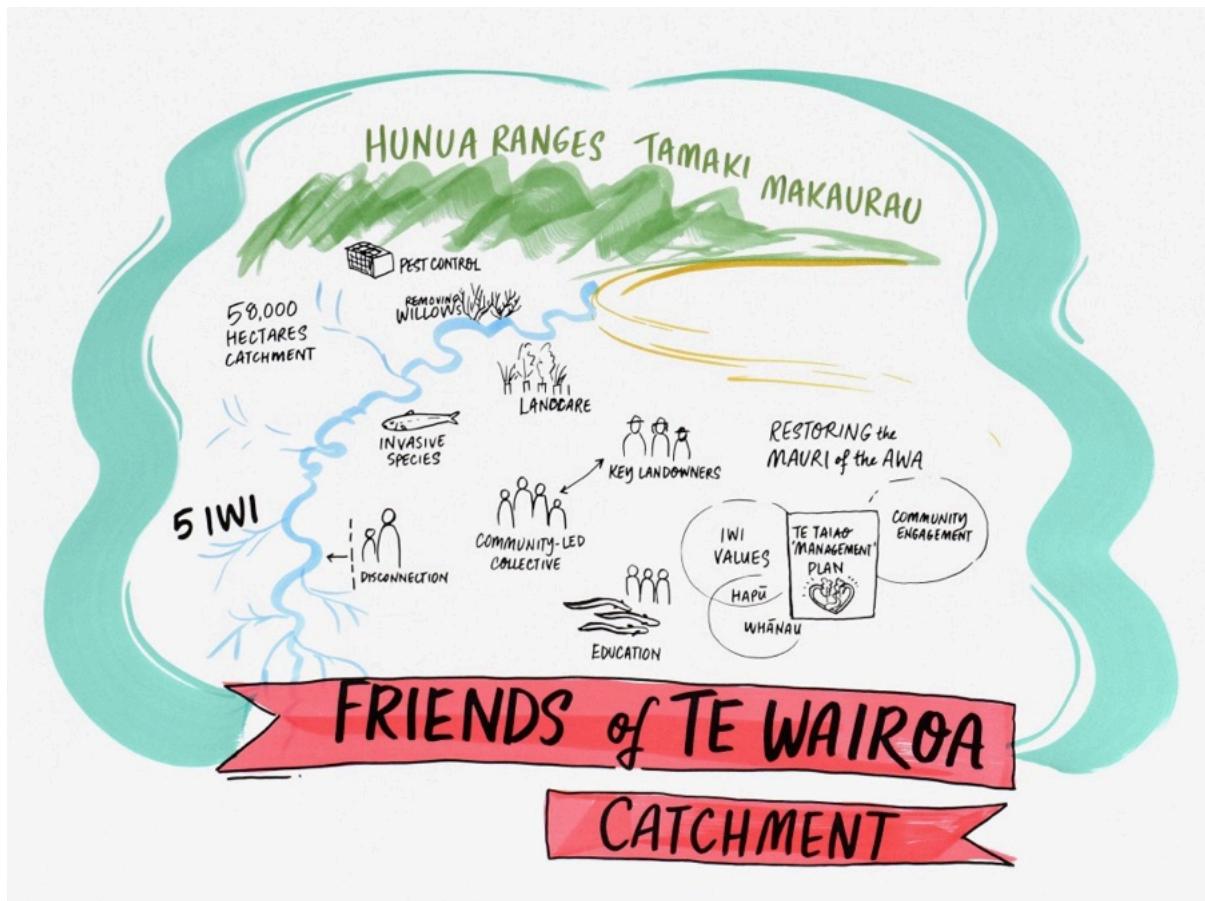


Friends of Te Wairoa

Isabella Penrose



Friends of Te Wairoa is a community-led catchment group based in Tāmaki Makaurau, dedicated to restoring the health and mauri of the Wairoa River, the region's second-largest waterway. The river is ecologically and culturally significant, supporting native species like tuna, kōura, and kākahi, and connecting five iwi. Key challenges include invasive species (e.g. willows, carp), restricted flow, and cultural disconnection. The group addresses these through tree planting, predator control, fencing, and education through initiatives such as the Wai Connection programme with local schools. Their collaborative model spreads across landowners, councils, and the community. A standout initiative has been the removal of over 21,000 pest animals, improving biodiversity and enabling future reintroductions of species. Friends of Wairoa is also co-designing a kaitiakitanga-based management plan with iwi to embed mātauranga Māori in all restoration efforts, aiming for drinkable water and a thriving, connected catchment.



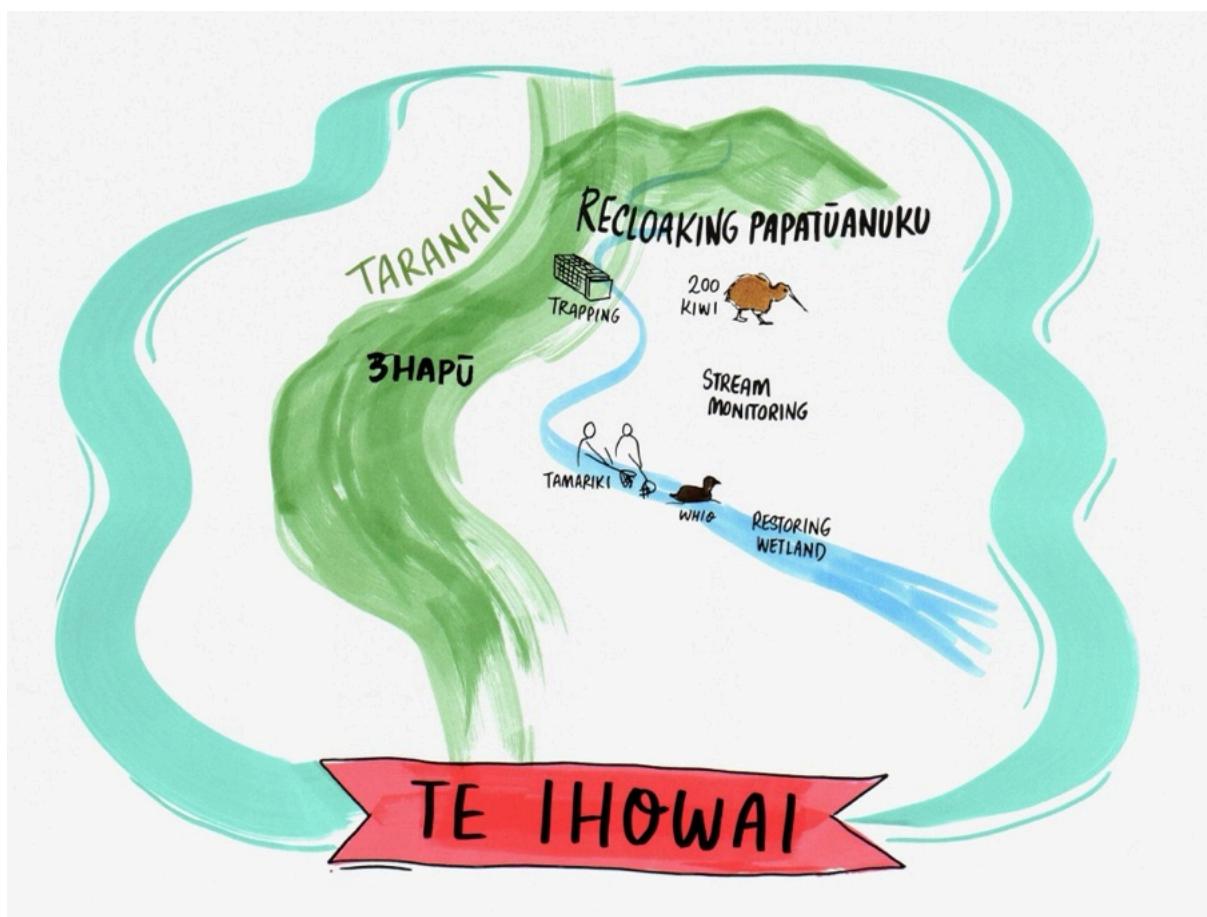
Te Ihowai

Darlene Gibson



Te Ihowai delivers the Wai Connection programme in Taranaki through a partnership with Wild for Taranaki. Te

Ihowai is a hapū collective whose mahi is focused on restoring native ecosystems, monitoring waterways, and reconnecting communities with their local environment. Centered around Taranaki maunga and surrounding catchments, their mahi spans from inland river sources to coastal wetlands. Te Ihowai monitor a 6.5km stoat and rat trapline on Taranaki maunga to support the translocation of over 200 kiwi by local environmental organisations in the past year. Monitoring tools used by Te Ihowai, include the water waka (water sensors), which provide real-time data on stream health in the Mangaone stream (in collaboration with Armatec). In partnership with DOC, and environmental agencies, Te Ihowai works to identify fish spawning sites, undertake piharau & shortjaw kōkopu monitoring and engage local schools. Children participate in fieldwork, gaining firsthand knowledge of taonga species like tuna and kōura. The kaupapa is clear: restoring ecological balance, protecting biodiversity, and nurturing environmental leadership through manaakitanga and hands-on education rooted in local whakapapa and kaitiakitanga.

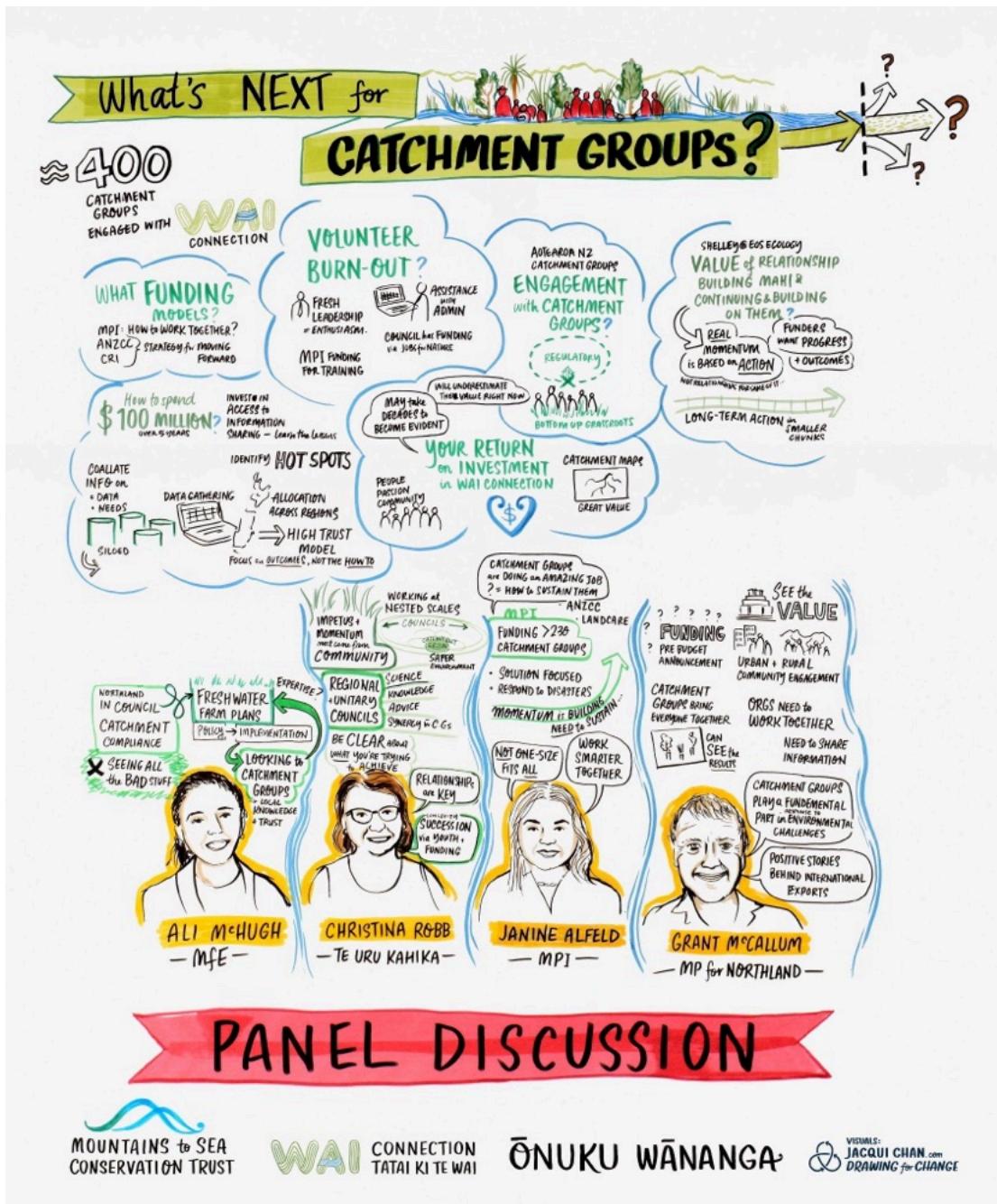


MOUNTAINS TO SEA
CONSERVATION TRUST

2025 Ōnuku Wānanga | 25

Government Panel Discussion – What's Next for Catchment Groups

Ali McHugh (Ministry for the Environment), Janine Alfeld (Ministry for Primary Industries), Christina Robb (Te Uru Kahika), Grant McCallum (National Party - MP for Northland & Deputy Chairman for the Environment)





This government panel session provided an opportunity for panelists to share insights on the future of catchment groups within New Zealand's freshwater initiatives, offering perspectives from their respective government agency or political party. The evening opened with a warm acknowledgement of the work being done by catchment groups and communities across the motu.



The panel included representatives from the Ministry for the Environment (MfE), Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), Te Uru Kahika (Regional & Unitary Councils Aotearoa), and Parliament. Each brought unique perspectives on the role of catchment groups in national freshwater strategies. A recurring theme was the importance of grassroots leadership, collaboration with iwi and hapū, and the integration of traditional and scientific knowledge.



Ali McHugh (MfE) emphasised the implementation of freshwater farm plans and the role catchment groups could play in supporting farmers with context-specific knowledge. Christina Robb (Te Uru Kahika) underscored the power of community-driven outcomes and the importance of aligning them with council and central government goals. Grant McCallum (National MP) reiterated the government's recognition of the value of catchment groups, Janine Alfeld (MPI) spoke to the success and growth of funded catchment groups and the need for strategic coordination across agencies.



Audience questions explored long-term funding, succession planning, integration with policy frameworks, and avoiding volunteer burnout. Panelists agreed that the sustainability of catchment efforts hinges on robust, respectful relationships, fit-for-purpose funding, and valuing local expertise.

The panel concluded with a strong endorsement of catchment groups as essential partners in delivering real, measurable change in freshwater management—working from the ground up, rooted in community values and driven by collective action.





Grant McCallum Opening Address



In his opening address Grant McCallum reflected on New Zealand's environmental journey, advocating for sustainability as a core principle of national progress. He emphasised that environmental issues must not remain on the political fringe but be mainstreamed for all Kiwis.



Grant emphasised sustainable development principles: science-based policy, incentives for positive action, and integrating environmental, economic, social, and cultural goals. He acknowledged farming's evolving role, from past environmental degradation to present-day initiatives like fencing waterways and funding conservation. He called for ongoing, balanced dialogue to achieve consensus on sustainability, drawing from both past successes and lessons learned.



Workshops

Celebrating our Impact and Ongoing Resilience

This workshop led by Michelle Rush from Facilitate Aotearoa brought together wānanga participants (Mountains to Sea team members, catchment group and community leaders) to reflect on what sustains catchment group efforts and how to build resilience into the future. Participants explored the behaviours, practices, and supports that have allowed catchment groups to thrive, and collaboratively developed a roadmap for future capability needs.

Key insights emerged from storytelling sessions, action planning, and interactive exercises.

What Sustains Catchment Groups

- **Behaviours:** Open communication, manaakitanga, inclusiveness, patience, passion, and enduring relationships.
- **Practices:** Regular engagement, wānanga, collective action, feedback processes, diverse storytelling, and whānau-first approaches.

What Catchment Groups Need

- Long-term, flexible funding
- Paid local coordinators
- Access to technical support and mātauranga Māori
- Clear, adaptive strategy and comms
- Centralised data tools, localised delivery
- Strong partnerships with iwi from the outset

Vision for 2030

- Thriving wetlands and catchments
- Communities showcasing their mahi
- 1,000,000+ trees planted
- Full-time roles across catchments
- Intergenerational impact through empowered tamariki and local leadership

The workshop reinforced the need to fund not just projects, but people, relationships, and long-term infrastructure—ensuring catchment efforts are resilient, community-driven, and deeply connected to place.

Full write up can be found [here](#).





Effective Ways to Promote Your Catchment Story on Social Media

Konrad Kurta - Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust - Communications & Marketing Manager

This presentation focused on how catchment and community conservation groups can effectively communicate about the work they're doing. Specifically, it examined how to create engaging content with just a mobile phone (and a few extras if you have budget!).

The presentation suggested a typical video should:

- Interview an expert (usually the coordinator or host) explaining who's doing what, when, and where.
- Get as many action shots as possible to make your event/mahi look as engaging as possible - include as much wildlife as you can
- Interview a participant/volunteer to add interest, and show people how they might be able to get involved themselves
- Ensure you're interviewing people in a quiet space with no wind noise - poor audio ruins good videos!

The points were much the same for still images - include a mix of experts, environmental, wildlife, and participant/volunteer shots, with text explaining who's doing what, when and where, and as much information on how and why.

Attendees hopefully took this information back to their own groups to share among themselves!





Evaluations and Feedback

Ngā mihi nui for sharing your reflections and evaluation of our recent wānanga. Your thoughtful feedback is already helping shape the design of future gatherings.

Highlights

The wānanga was overwhelmingly positive, with participants highlighting:

- The chance to connect in person with like-minded people from across the motu
- Powerful presentations from catchment groups and Wai Connection collaborators
- Visual summaries created by Jacqui Chan
- The harbour cruise, Hector's dolphins, and manaakitanga of the Ōnuku Rūnanga
- The beautiful setting of Akaroa and the shared energy of the group

“These events feel like gathering a hundred mini-mes from across the motu.”

“Seeing my daughter light up at her first dolphin—that’s why we do this.”

Learnings

- To **protect your wairua** and avoid burnout
- That **government is listening** and relationships matter
- Local context and collaboration lead to **better environmental outcomes**

“I came in tired and I’m leaving full.”

What Could Improve

- Clearer facilitation during panels and tighter timekeeping
- More context for some government discussions

Note: Feedback was almost entirely positive with only minor suggestions.



Looking Ahead – Your Actions

As part of your feedback, many of you shared **actions** you plan to take. These included:

- Convening hui
- Reassessing planting plans
- Strengthening local networks
- Creating more space for balance and wellbeing

We'll check in with you a week before your nominated completion date. Feel free to share how it's going!

Future Wānanga

Suggested locations included:

- Taranaki
- Auckland West Coast dune lakes
- Kaipara

More information on the 2026 wānanga including dates and location are still to come.

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Get involved

We have active provider organisations across the country.

www.mountaintosea.org.nz/work-with-us/provider-organisations

Or check out our planned events here

mountaintosea.org.nz/events

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