



# AGENDA

## Strategy and Policy Committee Meeting

**Date:** Wednesday, 6 May 2026

**Time:** 9:30 am

**Location:** Council Chambers  
Waikato Regional Council  
Level 1, 160 Ward Street, Hamilton

**Members:** Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith – Chair  
Cr Liz Stolwyk – Deputy Chair  
Cr Robert Cookson  
Cr Mich'eal Downard  
Cr Kataraina Hodge  
Cr Keith Holmes  
Cr Chris Hughes  
Cr Warren Maher  
Cr Tipa Mahuta  
Cr Gary McGuire  
Cr Jennifer Nickel  
Cr Garry Reymer  
Cr Noel Smith  
Cr Angela Strange

# Strategy and Policy Committee

## *Ngā Tikanga Whakahaere* | Terms of Reference

### 1. *Mana ā-Ture* | Status

This Committee was established by Council under clause 30(1)(a) of Schedule 7 of the [Local Government Act 2002](#). It is a discretionary committee that can be created or disestablished by Council resolution.

### 2. *Ngā Kawenga* | Responsibilities

This Committee is responsible for the following functions, excluding matters that fall within the specific responsibilities of other committees:

- a. Setting Council's strategic direction and policy responses
- b. Identifying regional issues that require Council intervention
- c. Setting Council's advocacy position on regional issues
- d. Responding to external agency statutory planning processes
- e. Providing thought leadership on matters of regional significance
- f. Establishing strategic priorities for organisational direction and policy setting

### 3. *Ngā Apatono* | Powers

The Committee has the following powers required to carry out its responsibilities:

- a. Advising Council on regional governance matters, including delegation to:
  - i. Develop Council's strategic direction and recommend policy responses
  - ii. Develop Council's position on regionally significant issues
  - iii. Oversee development of regional by-laws and plans including, the Regional Policy Statement, regional plans, and the Regional Pest Management Plan.
- b. Provide guidance on regional governance projects, including:
  - i. Upper North Island Strategic Alliance
  - ii. Waikato Progress Indicators Implementation
  - iii. Regional and sub-regional spatial planning.
- c. Review and endorse submissions on central government, neighbouring councils, and territorial authority policy documents
- d. Receiving information to:
  - i. Monitor the effectiveness of Council's strategic influence
  - ii. Review and recommend updates to Council's strategic positions
- e. Monitoring implementation of the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) by partners and receiving reports on progress toward RPS objectives
- f. Cross-boundary collaboration to:
  - i. Foster cooperation on inter-regional issues
  - ii. Stay informed of emerging cross-boundary issues
  - iii. Provide guidance and receive updates on collaboration efforts
- g. Establishing hearing panels and subcommittees, and appointing commissioners to:
  - i. Hear and make recommendations on proposed policy statements or plans under the Resource Management Act 1991
  - ii. Oversee other statutory policy processes, including:
    - Regional Biodiversity Strategy
    - Regional Pest Management Strategies
    - Bylaws
- h. Develop Council's governance position on regionally significant and cross-boundary matters

Note: Commissioners are delegated powers under section 34A (1) of the [Resource Management Act 1991](#) to:

- i. Hold hearings and recommend decisions on submissions
- ii. Exercise powers under sections 37, 37A, 39–42A of the RMA

- iii. This delegation excludes final decision-making powers under clauses 10, 17, and 29(4) of Schedule 1 of the RMA

4. *Ngā Tūranga* | **Membership**

4.1 *Ngā Mema* | **Members**

All elected members of the Council are members of this Committee.

4.2 *Ūpoko me te Ūpoko Tuarua* | **Chair and Deputy-Chair**

The Chair and Deputy-Chair are appointed by Council in accordance with clause 25 of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002.

5. *Tokamatua* | **Quorum**

Two members. Refer clause 23(3)(b) of Schedule 7, [Local Government Act 2002](#)).

6. *Ngā Tikanga Pōti* | **Voting**

- a. Decisions are made by majority vote of members present.
- b. If votes are equal, the Chair has a deliberative and casting vote.

Refer clause 24 of Schedule 7, Local Government Act 2002.

7. *Ngā Hui i te Tau* | **Frequency of meetings**

Bi-monthly *or* as required.

**Order Of Business**

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**1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA**

<b>Whakataka te hau ki te uru</b>	<b>Cease o winds from the west</b>
<b>Whakataka te hau ki te tonga</b>	<b>Cease o winds from the south</b>
<b>Kia mākinakina ki uta</b>	<b>Bring calm breezes over the land</b>
<b>Kia mātaratara ki tai</b>	<b>Bring calm breezes over the sea</b>
<b>E hī ake ana te atakura</b>	<b>And let the red-tipped dawn come</b>
<b>He tio</b>	<b>With a touch of frost</b>
<b>He Huka</b>	<b>A sharpened air</b>
<b>He hau hū</b>	<b>And promise of a glorious day</b>
<b>Tīhei mauri ora!</b>	<b>Behold we live</b>

**2 APOLOGIES****3 CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA****4 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Members are reminded of the need to be aware of maintaining a clear separation between personal interests and duties and their role as an elected member.

If any member has an interest that creates an actual, or could be perceived to create, a conflict in relation to any item on the agenda, it is recommended that this be disclosed.

**5 MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION OR RECEIPT**

Nil

## 6 GENERAL ITEMS

# 6.1 NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENT ON FRESHWATER MANAGEMENT 2020 - S55(2A) CHANGES TO THE WAIKATO REGIONAL PLAN

<b>Rā   Date:</b>	<b>31 March 2026</b>
<b>Kaituhi   Author:</b>	<b>Andre Hay, Policy Advisor</b>
<b>Kaituku   Authoriser:</b>	<b>Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information</b>
<b>Mana whakatau   Delegation Status:</b>	<b>For recommendation to Council</b>

### TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To inform the Strategy and Policy Committee of mandatory changes to the Waikato Regional Plan (WRP) required by the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPSFM) under section 55(2A) of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

### KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Clause 3.22 of the NPSFM directs every regional council to include a specific policy in its WRP, which provides direction regarding the protection and restoration of natural inland wetlands. This policy was incorporated into the WRP in 2021 as Policy 3.A.2.
3. An amendment to Clause 3.22 of the NPSFM was made on 15 December 2025 and came into force on 15 January 2026. These amendments insert the words “or operational need” into the gateway test applying to quarrying and mining activities affecting natural inland wetlands<sup>1</sup>.
4. Section 55(2A) of the RMA requires Waikato Regional Council to amend the WRP to reflect these changes without using the Schedule 1 plan change process. The amendments will affect Policy 3.A.2 of the WRP. This represents a broadening of the number of quarrying and mineral extraction activities that will be able to ‘pass’ a gateway test. This corresponds to a set of changes made to multiple national policy instruments and brings the NPSFM into alignment.
5. The amendment is exempt from Plan Stop<sup>2</sup>, the temporary pause on most council plan making introduced through the Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025, as it is a mandatory update under section 55 of the RMA and does not involve a Schedule 1 process.
6. Staff have considered whether the amendment is consistent with Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato (Te Ture Whaimana). Based on previous legal advice<sup>3</sup> on similar but more

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<sup>1</sup> [Amendment to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management | Ministry for the Environment](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Resource Management \(Consenting and Other System Changes\) Amendment Act 2025 | Ministry for the Environment](#)

<sup>3</sup> Legal opinion on Section 55 changes to Waikato Regional Plan in response to NPSFM 2020 amendment No.1 – 5 July 2024. (Refer to Attachment 2)

substantive amendments to clause 3.22, and the narrow scope of the current change, staff consider the amendment is consistent with Te Ture Whaimana and that further legal advice is not necessary. Therefore, the amendments to the WRP must be made as soon as reasonably practicable.

7. The WRP will therefore be amended and publicly notified in accordance with section 55(2A) of the RMA.

**TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That the report *Changes to the Waikato Regional Plan Required by Freshwater Management Policy Amendment* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 6 May 2026) be received.
2. That the Strategy and Policy Committee recommend that Council:
  - (a) Amend the Waikato Regional Plan, under section 55(2A) of the Resource Management Act 1991, to give effect to the December 2025 amendment to clause 3.22 of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020, by incorporating the mandatory policy change relating to quarrying and mining activities affecting natural inland wetlands, as set out in Attachment 1.
  - (b) In accordance with section 55(2A) of the Resource Management Act 1991, public notification of the amendments to the Waikato Regional Plan will occur within five working days of the amendments being made.

**HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND**

8. The NPSFM came into effect in September 2020. Regional councils are required to give effect to the NPSFM and in doing so must comply with any directions and process requirements set out in the document.
9. Most changes required by the NPSFM must be implemented through the freshwater planning process in Subpart 4 of the RMA. This process involves consultation, public notification, submissions, hearings and decisions.
10. However, the NPSFM also directs regional councils to incorporate certain provisions directly into Regional Plans using the process set out in section 55(2A) of the RMA. Section 55(2A) requires councils to amend Regional Plans without undertaking consultation, notification or submissions through the Schedule 1 process.
11. Clause 3.22 of the NPSFM requires regional councils to include a specific policy relating to the protection of natural inland wetlands in Regional Plans. This policy was incorporated into the WRP in 2021 as Policy 3.A.2.
12. Policy 3.A.2 directs that the loss of extent of natural inland wetlands is avoided, their values are protected and their restoration is promoted. The policy includes a number of exceptions allowing certain activities to occur:
  - (a) the customary harvest of food or resources undertaken in accordance with tikanga Māori.
  - (b) restoration activities.

- (c) scientific research.
  - (d) the sustainable harvest of sphagnum moss.
  - (e) the construction or maintenance of wetland utility structures.
  - (f) the maintenance or operation of specified infrastructure, or other infrastructure.
  - (g) natural hazard works.
13. On 15 December 2025 the Governor-General approved further amendments to the NPSFM, which came into force on 15 January 2026. These amendments insert the words “or operational need” into the gateway test applying to quarrying and mining activities affecting natural inland wetlands.
  14. The amendment aligns the NPSFM with related changes to national direction instruments concerning quarrying and mining and recognises that some quarrying and mineral extraction activities may require a particular location due to operational constraints.
  15. The Minister for the Environment previously made changes to the NPSFM in 2022 to include new exceptions to the mandatory policy regarding natural inland wetlands. The Resource Management (Freshwater and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2024 received royal assent in October 2024 and includes further exceptions to this policy. The WRP was amended pursuant to section 55 to include these changes, and now similarly must be amended again.
  16. This amendment is exempt from Plan Stop<sup>4</sup>, the temporary pause on most council plan making introduced through the Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025. Plan Stop applies only to draft or proposed planning instruments prepared through the Schedule 1 process and does not apply to mandatory amendments made under section 55 of the RMA. The required update can therefore proceed as a section 55(2A) amendment.

#### **TE TAKE | ISSUE**

17. The December 2025 amendment to clause 3.22 of the NPSFM broadens the circumstances in which quarrying and mineral extraction activities may meet the gateway test where they affect natural inland wetlands.
18. Previously, activities were required to demonstrate a functional need to be located in a particular place. The amendment recognises that certain activities may also require a particular location due to operational need.
19. Before incorporating the amendment into the WRP under section 55(2A), Council must be satisfied that the amendment is not inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana, which prevails over inconsistent provisions in the RMA and national direction instruments. This has been considered as part of this report.
20. The Minister for the Environment made changes to the NPSFM in 2022 to include new exceptions to the mandatory policy regarding natural inland wetlands. The Resource Management (Freshwater and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2024 received royal assent in October 2024 and includes further exceptions to this policy.
21. Councils are required to give effect to the NPSFM ‘as soon as reasonably practicable’ and amending the WRP to incorporate the updated NPSFM provisions will ensure that Waikato

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<sup>4</sup> [Resource Management \(Consenting and Other System Changes\) Amendment Act 2025 | Ministry for the Environment](#)

Regional Council meets its statutory obligations. Public notification of the amendments under section 55(2A) will occur shortly after the changes are made.

22. The required amendments to the WRP affect Policy 3.A.2 and are detailed in Attachment 1 to this report. The amendments create an alternative gateway test for quarrying and mining activities affecting natural inland wetlands.

#### **TE URUTAI KI TE HURIHANGA ĀHUARANGI | ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

23. The amendments proposed in this report are required to give effect to national direction and do not introduce new discretionary policy choices.

#### **TE HAUTŪ ĀHUARANGI | CLIMATE LEADERSHIP**

24. This change is a statutory requirement and, as such, there are no clear opportunities for Council to demonstrate leadership with regards to climate.

#### **TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

25. The decision is not considered to have a high degree of significance because the changes to the WRP are a statutory requirement under section 55(2A) of the RMA.

#### **TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT**

26. Section 12 of the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, section 13 of the Ngāti Tuwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010, and section 8 of the Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012 do not allow a local authority to amend a document under section 55 of the RMA if the amendment would make the document inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana.
27. Under these Acts, Te Ture Whaimana prevails over inconsistent provisions in the RMA and national direction instruments, including the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management. A local authority must not amend a planning document under section 55 of the RMA if the amendment would be inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana. Accordingly, before incorporating amendments to clause 3.22 of the NPSFM into the WRP, Waikato Regional Council must be satisfied that the amendments are not inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana.
28. In 2024 Waikato Regional Council obtained legal advice from Simpson Grierson regarding earlier amendments to clause 3.22 of the NPSFM. That advice related to amendments that were broader in scope than the current change and confirmed that those amendments were not inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana.
29. The advice recognised that Te Ture Whaimana should be interpreted “in the round” as an aspirational framework guiding the restoration and protection of the health and wellbeing of the Waikato and Waipā Rivers over time. This interpretation has been accepted by the Environment Court.
30. The advice also confirmed that the betterment considerations identified in the *Puke Coal* Environment Court decision remain relevant. In practice, this means that where residual adverse effects on natural inland wetlands cannot be fully avoided, they must be addressed

through the effects management hierarchy, including remediation or mitigation, and, where appropriate, offsetting or compensation measures that result in an overall improvement (or “betterment”) in wetland extent or values. The NPSFM effects management hierarchy therefore continues to apply when managing effects on natural inland wetlands.

31. The amendment to clause 3.22 made in December 2025 is comparatively narrow. It inserts the words “or operational need” alongside the existing functional need gateway test for quarrying and mining activities and does not alter the underlying objective of protecting and restoring natural inland wetlands.
32. It is also applied by Waikato Regional Council when considering Te Ture Whaimana in resource consent processes. The amendments therefore appear consistent with the restoration and protection of the health and wellbeing of the Waikato and Waipā Rivers.
33. Given that earlier and more substantive amendments to clause 3.22 were considered consistent with Te Ture Whaimana, staff consider that the current amendment is unlikely to alter that position. If the amendment were considered inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana, Te Ture Whaimana would prevail, and the amendment could not be incorporated into the WRP under section 55. This would also call into question the consistency of earlier amendments incorporated in 2024.
34. On that basis, staff consider that the amendment is consistent with Te Ture Whaimana and that obtaining further legal advice is not necessary.

#### **NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHERE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

35. To the best of the writer’s knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with, any policy adopted by Council, or any plan required by the Local Government Act (LGA) or any other enactment.

#### **TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI**

36. Council is obligated under the Local Government Act 2002 to recognise and respect the Crown’s responsibility to take appropriate account of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and to maintain and improve opportunities for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making processes.
37. The amendments proposed in this report are a statutory requirement under section 55(2A) of the RMA.

#### **WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION**

38. Amendments to clause 3.22 of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management require Waikato Regional Council to amend the Waikato WRP under section 55(2A) of the RMA.
39. The amendment inserts the words “or operational need” into the gateway test applying to quarrying and mining activities affecting natural inland wetlands. This creates an alternative pathway for quarrying and mining activities affecting natural inland wetlands.

40. Te Ture Whaimana prevails over inconsistent provisions in the RMA and national direction instruments. Earlier legal advice confirmed that similar amendments to clause 3.22 were not inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana. Given the narrower scope of the current amendment, staff consider that this position remains unchanged and that further legal advice is not necessary.
41. As the amendment is mandatory and exempt from Plan Stop, the WRP will therefore be amended and public notification will occur within five working days, in accordance with section 55(2A) of the RMA.

### NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

42. Ministry for the Environment. (2025). *Amendment to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management*.  
<https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/RMA/Amendment-2025-NPS-Freshwater-Management.pdf>
43. Ministry for the Environment. (2025). *Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025*.  
<https://environment.govt.nz/acts-and-regulations/acts/rm-amendment-act-2025/>
44. Puke Coal Ltd v Waikato Regional Council [2014] NZEnvC 223, Judge Smith, 23 October 2014.  
<https://www.nzlii.org/nz/cases/NZEnvC/2014/223.html>

### ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Proposed Amendments to Waikato Regional Plan Freshwater Policy (Policy 3.A.2) Required by National Freshwater Policy (2020) – (Doc # 35329168)** [↓](#)
2. **Legal Opinion on Section 55 Changes to the Waikato Regional Plan (NPS-FM 2020 Amendment 1, 5 July 2024) – (Doc # 29626017)** [↓](#)

## Changes to Policy 3.A.2 of the Waikato Regional Plan, as required by the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020

The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPSFM) directs councils to include a policy regarding natural inland wetlands in regional plans. This policy was incorporated into the Waikato Regional Plan in 2021 as Policy 3.A.2.

On 15 December 2025 amendments were made under section 53(1) of the RMA and notified in the New Zealand Gazette on 18 December 2025. These amendments came into force on 15 January 2026 and must now be included into the Waikato Regional Plan.

The required amendments to Policy 3.A.2 in Section 3A of the Waikato Regional Plan are set out below. Required insertions are shown in [underline](#).

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### Section 3A National direction in accordance with the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020

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#### Policies

##### Policy 3.A.2: Natural inland wetlands

The loss of extent of natural inland wetlands is avoided, their values are protected, and their restoration is promoted, except where:

- a. the loss of extent or values arises from any of the following:
  - i. the customary harvest of food or resources undertaken in accordance with tikanga Māori
  - ii. wetland maintenance, restoration, or biosecurity (as defined in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management)
  - iii. scientific research
  - iv. the sustainable harvest of sphagnum moss
  - v. the construction or maintenance of wetland utility structures (as defined in the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020)
  - vi. the maintenance or operation of specified infrastructure, or other infrastructure (as defined in the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020)
  - vii. natural hazard works (as defined in the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020); or
- b. the regional council is satisfied that:
  - i. the activity is necessary for the purpose of the construction or upgrade of specified infrastructure; and
  - ii. the specified infrastructure will provide significant national or regional benefits; and
  - iii. there is a functional need for the specified infrastructure in that location; and
  - iv. the effects of the activity are managed through applying the effects management hierarchy; or
- c. the regional council is satisfied that:

- i. the activity is necessary for the purpose of urban development that contributes to a well-functioning urban environment (as defined in the National Policy Statement on Urban Development); and
  - ii. the urban development will provide significant national, regional or district benefits; and
  - iii. the activity occurs on land identified for urban development in operative provisions of a regional or district plan; and
  - iv. the activity does not occur on land that is zoned in a district plan as general rural, rural production, or rural lifestyle; and
  - v. there is either no practicable alternative location for the activity within the area of the development, or every other practicable location in the area of the development would have equal or greater adverse effects on a natural inland wetland; and
  - vi. the effects of the activity will be managed through applying the effects management hierarchy; or
- d. the regional council is satisfied that:
- i. the activity is necessary for the purpose of quarrying activities; and
  - ii. the extraction of the aggregate will provide significant national or regional benefits; and
  - iii. there is a functional need [or operational need](#) for the activity to be done in that location; and
  - iv. the effects of the activity will be managed through applying the effects management hierarchy; or
- e. the regional council is satisfied that:
- i. the activity is necessary for the purpose of the extraction of minerals and ancillary activities; and
  - ii. the extraction of the mineral will provide significant national or regional benefits; and
  - iii. there is a functional need [or operational need](#) for the activity to be done in that location; and
  - iv. the effects of the activity will be managed through applying the effects management hierarchy; or
- f. the regional council is satisfied that:
- i. the activity is necessary for the purpose of constructing or operating a new or existing landfill or cleanfill area; and
  - ii. the landfill or cleanfill area:
    - (A) will provide significant national or regional benefits; or
    - (B) is required to support urban development as referred to in paragraph (c); or
    - (C) is required to support the extraction of aggregates as referred to in paragraph (d); or
    - (D) is required to support the extraction of minerals as referred to in paragraph (e); and
  - iii. there is either no practicable alternative location in the region, or every other practicable alternative location in the region would have equal or greater adverse effects on a natural inland wetland; and
  - iv. the effects of the activity will be managed through applying the effects management hierarchy.

For the purposes of this policy, functional need, effects management hierarchy, loss of value, natural inland wetland, specified infrastructure and restoration have the same meaning as defined in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020.



## Our advice

<b>Prepared for</b>	Naomi Crawford, Waikato Regional Council
<b>Prepared by</b>	Matt Conway and Tim Fischer
<b>Date</b>	5 July 2024

PRIVILEGED AND CONFIDENTIAL

### Potential amendments to the Waikato Regional Plan in response to National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 Amendment No 1

<b>Background</b>	<p>The Minister for the Environment has made changes to clause 3.22 of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (<b>NPS-FM</b>) to include new exceptions to the directives that loss of extent of natural inland wetlands must be avoided, their values are protected, and their restoration promoted.</p> <p>The starting point is that Waikato Regional Council (<b>WRC</b>) is required to amend the Waikato Regional Plan (<b>WRP</b>) to include the new exceptions without using the process in Schedule 1 to the Resource Management Act 1991 (<b>RMA</b>). However, this requirement is subject to Treaty settlement legislation, which provides that WRC must not amend the WRP if that would make the WRP inconsistent with the vision and strategy for the Waikato River (<b>Te Ture Whaimana</b>).</p> <p>You have asked us about potential inconsistency between the new exceptions in clause 3.22 of the NPS-FM and Te Ture Whaimana.</p>
<b>Question 1</b>	<p>Would amending the WRP to include the new exceptions under clause 3.22 of the NPS-FM make the WRP inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana, in which case inclusion in the WRP is precluded under the Treaty settlement Acts?</p>
<b>Answer 1</b>	<p>There are arguments both ways depending on whether the new exceptions under clause 3.22 are tested against the more directive avoidance objectives in isolation or against Te Ture Whaimana as a whole.</p> <p>In summary, we prefer the view that Te Ture Whaimana should be read in the round as an aspirational framework that anticipates an ongoing process to achieve the vision over time. If read in this way, we consider that the new exceptions under clause 3.22 of the NPS-FM can co-exist with Te Ture Whaimana. It follows that the new exceptions under clause 3.22 are not necessarily inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana and are not precluded from</p>

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being included in the regional plan under the respective Treaty settlement Acts.

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**Question 2**

If the new exceptions under clause 3.22 of the NPS-FM are inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana, could WRC still make the amendments so that they apply to the rest of the Region outside the Waikato and Waipā catchments?

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**Answer 2**

Given our conclusion to the previous question, it is not necessary for us to answer this question.



## Reasoning explained

**WRC must not amend the WRP if that would make the WRP inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana**

1. Under s 55(2) of the RMA, WRC must amend the WRP if directed by a national policy statement to include specific objectives and policies set out in the statement. Such amendments are to be made without using the process in Schedule 1 to the RMA under s 55(2A).
2. The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 Amendment No 1 amended implementation clause 3.22 of the NPS-FM. Clause 3.22 specifies a policy (or words to the same effect) that every regional council must include in its regional plan.
3. The policy required under clause 3.22 starts with the mandatory directive that “The loss of extent of natural inland wetlands is avoided, their values are protected, and their restoration is promoted...” and then proceeds to list some exceptions. The effect of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 Amendment No 1 was to include four new exceptions relating to: urban development; quarrying activities; extraction of minerals; and landfill or cleanfill areas.
4. The new exceptions are subject to “gateway tests” and all require the regional council to be satisfied that the effects of the activity will be managed through applying the effects management hierarchy. We anticipate that this discretion would be exercised through the resource consent process.
5. The effects management hierarchy is defined in the NPS-FM as follows:
 

**effects management hierarchy**, in relation to natural inland wetlands and rivers, means an approach to managing the adverse effects of an activity on the extent or values of a wetland or river (including cumulative effects and loss of potential value) that requires that:

  - (a) adverse effects are avoided where practicable; then
  - (b) where adverse effects cannot be avoided, they are minimised where practicable; then
  - (c) where adverse effects cannot be minimised, they are remedied where practicable; then
  - (d) where more than minor residual adverse effects cannot be avoided, minimised, or remedied, aquatic offsetting is provided where possible; then
  - (e) if aquatic offsetting of more than minor residual adverse effects is not possible, aquatic compensation is provided; then
  - (f) if aquatic compensation is not appropriate, the activity itself is avoided



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6. The starting point is that the new exceptions must be included in the WRP under s 55(2) of the RMA, but this is subject to legislation enacted to give effect to the settlement and co-management deeds entered into between the Crown and the five river iwi (being Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Raukawa, Te Arawa and Ngāti Maniapoto).
  7. This Treaty settlement legislation includes:
    - (a) The Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010;
    - (b) The Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010; and
    - (c) The Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012.
  8. The overarching purpose of the two Waikato River Acts is to restore and protect the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River for (present and) future generations. The overarching purpose of the Waipā River Act is to restore and maintain the quality and integrity of the waters that flow into and form part of the Waipā River for present and future generations and the care and protection of te mana tuku iho o waiwaia.
  9. A key mechanism to achieve this is Te Ture Whaimana, the vision and strategy for the Waikato River. Te Ture Whaimana is set out in the schedules to the three Treaty settlement Acts. Under the Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012, Te Ture Whaimana was extended to apply to the Upper Waipā River and activities in its catchment affecting the Upper Waipā River. Although Te Ture Whaimana has been extended to apply to the Upper Waipā River and its catchment, it continues to refer to the Waikato River.
  10. For the purposes of Te Ture Whaimana, the settlement legislation defines Waikato River expansively to:
    - (a) Mean the body of water known as the Waikato River;
    - (b) Include parts of the Waipā River;
    - (c) Include all tributaries, streams, and watercourses flowing into the Rivers within the defined catchments;
    - (d) Include lakes and wetlands within the defined catchments;
    - (e) Include the beds and banks of the above water bodies.
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11. In this advice, we also use the same expansive meaning for Waikato River i.e. it applies to the Waipā River and wetlands within the relevant catchments.
  12. The Treaty settlement legislation sets out “guiding principles for interpretation”, which include “The vision and strategy is intended by Parliament to be the primary direction-setting document for the Waikato River and activities within its catchment affecting the Waikato River”.<sup>1</sup> The Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012 includes a similar provision in relation to the Waipā River and the Waikato River and activities within their catchments affecting the Waipā River and the Waikato River.<sup>2</sup>
  13. The Treaty settlement legislation provides that WRC must not amend the WRP if the amendment would make the WRP inconsistent with the vision and strategy.<sup>3</sup>
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**Close analysis of the two policy frameworks is required, paying particular attention to the way the respective provisions are expressed**

14. The question is therefore whether amending the WRP to include the new exceptions under clause 3.22 of the NPS-FM would make the WRP inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana, in which case inclusion in the WRP is precluded under the Treaty settlement Acts.
15. We are not aware of any case law that addresses the meaning of “inconsistent” in the context of the River Settlement legislation. The ordinary meaning of “inconsistent” includes incompatibility, which in turn means unable to co-exist. In *New Zealand Aviation Museum Trust v Marlborough District Council*<sup>4</sup> the High Court considered whether the Environment Court had erred by failing to consider whether a plan change was inconsistent with a regional plan under s75(4). The Court found that:

[49] ... Objective 12.7.2 of the WARMP and its implementing policies required the Court to undertake an assessment of fact as to whether any proposed land use protects or fails to protect airport operations. That is exactly what the Court did and on balance I am satisfied that the factual assessment undertaken by the Court supports a finding that **PC59 is not inconsistent with either chapter 12 or the specific policy 12.7.2.1.3 contained therein.**

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1 Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, s 5; Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010, s 5.  
 2 Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012, s 4.  
 3 Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, s 12; Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010, s 12; Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010, s 13; and Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012, s 8.  
 4 (2014) 18 ELRNZ 253.




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[56] I accept Colonial’s submissions that the Court’s finding that Omaka Aerodrome and Colonial’s development **can co-exist side by side, without preventing the use or enjoyment of each other, supports a finding that PC59 is not inconsistent with policy 12.7.2.1.3.** This conclusion was based on the Court’s assessment of expert evidence as to the likely growth of Omaka Aerodrome and it is not for this Court to engage in a re-examination of the merits of that assessment under the guise of a question of law.

16. In *Bay of Plenty Regional Council v Western Bay of Plenty District Council*<sup>5</sup> the Environment Court considered whether differences between the Coastal Protection Area (CPA) under a variation to the proposed district plan and the Areas Sensitive to Coastal Hazards line under the regional coastal environment plan failed the requirement to “not be inconsistent with”. The Court accepted that the CPA “is sufficiently comparable and not at odds in degree or purpose as to be impermissibly inconsistent”.
17. Determining whether the new exceptions in clause 3.22 are inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana therefore requires a close analysis of the two policy frameworks, paying particular attention to the way the respective provisions are expressed. This is similar to the approach of the Supreme Court in *King Salmon*<sup>6</sup> which found that there must be a “thoroughgoing attempt to find a way to reconcile” provisions before a Court will come to the conclusion that there is a conflict.

**The new exceptions under clause 3.22 are not necessarily inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana if it is read as a whole**

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18. Te Ture Whaimana includes a vision, objectives and strategies. The Treaty settlement legislation defines “vision and strategy” to mean the vision and strategy set out in the respective schedules to the settlement Acts. While the definition does not specifically refer to the objectives, we have treated the objectives as part of the vision and strategy because they are encompassed within the schedules referred to in the definitions.
  19. The vision under Te Ture Whaimana is as follows:
 

Our vision is for a future where a healthy Waikato River sustains abundant life and prosperous communities who, in turn, are all responsible for restoring and protecting the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River, and all it embraces, for generations to come
  20. Te Ture Whaimana goes on to list 13 objectives that “will be pursued” in order to realise the vision. These objectives relate to a wide range of matters but have a strong theme of restoring and protecting iwi and community relationships with the Waikato River and restoring and
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<sup>5</sup> (2002) 8 ELRNZ 97.

<sup>6</sup> *Environmental Defence Society v New Zealand King Salmon* [2014] NZSC 38, (2014) 17 ELRNZ 442, at [131].



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protecting the River and its various components. Some key objectives relating to restoration and protection of the River include:

- (a) The restoration and protection of the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River;
  - (b) The recognition and avoidance of adverse cumulative effects, and potential cumulative effects, of activities undertaken both on the Waikato River and within the catchment on the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River;
  - (c) The recognition that the Waikato River is degraded and should not be required to absorb further degradation as a result of human activities;
  - (d) The protection and enhancement of significant sites, fisheries, flora, and fauna; and
  - (e) The restoration of water quality within the Waikato River so that it is safe for people to swim in and take food from over its entire length.
21. Te Ture Whaimana then specifies a number of strategies “to achieve the vision”. The strategies specify a range of actions to restore and protect the Waikato River. This includes establishing the current health status of the Waikato River, developing targets for improving the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River and developing and implementing a programme of action to achieve the targets for improving the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River. One of the strategies is to “ensure that cumulative adverse effects on the Waikato River of activities are appropriately managed in statutory planning documents at the time of their review”.
22. The policy required by clause 3.22 of the NPS-FM is focused on the extent and values of natural inland wetlands. Clause 3.22 and Te Ture Whaimana are therefore related as both apply to wetlands within the relevant catchments (given that wetlands are within the expansive definitions of Waikato River in the Treaty settlement legislation).
23. Several of Te Ture Whaimana’s objectives are, on their face, highly directive. For example, objective (g) is “recognition and avoidance of adverse cumulative effects, and potential cumulative effects, of activities undertaken both on the Waikato River and within the catchment on the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River”. Objective (h) is “recognition that the Waikato River is degraded and should not be required to absorb further degradation as a result of human activities”. There are also several objectives directing “restoration and protection”.
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24. Arguments can be made both for and against inconsistency between the new exceptions under clause 3.22 and Te Ture Whaimana, depending on whether the new exceptions are tested against these more directive avoidance objectives in isolation or against Te Ture Whaimana as a whole.
25. If the new exceptions in clause 3.22 are tested against the more directive objectives in isolation, it seems likely that they would be inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana. For example, the amendments to clause 3.22 provide exceptions to the directives that loss of extent of natural inland wetlands must be avoided, their values are protected, and their restoration promoted. The application of the effects management hierarchy to those exceptions allows management that could instead result in effects being minimised, remedied, offset or compensated. Objective (h) on the other hand requires avoidance of adverse cumulative effects on the Waikato River (which includes wetlands within the catchment) and there are no specific exceptions. When compared in this way, it is difficult to see how the two policy directions could co-exist.
26. However, we prefer to approach the question of inconsistency in a way that considers Te Ture Whaimana as a whole, rather than isolating objectives and focusing on those. When read as a whole, we consider that Te Ture Whaimana is an aspirational framework that anticipates a process to achieve the vision over time. This is inherent in the word “vision”, the requirement that the objectives are to “be pursued” and the strategies which include a scientific programme of action to set and achieve improvement targets for the Waikato River over time.
27. This “step-wise” or progressive nature of Te Ture Whaimana was accepted by all parties in the appeals on Proposed Plan Change 1 and is consistent with indications in the Environment Court’s Minute dated 27 March 2024:
- We urge all parties to consider the PC1 provisions as an initial step rather than a complete answer but that clear progress is needed at this early stage to ensure that real progress is made.
28. We consider that Te Ture Whaimana as a whole does not necessarily require the immediate and absolute cessation of all adverse effects on the Waikato River. This approach is reflected in strategy (k), which corresponds to objective (h). This strategy is to “ensure that cumulative adverse effects on the Waikato River of activities are appropriately managed in statutory planning documents at the time of their review”. The strategies are actions to achieve the vision, and the directive for cumulative adverse effects to be “appropriately managed” is less directive than the avoidance objective. The objective
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is also qualified as a matter to “be pursued” rather than necessarily being absolute and immediate.

29. If the new exceptions under clause 3.22 are compared to the wider context of Te Ture Whaimana, including the management approach in strategy (h), the two sets of provisions can be more readily reconciled without inconsistency. For example, the new exceptions all require the regional council to be satisfied that the effects of the exempted activity will be managed through applying the effects management hierarchy, which aligns with the management approach on strategy (h).
30. In conclusion, we consider that the new exceptions required under 3.22 of the NPS-FM can co-exist with Te Ture Whaimana, if Te Ture Whaimana is read as we prefer i.e. in the round as an aspirational framework that anticipates an ongoing process to achieve the vision over time. We therefore consider that the new exceptions under clause 3.22 are not necessarily inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana and are not precluded from inclusion in the regional plan under the respective Treaty settlement Acts.
31. For completeness, we note that the new exceptions under clause 3.22 do not override the requirement to consider Te Ture Whaimana and give it weight through the resource consent process.

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**It is not necessary to consider partial application of the new exceptions**

32. You have also asked whether, if the new exceptions under clause 3.22 of the NPS-FM are inconsistent with Te Ture Whaimana, WRC could still make the amendments so that they apply to the rest of the Region outside the Waikato and Waipā catchments.
33. Given our conclusion to the previous question, it is not necessary for us to answer this question.

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**Please call or email to discuss any aspect of this advice**

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## 6.2 A BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY FOR THE WAIKATO REGION - ENDORSEMENT OF DRAFT STRATEGY FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

<b>Rā   Date:</b>	<b>10 April 2026</b>
<b>Kaituhi   Author:</b>	<b>Judy van Rossem, Specialist Policy Advisor</b>
<b>Kaituku   Authoriser:</b>	<b>Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information</b>
<b>Mana whakatau   Delegation Status:</b>	<b>Committee has delegated authority to make the recommended decision</b>

### TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To present the final Draft Biodiversity Strategy for the Waikato Region and seek Committee endorsement to release the draft strategy for public consultation.

### KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Waikato Regional Council is leading the development of a regional biodiversity strategy (the strategy) as a strategic priority and to meet statutory obligations under the [National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 \(NPS-IB\)](#).
3. The strategy sets a 25-year regional direction to 2050 to protect, restore and enhance indigenous biodiversity across terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine and coastal/marine environments.
4. The strategy provides a high-level, region-wide framework, including a shared vision, outcomes and strategic focus areas across four pou (pillars). It is designed to bring together the significant biodiversity work already underway across the region and to shift from fragmented, project-by-project efforts to a more coordinated, long-term and partnership-based approach.
5. A companion implementation plan will translate the strategy into detailed actions, roles, timeframes and resourcing, and will be developed following public consultation.
6. The content of the draft strategy has been informed by engagement with Waikato Biodiversity Accord partners and stakeholders, supported by technical evidence, statutory requirements and regional policy context. Council workshops held during the development of the strategy have provided guidance on direction, scope and next steps.
7. This report recommends that the committee endorses the Draft Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy for release for public consultation, enabling wider community and stakeholder feedback to further refine the strategy and inform the development of the draft implementation plan.

### TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *A Biodiversity Strategy for the Waikato Region - Endorsement of Draft Strategy for Public Consultation* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 6 May 2026) be received.
2. That the Strategy and Policy Committee endorse the Draft Biodiversity Strategy, subject to any amendments identified during discussion at the Committee meeting.

## **HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND**

8. Protecting and restoring the region's natural resources including the native plants and animals and the ecosystems they live in is one of the Council's strategic priority areas under [Te Pae Tawhiti – Strategic Direction 2026-2036](#). The Council has statutory responsibilities under the Resource Management Act 1991 to maintain indigenous biodiversity, and under Policy 16 of the NPS-IB to prepare a regional biodiversity strategy to guide landscape-scale biodiversity protection and restoration for the region.
9. In 2024, the Council approved the [Waikato Biodiversity Accord](#), a high-level agreement between the Council, territorial authorities, iwi partners, the Department of Conservation, QEII National Trust and the Ministry for Primary Industries. The Accord established a shared commitment and set of principles for working together to develop and implement a regional biodiversity strategy, and provides the collaborative foundation on which the strategy has been built.
10. In March 2025, the Council approved the project plan, scope, engagement approach and timeline for development of the regional biodiversity strategy. Later in 2025, the Council resolved to accelerate the project so the strategy would be sufficiently advanced to inform business case development for the Long Term Plan 2027–2037.
11. The draft strategy has been informed by a comprehensive engagement programme undertaken during late 2025, including workshops with representatives from territorial authorities, iwi, central government agencies, NGOs, industry groups and community organisations.
12. This engagement tested aspirations, challenges, opportunities and priorities for biodiversity restoration across the region and demonstrated strong support for a coordinated regional approach. Engagement insights were complemented by analysis of iwi environmental management plans, existing strategies, state of environment information and national direction.
13. Council workshops and progress reports during strategy development have provided updates on the project timeline, engagement approach, emerging themes and draft content.

## **TE TAKE | ISSUE**

14. Despite substantial effort by councils, iwi, landowners, agencies and communities, biodiversity restoration in the Waikato region is often fragmented and resource-constrained. A shared regional framework will make better use of opportunities for collaboration and coordinated investment, and better address biodiversity decline.
15. The NPS-IB requires a regional biodiversity strategy that sets shared priorities and guides collective action. The draft strategy responds to this requirement by providing a cohesive

regional framework that aligns national direction, iwi aspirations, council responsibilities and community action.

16. Council endorsement is now sought to release the draft strategy for public consultation so that wider community and stakeholder feedback can be considered before the strategy is finalised and work begins on a detailed implementation plan.

## THE STRATEGY

17. The draft strategy provides a high-level framework (vision, guiding principles, outcomes, foundational pillars (pou) and strategic focus areas) and establishes a pathway for the development of detailed actions, responsibilities, timeframes and resourcing in a companion implementation plan, enabling flexibility and adaptation as science, mātauranga, and policy settings evolve.
18. The strategy is split into three parts:
  - (a) **Part 1: Setting the Scene** - provides an overview of the Waikato region's biodiversity, the statutory context and rationale for a biodiversity strategy.
  - (b) **Part 2: The Strategy Framework** – describes the vision, outcomes, foundational pillars/pou and strategic focus areas. Guiding principles (“how we’ll work”) follow the Waikato Biodiversity Accord principles.
  - (c) **Part 3: Strategy Implementation and Monitoring** - describes the strategy to implementation pathway, and monitoring/review of the strategy.
19. The strategy is included as **Attachment 1** to this report.
20. Four pou define the major domains where effort must occur and these provide the structural backbone of the strategy. They organise activity without describing detailed work. Each of the four pou contribute to all five of the strategy's long term biodiversity outcomes:
  - Pillar/Pou 1 – Protecting and restoring what matters
  - Pillar/Pou 2 – Empowering landowners and communities
  - Pillar/Pou 3 – Partnering with tangata whenua
  - Pillar/Pou 4 – Strengthening data, policy and investment.
21. The strategic focus areas identify the priority directions within each pou and clarify what must advance in that domain to achieve the strategy's outcomes
22. The draft strategy brings together stakeholder engagement insights, technical evidence and statutory context into a region-wide framework that is future-focused, partnership-based and designed to guide practical action over time.
23. It is aligned with Te Mana o te Taiao, New Zealand's Biodiversity Strategy 2020.
24. The draft strategy recommends a shift to a single, coordinated regional approach to halt and reverse biodiversity decline by 2050. It sets clear direction to prioritise protection and restoration where it will make the greatest impact—particularly rare, depleted and highly threatened ecosystems such as lowland forests, wetlands, peatlands, dunes and estuaries—and to reconnect ecosystems from ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea) through catchment-to-coast planning.
25. Strengthening the systems that enable coordinated action include:

- partnering with tangata whenua so that mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga guide planning, delivery and monitoring;
  - empowering landowners and communities through accessible funding, capacity building, education and regional biodiversity hubs; and
  - scaling up coordinated, landscape-scale pest control and nature-based solutions that also deliver multiple climate resilience and community benefits.
26. Embedding biodiversity into spatial planning is a core recommendation of the strategy. This includes and complements the setting of regional environmental limits, applying a no net loss of biodiversity principle, aligning policy settings across councils, and using targeted incentives to go beyond minimum compliance and drive measurable biodiversity gains.
27. Rather than prescribing detailed actions, the strategy proposes a staged implementation pathway supported by shared monitoring, clear indicators and an independent, multi-party oversight group, with a companion implementation plan to set out responsibilities, timing, resourcing and accountability.
28. The strategy was presented and discussed at a workshop with councillors on 9 April 2026. A number of amendments have been made in response to feedback given at the workshop. The key changes are:
- **Chairperson’s Foreword and Pou 1 (Protecting and restoring what matters):**  
Added and amended wording to strengthen the connection between biodiversity, catchment management, flood protection and climate resilience, emphasising nature-based solutions and catchment-scale integration.
  - **Outcome 4 (Mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga):**  
Amended the outcome intent to clarify that iwi leadership is expressed through partnership, shared decision-making and delivery, rather than autonomy over region-wide biodiversity management or funding.
  - **Pou 1 (Protecting and restoring what matters):**  
Amended wording to clearly align biodiversity outcomes with biosecurity and pest management, and to highlight pest control as a core mechanism for protecting biodiversity and the region’s productive base.
  - **Pou 2 (Empowering landowners and communities):**  
Expanded the “why this is a priority” section to explicitly recognise the critical role of volunteers in biodiversity delivery and the need for sustained support, partnerships and resourcing to address volunteer fatigue and organisational vulnerability.
  - **Chairman’s Foreword, Section 1.2 (Setting the Scene), and Section 2.3 Outcomes (introductory text):**  
Updated language to more clearly link biodiversity to economic wellbeing and productivity, while retaining consistency with the Council’s Strategic Direction.
  - **Pou 3 (Partnering with tangata whenua):**  
Added clarification to explain the intent of “equitable” funding for iwi and hapū as recognising different starting points, land tenure and capacity.
  - **Pou 4 (Strengthening data, policy and investment):**  
Added explanatory text to clarify that the “no net loss of indigenous biodiversity” approach will be refined and made practicable through statutory planning processes, engagement and implementation planning.

- **Pou 4 (Strengthening data, policy and investment) and Section 3.2 Monitoring:**  
Strengthened emphasis on baselines, measurability and monitoring to enable clearer demonstration of biodiversity outcomes and the effectiveness of restoration investment.
  - **Section 1.2 (What is biodiversity and why is it important?):**  
Added narrative recognising biodiversity's intrinsic value and acknowledging diverse worldviews across the Waikato region, alongside cultural, environmental, social and economic perspectives.
29. The outcomes and pou have been rearranged and renumbered to provide a more logical flow of ideas. Minor wording refinements have been made to improve clarity, consistency and alignment with councillor feedback across sections and pou.

### ĒTAHI ATU TAKE | OTHER MATTERS

30. The draft strategy and supporting documents including the engagement report will be placed on the Council's website. The consultation period will be open for six weeks.
31. During this public consultation phase, staff will also engage with key stakeholders to gather input for draft implementation plan, focusing on actions, resources, financial implications and timing.
32. It is proposed to set up an independent strategy oversight group with membership that includes Waikato Biodiversity Accord partners, to assist with the development and delivery of the implementation plan. WRC will maintain oversight of the strategy and implementation plan and provide support for this group.
33. Developing a regional biodiversity monitoring programme with a comprehensive suite of indicators across different agencies is one of the strategic focus areas in the strategy and this will be an important part of the implementation plan.
34. The strategy will be formally reviewed every 3-5 years, aligned where possible with Long Term Plan cycles national biodiversity strategy reviews. The next formal review is planned for 2030.

### TE URUTAI KI TE HURIHANGA ĀHUARANGI | ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

35. This decision will increase the ability of the Council and region to proactively respond to the impacts of climate change now or in the future.
36. Having a regional biodiversity strategy strengthens the Council's ability to respond to climate change by prioritising ecosystem protection and restoration as nature-based solutions that reduce climate risks now—such as flooding, erosion, heat stress and coastal inundation—while improving long-term resilience. By coordinating action at a landscape scale, targeting climate refugia, improving connectivity (ki uta ki tai), and aligning investment and planning, the strategy enables proactive adaptation over time as climate pressures intensify and conditions change.

### TE WHAKAMAURU – TE WHAKAHEKE I NGĀ PĀNGA KI TE ĀHUARANGI | MITIGATION – REDUCING IMPACTS ON THE CLIMATE

37. The preparation and implementation of a regional biodiversity strategy may contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

38. The strategy sets out a pathway for greenhouse gas emission reduction by prioritising nature-based solutions – such as restoring wetlands, forests and coastal ecosystems – that sequester carbon while reducing emissions from degraded ecosystems.

### **TE HAUTŪ ĀHUARANGI | CLIMATE LEADERSHIP**

39. There are opportunities for the Council to demonstrate leadership arising from this decision. The Council can provide leadership through the adoption of this strategy – recognising the need for a strategy and a future-focused approach.
40. Having a regional biodiversity strategy allows the Council to demonstrate climate leadership by clearly positioning ecosystem protection and restoration as a deliberate climate response, and by recommending that nature-based solutions be embedded into regional planning, investment and partnerships. By taking a coordinated, long-term and evidence-based approach, the Council shows leadership in integrating biodiversity, climate adaptation and economic and community wellbeing, setting a clear example for other regions and sectors on how to respond proactively to climate change.

### **TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

41. Although the subject matter is critical to the ongoing development of the natural character, resilience and prosperity of the Waikato region, having regard to the decision-making provisions in the LGA and Council’s Significance and Engagement Policy, a decision in accordance with the recommendations is not considered to have a high degree of significance. Staff are of the opinion that the content and recommendations in this report are consistent with the decision-making requirements contained in Part Six of the LGA and that the decision-making requirements of the LGA have been met.

### **TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT**

42. The Regional Biodiversity Strategy sits within a clear legislative framework that requires and guides its development. The National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB) requires regional councils to prepare a regional biodiversity strategy to guide landscape-scale protection and restoration of indigenous biodiversity in collaboration with iwi, territorial authorities and communities. This requirement is supported by the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), which places duties on councils to maintain indigenous biodiversity and protect significant habitats.
43. At the regional level, the Waikato Regional Policy Statement provides overarching policy direction for biodiversity management, and the strategy helps translate these statutory requirements into a coordinated, practical regional framework.
44. The strategy is also consistent with the purpose of the Local Government Act – which is to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future.

### **NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHERE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

45. The draft strategy is underpinned by:

- (a) The Council's 2023-2033 strategic direction: Biodiversity and Biosecurity strategic priority.
  - (b) The Council's 2026-2036 strategic direction: Sustaining natural resources strategic priority.
46. To the best of the writer's knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by Council or any plan required by the LGA or any other enactment.

### TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

47. This decision will not impact the Council's obligations under the Treaty. Iwi perspectives have been fundamental to the strategy, shaping its direction through a focus on protecting taonga and embedding mātauranga Māori into biodiversity planning and delivery. The strategy recommends supporting iwi partnership, participation and engagement in restoring habitats and ecosystems.

### WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

48. The Committee is asked to endorse the draft regional biodiversity strategy for release for public consultation, because it gives the region a clear, shared plan to work together, focus effort where it matters most, and protect nature in ways that also support communities, the economy and future resilience.

### NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

- 49. [National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 \(amended December 2025\)](#)
- 50. [Te Mana o te Taiao: Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020](#)
- 51. [Waikato Biodiversity Accord | Waikato Regional Council](#)
- 52. Te Reo o te Taiao: A Call from Nature – Developing a Regional Biodiversity Strategy for the Waikato Region (*WRC Policy Series – available on request*)
- 53. Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy Feedback Summary – Phase 1 Workshops and Stakeholder Meetings (*WRC Policy Series – available on request*)
- 54. Analysis and Development of a Vision Statement for the Draft Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy, report by Place Group Environmental Planning Ltd (*available on request*)

### ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

- 1. **Te Mauri o te Taiao - A Biodiversity Strategy for the Waikato Region 2026-2050 - Draft (May 2026) – (Doc # 35550482)** [↓](#)

# *Te Mauri o te Taiao*

# **A Biodiversity Strategy for the Waikato Region 2026-2050**

**May 2026 DRAFT**

Waikato Regional Council  
Private Bag 3038  
Waikato Mail Centre  
HAMILTON 3240

This document has been prepared by Waikato Regional Council staff with assistance from Place Group Limited.

Waikato Regional Council would like to sincerely thank the communities and stakeholders whose input has been invaluable in preparing *A Biodiversity Strategy for the Waikato Region*. While a non-statutory document, the council is committed to working collaboratively with stakeholders, groups, iwi, communities and individuals to implement the strategy.

## Foreword | He Whakapuakitanga

We have a special relationship with the environment/te taiao - it underpins how we live in the Waikato region. From mountains to the sea, the health of our forests, wetlands, rivers and coasts sustains our communities, livelihoods and cultural identity. Yet the cumulative pressures of habitat loss, pests, pollution and a changing climate demand that we do more—and do it together.

This biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region (the strategy) sets a clear, shared direction for the next 25 years to stop further loss, reverse decline, and invest where the return for communities and nature is highest. [This includes integrating biodiversity restoration with catchment management, recognising nature as essential infrastructure that protects communities and supports long-term economic wellbeing.](#) It aims to turn many good projects into one coordinated programme of action across land, freshwater, coastal and marine environments.

Guided by the Waikato Biodiversity Accord and shaped by iwi, individuals, community groups, industry representatives, environmental organisations and central government agencies, the strategy focuses effort where it counts most: restoring rare and depleted ecosystems, reconnecting habitats mountains to sea *ki uta ki tai*, building consistent policy frameworks, improving data and monitoring, and supporting locally led action with practical tools and incentives. It is intentionally concise, future-focused and designed to adapt as science, indigenous knowledge/mātauranga and national direction evolve.

## Strategy on a Page | He Whakarāpopototanga rautaki

<b>Vision</b> <i>Te mauri o te taiao, he taiao mauri ora</i> Biodiversity in the Waikato region: thriving, connected, resilient	
<b>Outcome 1</b>	<b>Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai (mountains to the sea)</b>
<b>Outcome 2</b>	<b>Indigenous/taonga species and their habitats are recovering</b>
<b>Outcome 3</b>	<b>Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion the Waikato region's biodiversity</b>
<b>Outcome 4</b>	<b>Māori leadership, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga guide biodiversity restoration</b>
<b>Outcome 5</b>	<b>People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region</b>
<b>Pou</b>	<b>Strategic Focus Areas</b>
<b>Pou 1 Protecting and restoring what matters</b> <i>Protecting and restoring native species, habitats and the ecological functioning of ecosystems by addressing climate, biosecurity and other threats while preserving the values that connect people to the environment.</i>	1. Prioritise restoration of the region's most threatened, rare and vulnerable ecosystems 2. Reconnect ecosystems through ecological corridors, linkages and buffers – ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea) 3. Protect and restore wetlands, peatlands, floodplains, riparian margins and coastal systems as frontline nature-based solutions for climate and ecosystem resilience 4. Scale up coordinated landscape-scale pest control operations with specific targets as a core biodiversity and biosecurity delivery mechanism
<b>Pou 2 Empowering landowners and communities</b> <i>Empowering landowners and local communities through advocacy, education and practical support while building community capacity and capability to actively participate in biodiversity efforts.</i>	5. Maintain a network of regional biodiversity support hubs for community groups, landowners and local iwi/hapū 6. Facilitate long-term, coordinated and accessible funding to enable secure investment in biodiversity restoration 7. Grow public awareness, participation and storytelling about biodiversity across the region 8. Build capacity and capability for locally led action
<b>Pou 3 Partnering with tangata whenua</b> <i>Working alongside iwi and hapū to embed mātauranga Māori and guide engagement, leadership and delivery in biodiversity management, while upholding the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.</i>	9. Embed iwi aspirations, te ao Māori values, and mātauranga Māori into all biodiversity planning and delivery 10. Establish long-term, equitable funding pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau-led biodiversity action 11. Co-design and implement Māori led monitoring and kaitiaki development programmes 12. Create co-designed partnership models for ecosystem restoration on shared Māori land 13. Restore culturally significant biodiversity sites and revitalise customary practices
<b>Pou 4 Strengthening data, policy, and investment</b> <i>Building the quality data, policy and funding settings needed to prioritise the right places for biodiversity restoration, measure impact and guide action across the Waikato region.</i>	14. Strengthen policy consistency and alignment across councils and central government 15. Develop a clear biodiversity spatial framework for the region 16. Set and implement regional environmental limits for biodiversity 17. Deliver “no net loss of indigenous biodiversity” through clear policy and strong rules 18. Develop and implement targeted incentives to reverse ongoing ecosystem degradation and drive biodiversity gains beyond “no net loss” 19. Build shared understanding and better knowledge through targeted research, consistent biodiversity monitoring and clear accessible information

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# 1 Setting the scene | Te whakarite kaupapa

## 1.1 Introduction

Archey's frogs and alpine bogs, bacteria and butterflies, chromosomes and centipedes, eels and estuaries, forests and fumaroles, genes and geckos, wetlands and whales – all form part of the rich biodiversity of the Waikato region.

Our natural capital sustains and defines us. Biodiversity is central to te ao Māori, supports primary industries and local economies, and strengthens the identity and wellbeing of our communities.

The Waikato region's ancient forests/ngahere, volcanic mountains/maunga and its rivers, lakes and coastal wetlands are ecological ~~treasures as well as~~ cultural ~~treasures/taonga~~ that carry the genealogy/whakapapa of the iwi and hapū who have cared for them across generations. These ecosystems support an extraordinary range of species and community wellbeing, yet many are increasingly under pressure.

The Waikato Biodiversity Accord (2024) laid the groundwork by bringing partners together to collaborate on a regional approach to biodiversity management. This first regional biodiversity strategy sets a shared 25-year direction for protecting, restoring and enhancing biodiversity across freshwater, estuarine, coastal and marine environments. Developed by Waikato Regional Council on behalf of the region, it reflects the collective knowledge and aspirations of iwi and hapū, territorial authorities, individuals, industry representatives, community groups, environmental organisations and central government agencies.

## 1.2 What is biodiversity and why is it important?

In this strategy, “**biodiversity**” means **indigenous biodiversity** - the native plants, animals, fungi and other living organisms that occur naturally in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the ecosystems, habitats and ecological processes that support them. It includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems, consistent with the Resource Management Act 1991<sup>1</sup> (RMA) and the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023<sup>2</sup> (NPS-IB).

[The strategy recognises that biodiversity has intrinsic value—it matters in its own right, not only for what it provides to people. It also acknowledges that biodiversity is understood and valued through diverse worldviews across the Waikato region, including mātauranga Māori, science, stewardship traditions, community experience and sector-based perspectives.](#)

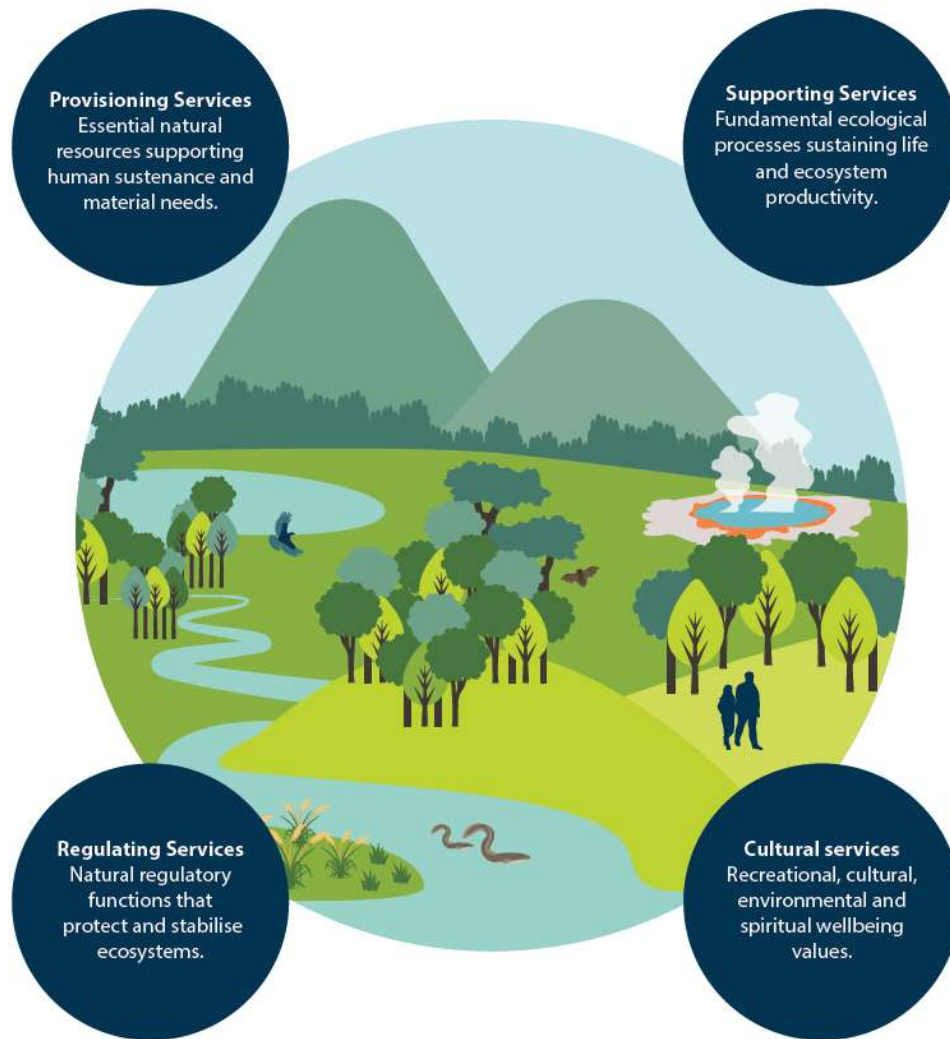
Healthy biodiversity underpins the natural systems that support our daily lives. It helps keep water clean, form soil, recycle nutrients, store carbon, and buffer the impacts of floods, erosion, storms and droughts. Diverse, functioning ecosystems are also more resilient to climate change, pests, diseases and habitat loss, and are recognised as essential natural capital that supports environmental health, productive land use, and local livelihoods.

Biodiversity also supports cultural, social, community and economic wellbeing (Figure 1). It shapes local identity, attracts visitors, supports recreation and learning, and anchors people's connection to place. Healthy, diverse ecosystems also reduce pest and disease risks that can impact primary sector productivity, [including horticulture, forestry and aquaculture](#). For tangata whenua, biodiversity is part of a living whakapapa, and protecting native species and habitats supports mātauranga Māori, customary practices and intergenerational kaitiakitanga.

<sup>1</sup> Resource Management Act 1991 No 69 (as at 17 December 2025)

<sup>2</sup> National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 | Ministry for the Environment

**Figure 1 Ecosystem services** (adapted from [Hauraki District Council Biodiversity Strategy, March 2025<sup>3</sup>](#))



**Cultural Services**

- mental and physical health
- recreation and tourism
- cultural identity and expression (e.g. waiata, karakia)
- species conservation
- education
- aesthetic values
- sense of place
- inspiration
- spiritual and religious values

**Provisioning Services**

- food
- water
- medicines
- wood and fibre
- biomass fuel
- ornamental resources
- genetic resources

**Supporting Services**

- nutrient and water cycling
- primary production and photosynthesis
- soil formation
- oxygen production
- habitat provision

**Regulating Services**

- air purification
- climate stabilisation
- disease control
- flood mitigation
- erosion control
- water purification and waste treatment
- plant pollination

<sup>3</sup> [Biodiversity Strategy - Hauraki District Council](#)

### 1.3 Biodiversity in the Waikato region

The Waikato region is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most ecologically varied regions, spanning alpine areas, geothermal fields, extensive river systems, wetlands and lakes, conifer-broadleaved forests, dunes, estuaries and coastal habitats<sup>4</sup>. These diverse landscapes support many endemic species and ecosystem types found nowhere else in the country.

Freshwater systems are a defining feature, with more than 16,000 km of rivers and streams and approximately 200 lakes<sup>5,6,7</sup>. These waterways support migratory native fish such as tuna (eel) and whitebait (īnanga and kōkopu), diverse invertebrates, aquatic plants and nationally important waterbirds.

The coastline extends approximately 1,150 km across the exposed west coast, the Firth of Thames/Tikapa Moana and the Coromandel Peninsula. The Firth of Thames is internationally recognised for its importance to aquaculture and migratory shorebirds<sup>8</sup>. Coastal waters support fish and shellfish; rocky reefs host rich marine habitat with macroalgae forests, horse mussel beds, sea grass meadows, tubeworm beds, sponge gardens, anemones, sea pens and corals<sup>9</sup>. Near Port Waikato, the critically threatened Māui still occurs<sup>10</sup>.

Despite significant land modification, over 7,500 native forest fragments under 25 hectares remain, including kahikatea stands that support high beetle diversity and offer refuge in the pastoral landscape. Moehau and the Coromandel Peninsula host distinctive fauna such as the Coromandel striped gecko, Moehau stag beetle, brown kiwi and Archey's frog, and native birds like the North Island robin/toutouwai, kākā and kererū<sup>11</sup>.

The region also contains 70 percent of New Zealand's geothermal ecosystems, home to globally unique plants, animals, and micro-organisms. Peatlands are another defining feature - Kopuatai Peat Dome, the country's largest intact restiad bog, is internationally significant for its unique vegetation and carbon storage capacity. The internationally recognised Whangamarino Wetland supports threatened species including the swamp helmet orchid, the giant wire rush with its native moth, "Fred the thread" and the Australasian bittern (the latter two species also occur at Kopuatai). Karst landscapes extend from Port Waikato to Mōkau, including glow worm caves, Awaroa koromiko (*Hebe scopulorum*), cave spleenwort (*Asplenium cimmericum*), eyeless cave beetles and cave wētā<sup>12,13</sup>. Urban areas also host important biodiversity - at least 31 threatened and at risk species have been recorded within Hamilton City<sup>14</sup> including a rare urban population of pekapeka-tou-ra, native long-tailed bats. Coastal towns, such as Whaingaroa/Raglan, include numerous significant biodiversity areas intertwined with residential properties.<sup>15</sup>

Together, these ecosystems and species, along with many others, are what makes the Waikato region ecologically distinct and varied.

<sup>4</sup> The Waikato region extends to 12 nautical miles offshore.

<sup>5</sup> [Waikato region shallow lakes management plan Volume 1 TR201458.pdf](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Waikato region shallow lakes management plan: Volume 2 | Waikato Regional Council](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Experts highlight challenges and priorities for restoring Waikato lakes : University of Waikato](#)

<sup>8</sup> [DOC & Ramsar Convention Secretariat \(2004\) OLDDM-289132 - Ramsar RIS Firth of Thames](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Biodiversity data extraction for the Waikato area of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park TR202508](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Marine and Estuarine - Waikato Biodiversity Forum](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Consulting on the protection of native species in Moehau](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Karst \(Limestone\) - Waikato Biodiversity Forum](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Mapping Significant Natural Areas of the Waikato region: the physical basis for the identification of karst ecosystem sites \(updated methodology report\) | Waikato Regional Council](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Hamilton City Council \(2022\) Proposed Plan Change 9: Appendix-12-Significant-Natural-Areas.pdf](#)

<sup>15</sup> [van der Zwan, W. & Kessels, G. \(2017\) Significant Natural Areas of the Waikato District TR201736.pdf](#)

## 1.4 Pressures and their impacts on biodiversity in the Waikato region

Biodiversity in the Waikato region has undergone substantial historical loss and continues to decline. Many native ecosystems are still being fragmented or degraded each year, and many populations of threatened species are reducing (Figure 2).

Freshwater ecosystems face significant pressure. Intensified land use has increased sediment, nutrients and other contaminants entering into rivers, lakes and estuaries<sup>16</sup>. Nearly half of monitored river sites now fall below national sediment standards<sup>17</sup>. Native fish such as tuna and whitebait are declining due to poor water quality, habitat loss and barriers that block their migration.

Estuaries, as receiving environments, are especially vulnerable. Sediment build-up, nutrient enrichment and low oxygen conditions are degrading habitats including seagrass beds, shellfish reefs and sponge gardens. Around 2000km<sup>2</sup> – about one fifth of the Waikato coastal marine area – is disturbed each year by bottom contact fishing<sup>18</sup>.

Habitat loss on land remains a major driver of decline. Only 27% of the region retains native vegetation, and around 75% of peat wetlands have been drained<sup>16</sup>. These long-term pressures contribute to more than 300 native species now threatened or at risk of extinction<sup>19</sup>.

Invasive plants and animals add further pressure by suppressing native regeneration, altering habitat structure, and preying on and outcompeting native birds, fish, reptiles and invertebrates.

Climate change is putting extra pressure on biodiversity by altering temperatures, rainfall patterns and natural cycles, making it harder for species to survive and adapt. More frequent storms, droughts, heatwaves and rising seas are damaging habitats, shifting where species can live, and increasing the spread of pests and diseases – all of which accelerate the decline of already vulnerable ecosystems.

Together, habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution and water quality degradation, invasive species and climate change all have a compounding effect. Despite these challenges, halting and reversing biodiversity decline is possible, but only with greater and more coordinated action.

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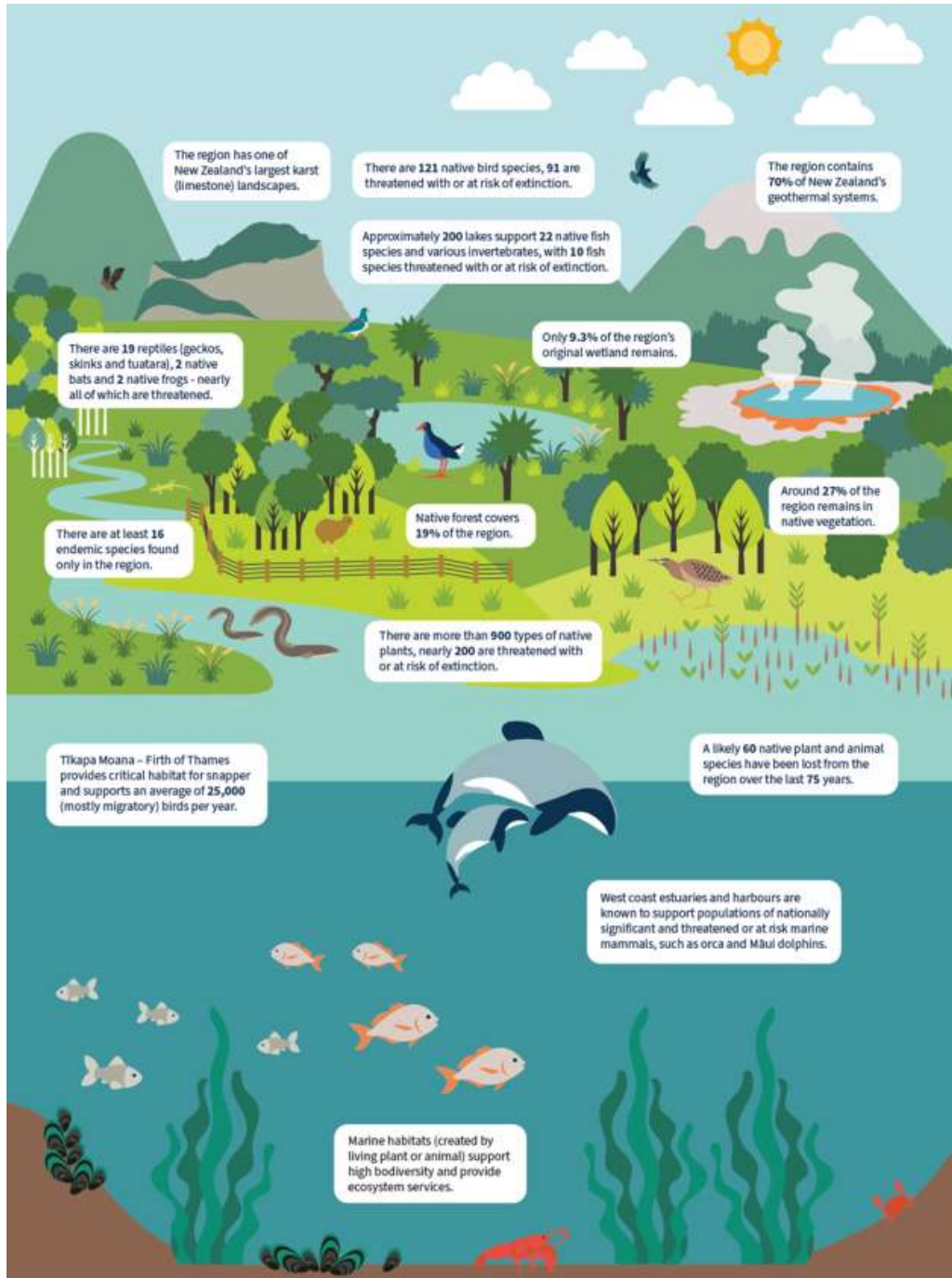
<sup>16</sup> [Te oranga o te taiao | Waikato State of the Environment 2022](#)

<sup>17</sup> [State of the environment monitoring river water quality](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Impacts of seabed disturbance in the Waikato region TR202304](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Nationally threatened and regionally uncommon species of the Waikato region TR201928.pdf](#)

Figure 2 Biodiversity in the Waikato region



### 1.5 The current biodiversity management system

Indigenous biodiversity spans land, air, freshwater, coastal and marine boundaries, crossing the jurisdictions of local, regional and national agencies. It is guided by a wider framework of obligations including the RMA, NPS-IB and also Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2050<sup>20</sup>. For the region, the Waikato Regional Policy Statement 2016 (WRPS)<sup>21</sup> provides overarching policy direction, alongside iwi environmental management plans<sup>22</sup> and Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato (Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River)<sup>23</sup>, the Treaty-based frameworks for restoring the Waikato River.

Biodiversity management is place-based and involves many partners: iwi and hapū; community groups, landowners, businesses, industry, research organisations, territorial authorities, councils and central government agencies (Figure 3).

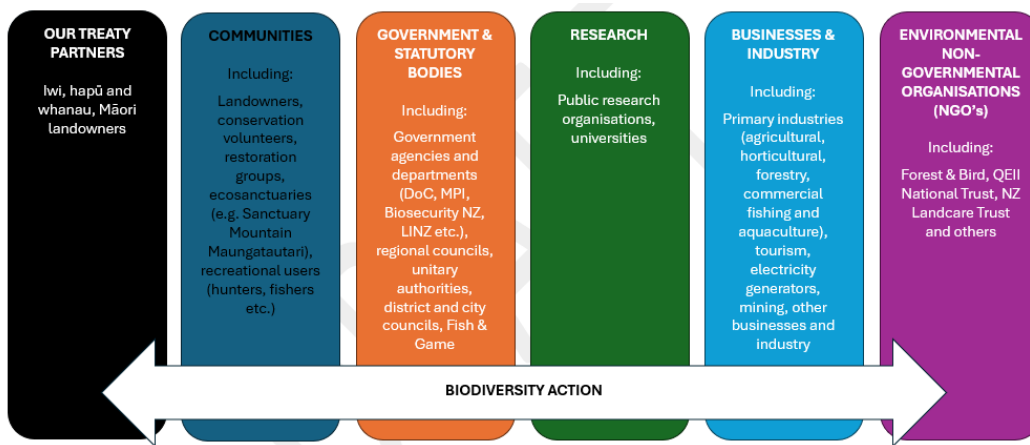
The regions’ 11 territorial authorities have key roles through district plans and local biodiversity strategies, such as Hamilton City Council’s *Nature in the City Strategy*<sup>24</sup>, Hauraki District Council’s biodiversity strategy<sup>25</sup> and Waikato District Council’s *Taiao in the Waikato* strategy<sup>26</sup>.

The Department of Conservation (DOC) is a key partner, managing large areas of public conservation land, leading threatened species recovery, pest/weed control and habitat protection. DOC also oversees the implementation of Te Mana o te Taiao under the international Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)<sup>27</sup>.

Private landowners, businesses and industry groups play a crucial role through pest control, native planting, fencing waterways and investing in restoration. Community groups, trusts and catchment collectives also deliver significant on-the-ground work/mahi alongside mana whenua and councils - much of it on private land where many threatened ecosystems remain<sup>28</sup>.

Figure 4 highlights some of the biodiversity initiatives underway across the Waikato region. Appendices 1 and 2 summarise agency responsibilities and key biodiversity mandates across relevant laws and plans.

**Figure 3 The range of people and organisations involved in biodiversity management**



<sup>20</sup> [Te Mana o te Taiao - Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020](#)  
<sup>21</sup> [Waikato Regional Policy Statement 2016 | Waikato Regional Council](#)  
<sup>22</sup> [Iwi management plans | Waikato Regional Council](#)  
<sup>23</sup> [Vision & Strategy - Waikato River Authority](#)  
<sup>24</sup> [HCC-Nature-in-the-City-Strategy-2020 December-2020.pdf](#)  
<sup>25</sup> [Biodiversity Strategy 2025- Hauraki District Council](#)  
<sup>26</sup> [Taiao-\(nature\)-in-the-waikato-strategy-document.pdf](#)  
<sup>27</sup> [Convention on Biological Diversity: DOC's international role](#)  
<sup>28</sup> [New Zealand's latest National Report under the Convention on Biological Diversity](#)

## 1.6 Why do we need a regional biodiversity strategy?

Although many good projects are underway, work is often fragmented. A regional strategy creates one clear direction and framework to focus effort, guide investment, clarify roles and track progress across land, freshwater, coastal and marine environments. It brings national and regional priorities with locally led action, helping us meet obligations under the NPS-IB, RMA and alignment with Te Mana o te Taiao.

The strategy is intentionally high-level. It sets a vision, outcomes and strategic focus areas under four pou (themes), while detailed actions, methods, milestones and resourcing (as set out in Appendix 5 of the NPS-IB) will be developed through a companion implementation plan.

This approach lets us adapt as science evolves, pressures change, or national requirements are updated. The strategy is a starting point and will be refined over time alongside the implementation plan.

The statutory landscape is shifting with resource management reform. The Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill<sup>29</sup> propose a single combined plan per region, nationally consistent biodiversity rules, “no net loss” goals, ecosystem health limits and clearer spatial planning for development and protection. Incentives and other tools are also signalled to balance public benefits with impacts on individual landowners<sup>30</sup>.

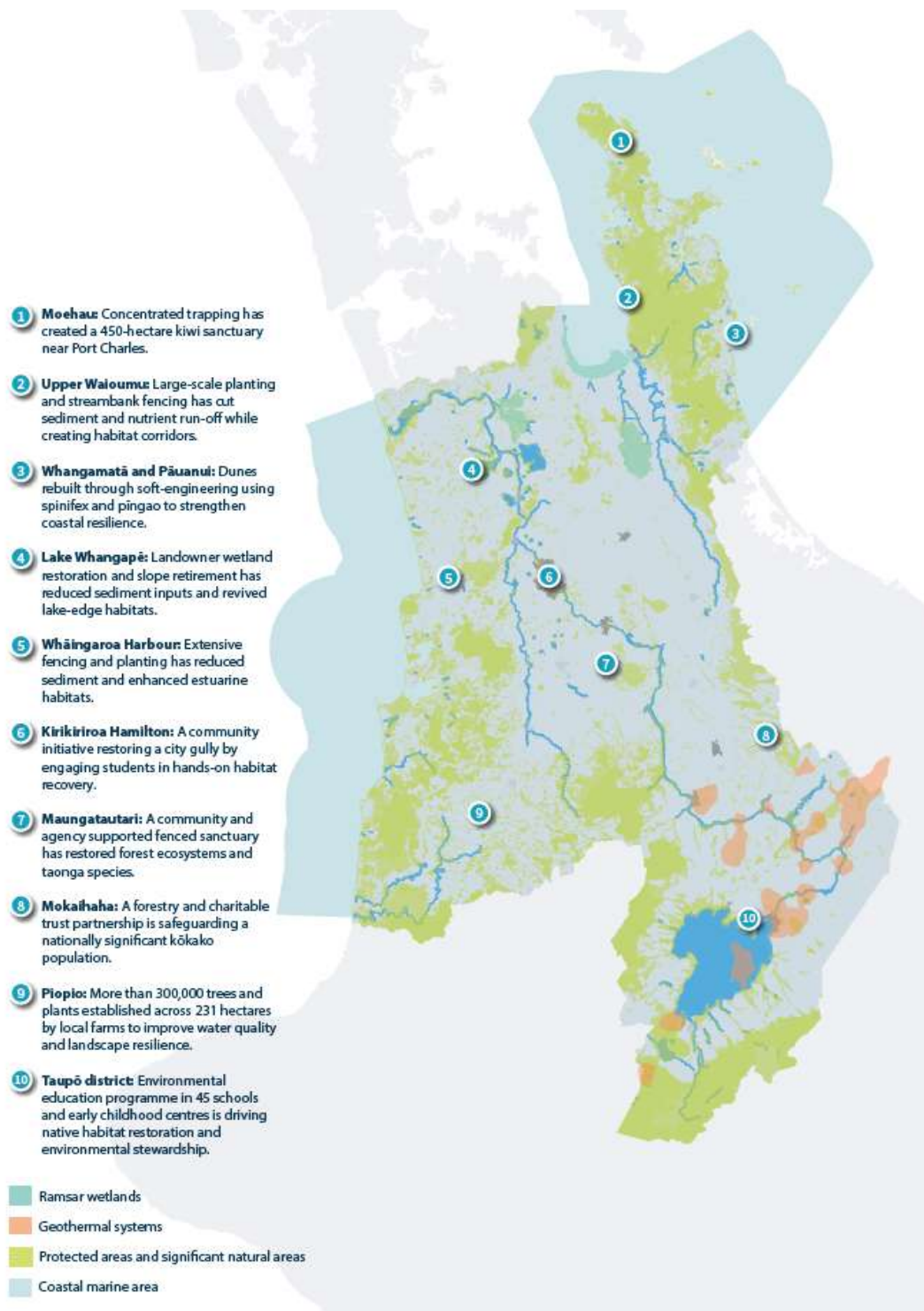
In this context of ongoing legislative change, the regional biodiversity strategy needs to stay agile so that it can align with future national and regional planning requirements.

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<sup>29</sup> [Resource management reforms | Ministry for the Environment](#)

<sup>30</sup> [New Planning System: Protecting the environment | Ministry for the Environment](#)

**Figure 4 Restoring biodiversity in the Waikato Region – project examples**



## 2 The regional biodiversity strategy framework | Te anga a te rautaki ā-rohe

### 2.1 Vision

***Te mauri o te taiao, he taiao mauri ora***  
 Biodiversity in the Waikato region: thriving, connected, resilient

### 2.2 Guiding Principles

***How we'll work***

The Waikato Biodiversity Accord<sup>31</sup> provided a foundation for the development of this strategy. The Accord is a regional agreement that brings together organisations with the common goal of creating and putting the strategy into action.

The Accord **principles** have been adopted to guide the actions of all parties and the delivery of this strategy (Appendix 3).

### 2.3 Outcomes

***What we are aiming to achieve by 2050 or earlier***

The Strategy sets out five **outcomes** for 2050.

The first two outcomes focus on restoring healthy biodiversity across the landscape. Outcomes 3 and 4 are about empowered and connected people. This reflects the fact that for people to thrive, the natural world around them must thrive too. Healthy, diverse ecosystems provide services that people rely on (Figure 1), meaning our wellbeing is inseparable from the wellbeing of nature and biodiversity.

The last outcome highlights that the Waikato region’s long term [economic wellbeingprosperity](#) and resilience rely on healthy, ~~resilient~~ ecosystems that support [regional prosperity and economic productivitygrowth](#).

We will know we have been successful in achieving the vision when we are achieving these outcomes.

#### **Outcome 1 Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai (mountains to the sea)**

**INTENT:** *By 2050, the overall extent, condition and connectivity of ecosystems has increased, linking forests and mountains with lowland environments and the sea. Priority effort is delivering measurable recovery first in rare and depleted ecosystems (e.g. lowland forests, wetlands, dunes and estuaries) to ensure a representative range of healthy, functioning ecosystem types across the region.*

<sup>31</sup> Waikato Biodiversity Accord | Waikato Regional Council

**Outcome 2 Indigenous/taonga species and their habitats are recovering**

**INTENT:** *By 2050, indigenous species threat status has improved in the region, with secure habitats and restored migration pathways (e.g. fish passage, corridors) supporting self-sustaining populations.*

**Outcome 3 Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion the Waikato region's biodiversity**

**INTENT:** *By 2050, people, landowners and the community are informed, supported and motivated to act as active stewards of indigenous biodiversity. They have the knowledge, resources, funding and partnerships they need to take meaningful action, with barriers reduced and opportunities made easy to access, so that caring for nature becomes a shared part of everyday life, local identity and community pride.*

**Outcome 4 Māori leadership, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga guide biodiversity restoration**

**INTENT:** *By 2050, [Treaty-based partnership approaches enable whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori organisations to exercise their roles as rangatira and kaitiaki, leading and partnering in the delivery of biodiversity restoration and in shared decision-making. iwi and hapū are leading planning, decision-making, delivery and monitoring at place.](#) Mātauranga Māori indicators are reported alongside biophysical measures, and culturally significant sites and [taonga](#) species show clear gains.*

**Outcome 5 People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region**

**INTENT:** *By 2050, people and nature prosper together because healthy ecosystems underpin the region's economy, protect communities from climate impacts, and support sustainable land and water use. Biodiversity is recognised as essential natural infrastructure – strengthening productivity, resilience and wellbeing across the Waikato region.*

**2.4 Strategic Focus Areas**

Four **pou** (pillars) define the major domains where effort must occur and these provide the structural backbone of the strategy. They remain stable across the strategy timeframe and organise activity without describing detailed work.

Each of the four pou contribute to all five of the strategy's long term biodiversity outcomes.

The **strategic focus areas** identify the priority directions within each pou and clarifies what must advance in that domain to achieve the strategy's outcomes.

**Pou 1 Protecting and restoring what matters**

*Protecting and restoring native species, habitats and the ecological functioning of ecosystems by addressing climate, biosecurity and other threats while preserving the values that connect people to the environment.*

**Strategic Focus Areas**

<b>1</b>	<b>Prioritise restoration of the region’s most threatened, rare and vulnerable ecosystems</b>
<p><b>What this means:</b></p> <p>Focus restoration effort first on ecosystems at greatest risk - such as lowland forests, wetlands/peatlands, dunes and other under-represented habitat types. Ensure these ecosystems are identified, mapped and embedded in planning, prioritisation and investment decisions - to ensure their long-term representation across the region.</p>	
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These ecosystems hold exceptional biodiversity and other values but are heavily depleted or close to ecological tipping points.</li> <li>• Actively managing the most threatened areas by addressing threats and improving ecological condition yields the most meaningful ecological gains.</li> <li>• Prioritisation helps to ensure representation of all ecosystem types and aligns local action with DOC’s national ecosystem-based management approach.</li> <li>• Protecting the rarest ecosystems strengthens the region’s overall ecological resilience and secures a viable future for species dependent on them (especially threatened species).</li> </ul>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Reconnect ecosystems through ecological corridors and buffers – ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea)</b>
<p><b>What this means:</b></p> <p>Identify, protect and enhance ecological <del>connectivity corridors</del> across terrestrial, freshwater, coastal/marine and aerial <del>environments to reduce pathways to improve connectivity and avoid</del> habitat fragmentation <del>and</del>; supporting species movement from mountains to sea. This includes <del>buffering existing habitats, creating habitat “steeping stones” along catchment riparian zones and</del> incorporating <del>these corridor</del> areas into the Regional Spatial Plan and into related plans and consenting decisions.</p>	
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habitat fragmentation <del>(e.g. clearing a continuous indigenous vegetation sequence into two or more fragments, or losing freshwater passage for species through culverts or dams)</del> is a major barrier to species movement and ecosystem resilience.</li> <li>• <del>Enhancing, buffering and linking habitats</del> <del>Corridor and buffer restoration</del> delivers greater biodiversity gains than isolated <del>restoration</del> sites.</li> <li>• <del>Functional connectivity improves climate resilience by enabling</del> species to <del>move, migrate and</del> shift ranges <del>as conditions change, improving resilience to climate change and recover after</del> disturbance.</li> <li>• <del>Improved connectivity in Reconnected</del> upper catchments directly benefits <del>downstream ecosystems and</del> coastal receiving environments.</li> </ul>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Protect and restore wetlands, peatlands, floodplains, riparian margins and coastal systems as frontline nature-based solutions for climate and ecosystem resilience</b>

<p><b>What this means:</b></p> <p>Prioritise the protection, restoration, and re-establishment of natural flood- and climate-buffering systems across the region - wetlands, floodplains, riparian margins, steep upper catchments and hillsides and coastal dunes.</p> <p>Efforts can be focused in high-risk areas such as the lower Waikato, Hauraki Plains and Coromandel, implementing measures such as re-wetting peatlands, expanding riparian buffers, restoring dunes and estuarine margins, and creating “room for the river” to improve natural water storage, sediment retention and coastal resilience.</p>
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Waikato region has lost over 90% of its wetlands, removing natural flood storage and increasing sedimentation and carbon emissions.</li> <li>• Nature-based solutions<sup>32</sup> reduce flood peaks, buffer drought, slow runoff protect against coastal inundation, and promote ecosystem health<sup>33</sup> - particularly in vulnerable areas like eastern Coromandel and the Firth of Thames which are increasingly exposed to sea level rise, storm surge and marine heatwaves.</li> <li>• <a href="#">These interventions also directly support regional flood protection objectives and can reduce long term reliance on engineered solutions.</a></li> <li>• High quality nature-based solutions can be cost-effective, deliver co-benefits of biodiversity habitat and cultural values, and are endorsed in national adaptation plans and climate change policies.</li> </ul>

<p><b>4 Scale up coordinated landscape-scale pest control operations with specific targets</b></p>
<p><b>What this means:</b></p> <p>Coordinate WRC, DOC, iwi, territorial authorities and community groups to deliver region-wide and coastal/marine pest control programmes with firm, measurable targets for key animal pests (e.g. goats, deer, pigs, possums, feral/stray cats, mustelids and rats), pest plants and marine pests.</p> <p>Align control methods, timing and monitoring across land tenures, improve pathway control (e.g. vessels and equipment) and incorporate new technologies (e.g. remote sensing, AI-assisted monitoring) to increase efficiency. Use both result and outcome monitoring to track biodiversity gains and guide decisions.</p> <p><a href="#">This strategic focus area will be delivered in alignment with the Waikato Biosecurity Strategy and the Regional Pest Management Plan, ensuring biodiversity priorities directly inform pest control investment and operations.</a></p>
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders identified coordinated animal, plant and marine pest control with measurable targets as the most cost-effective way to restore biodiversity at scale and reduce reinvasion.</li> <li>• A warming climate is expanding pest ranges on land and at sea, increasing pressures on forests, wetlands, coastal ecosystems and other vulnerable biodiversity areas.</li> <li>• Joined-up delivery, pathway management and innovative tools improve efficiency, reduce duplication, limit reinvasion risk and deliver better biodiversity outcomes in priority catchments and coastal waters.</li> </ul>

<sup>32</sup> [Nature-based solutions for climate adaptation - Roadmap for scaling use in Aotearoa New Zealand \(December 2024\)](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Nature-based solutions for flood management - Literature review. NIWA Client report June 2024](#)

**Pou 2 Empowering landowners and communities**

*Empowering landowners and local communities through advocacy, education and practical support while building community capacity and capability to actively participate in biodiversity efforts from mountains to sea.*

**Strategic Focus Areas**

<b>5</b>	<b>Maintain a network of regional biodiversity support hubs for community groups, landowners and local iwi/hapū</b>
<p><b>What this means:</b></p> <p>Scale up a coordinated support structure linking local hubs, iwi, community groups, landowners, coastal communities, councils and agencies to improve collaboration, cut duplication and make work visible—including cross-district and catchment to coast partnerships.</p>	
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Biodiversity restoration across the Waikato region is delivered through a combination of agency-led programmes (including DoC and regional councils) and locally led action by communities, landowners, environmental groups and iwi. but they require consistent recognition and practical support.</a></li> <li>• Many community groups and volunteer networks operate in isolation and are stretched for resources, missing opportunities to work together.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Volunteer fatigue and organisational vulnerability threaten long term biodiversity outcomes if not supported by stable partnerships, technical assistance and sustained funding.</a></li> <li>• Community feedback has emphasised the need for better connection and collaboration to maximise collective impact.</li> </ul>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Facilitate long-term, coordinated and accessible funding to enable secure investment in biodiversity restoration</b>
<p><b>What this means:</b></p> <p>Create a coordinated regional funding framework that makes it easier for iwi/hapū, landowners, community groups and local hubs to access sustained, longer-term support for biodiversity restoration. This includes exploring new and innovative funding tools such as philanthropic partnerships and biodiversity credits, and aligning funding decisions with regional biodiversity priorities.</p>	
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many groups face short-term, uncertain funding and high competition for grants.</li> <li>• The government’s Jobs for Nature programme demonstrated that consistent, long-term investment unlocks action at scale, builds capacity and strengthens partnerships.</li> <li>• Stakeholders want coordinated, fair (<a href="#">transparent</a>) and accessible funding, reduced administrative burden, and new tools to broaden investment opportunities and reduce pressure on rates.</li> </ul>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Grow public awareness, participation and storytelling about biodiversity across the region</b>
<p><b>What this means:</b></p> <p>Deliver a region-wide, co-designed education and communications programme that celebrates local success, promotes pride in biodiversity restoration, uses engaging visual tools and clearly shows</p>	

people how they can get involved. Tailored resources will support communities and groups such as schools, landowners and industry partners.

**Why this is a priority:**

- Success stories and progress are not widely shared.
- Low awareness of biodiversity's value remains a major barrier.
- Communities want accessible maps, inspiring case studies and plain-language content.
- People need clear information about roles, responsibilities and where to find support.

**8 Build capacity and capability for locally led action**

**What this means:**

Develop a region-wide programme that strengthens local leadership, skills and practical capability by providing training, tools and support for community leaders, landowners, community nurseries and pest control contractors. This includes working with education providers to also grow a strong pipeline of skilled graduates - ensuring the region has the ecological, technical and cultural expertise needed for long-term restoration and kaitiaki roles.

**Why this is a priority:**

- Communities are ready to lead but need support and clear pathways to act.
- Limited volunteer and governance capacity is holding back restoration.
- Strong demand exists for skills in nursery management, pest control and restoration methods.
- Shared training and monitoring improve data quality and supports better decisions.
- Long-term workforce development - including tertiary training - will ensure appropriately skilled and experienced people continue to enter the field.

### Pou 3 Partnering with tangata whenua

*Working alongside iwi and hapū to embed mātauranga Māori and guide engagement, leadership and delivery in biodiversity management, while upholding the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.*

#### Strategic Focus Areas

<b>9</b>	<b>Embed iwi aspirations, te ao Māori values, and mātauranga Māori into all biodiversity planning and delivery</b>
<p><b>What this means:</b> Integrate iwi environmental management plans (IEMPs), Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements, mātauranga Māori, and relevant legislation (including Te Ture Whaimana) across all pou and priority areas, and support community groups to build effective relationships with iwi and hapū.</p>	
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IEMPs set clear biodiversity aspirations that should guide strategy implementation.</li> <li>• Mātauranga Māori and western science both inform effective, culturally grounded outcomes.</li> <li>• Current legislation and resource management reform require alignment with iwi-specific legislation, partnerships with Māori and better integration of Māori values in planning.</li> <li>• Embedding iwi perspectives strengthens trust, legitimacy and Treaty-aligned relationships.</li> </ul>	
<b>10</b>	<b>Establish long-term, equitable funding pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau - led biodiversity action</b>
<p><b>What this means:</b> Establish tailored incentives to enable Māori-led restoration projects, monitoring and governance on shared Māori land/whenua, aligned with Treaty and settlement arrangements and coordinated through the implementation plan. <a href="#">“Equitable” funding recognises different starting points, land tenure and capacity amongst iwi and hapū.</a></p>	
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the Waikato region, 44% of Māori freehold land contains indigenous vegetation, offering significant biodiversity restoration opportunities while respecting landowner aspirations.</li> <li>• Many iwi face funding and capacity constraints that limit long-term, Māori-led action on their whenua.</li> <li>• Feedback highlighted the need for practical incentives specifically for shared Māori whenua.</li> <li>• Sustained, Māori-led biodiversity restoration needs long-term, multi-partner funding.</li> </ul>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Co-design and implement Māori -led monitoring and kaitiaki development programmes</b>
<p><b>What this means:</b> Work with mana whenua to deliver Māori-led monitoring that integrates mātauranga Māori, tracks taonga species and ecosystem health, builds guardian/kaitiaki capability, and follows agreed iwi and hapū data stewardship protocols.</p>	
<p><b>Why this is a priority:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iwi seek to monitor taonga species so that their values and priorities shape decisions.</li> <li>• Mana whenua often detect environmental changes early through close connection with whenua and wai.</li> </ul>	

- Cultural indicators are largely absent from current biodiversity monitoring.
- Youth/rangitahi training and joint monitoring strengthen kaitiakitanga and trust between partners.

**12 Create co-designed partnership models for ecosystem restoration on shared Māori land**

**What this means:**  
 Develop partnership agreements between agencies, community organisations and iwi and hapū to support restoration on shared Māori whenua, balancing biodiversity protection with landowner aspirations and recognising existing joint decision-making arrangements.

- Why this is a priority:**
- Many iwi seek to progress biodiversity restoration in line with settlement commitments and cultural values but require practical support.
  - Managing significant natural areas (SNAs) on Māori land is sensitive and benefits from partnership approaches.
  - Tangata whenua have called for genuine, respectful collaboration that upholds cultural practices.
  - Co-designed biodiversity restoration programmes enable shared planning, decisions and resource use.

**13 Restore culturally significant biodiversity sites and revitalise customary practices**

**What this means:**  
 Work with iwi and hapū to protect and restore the biodiversity of culturally significant sites and their taonga species, and revitalise practices such as food/kai-gathering, traditional healing/rongoā harvesting, prohibition/rāhui and lunar calendar/maramataka-based management.

- Why this is a priority:**
- Restoring taonga species supports both ecological resilience and cultural wellbeing, enabling traditional kai to return to marae tables.
  - Customary practices align care for the environment with natural cycles and support climate resilience and allow ecosystems to recover.
  - Protecting culturally significant places uplifts authority/mana and deepens Māori identity and connection to place.

**Pou 4 Strengthening data, policy, and investment**

*Building the quality data, policy and funding settings needed to prioritise the right places for biodiversity restoration, measure impact and guide action across the Waikato region.*

**Strategic Focus Areas**

<b>14</b>	<b>Strengthen policy consistency and alignment across councils and central government</b>
<b>What this means:</b> Work with territorial authorities and DOC to clarify roles and align biodiversity strategies, plans and rules across government, ensuring they are consistent, practical and support delivery of this strategy.	
<b>Why this is a priority:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fragmented policies and differing council approaches to biodiversity management create confusion and reduce effectiveness.</li> <li>Local biodiversity strategies need to regional backing to deliver district-scale action.</li> <li>Integrating biodiversity actions with climate, catchment and biosecurity planning enables more joined-up, place-based solutions that support healthier and more resilient ecosystems.</li> </ul>	
<b>15</b>	<b>Develop a clear biodiversity spatial framework for the region</b>
<b>What this means:</b> Ensure that the Regional Spatial Plan (required by the new Planning Bill) identifies and protects ecological corridors, climate refugia, significant natural areas and key land-freshwater-coastal linkages and reflects these in zoning and land use controls.	
<b>Why this is a priority:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional Spatial Plans integrate land use, infrastructure, and environmental limits in one strategic document - a unique opportunity to map and secure biodiversity priorities spatially.</li> <li>A spatial stocktake focuses effort on high impact places (e.g. corridors, refugia) rather than spreading resources too thinly.</li> <li>A corridor-based, landscape approach supports connectivity and resilience across terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems.</li> </ul>	
<b>16</b>	<b>Set and implement regional environmental limits for biodiversity</b>
<b>What this means:</b> Define and apply regional ecosystem health limits (such as minimum indigenous vegetation cover and habitat requirements) and embed them into the new regional planning framework and related strategies.	
<b>Why this is a priority:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Natural Environment Bill will require councils to implement environmental limits for air, water, soils and indigenous biodiversity.</li> <li>Limits provide clear boundaries for development and ensure ecosystems do not fall below minimum health thresholds amid rapid land use change.</li> <li><a href="#">Quantitative targets</a> help focus restoration effort and guide long-term biodiversity management. <a href="#">They can be developed through local indigenous biodiversity strategies at the territorial authority level, and embedded into the regional spatial plan</a></li> </ul>	

<b>17</b>	<b>Deliver “no net loss of indigenous biodiversity” through clear policy and strong rules</b>
<b>What this means:</b> Embed a “no net loss of indigenous biodiversity” requirement into the regional planning framework, all planning decisions, consent processes and restoration programmes.	
<b>Why this is a priority:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High value but fragmented ecosystems in the Waikato region continue to decline under land use pressure and climate change.</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Waikato Regional Policy Statement mandates a no net loss approach to indigenous biodiversity, aiming for long term maintenance and enhancement.</a></li> <li>• The NPS-IB and Natural Environment Bill both require no net loss of indigenous biodiversity, <a href="#">with regions responsible for defining practicable pathways to achieve this in consultation with their communities.</a></li> <li>• Stakeholder and particularly iwi engagement highlighted the need for clear, enforceable bottom lines to reverse incremental biodiversity loss.</li> </ul>	
<b>18</b>	<b>Develop and implement targeted incentives to reverse ongoing ecosystem degradation and drive biodiversity gains beyond “no net loss”</b>
<b>What this means:</b> Practical, tailored incentives will encourage restoration and help address long-standing pressures on ecosystems (such as historical land use change, pests and habitat loss), and support landowners and communities who want to enhance biodiversity alongside productive uses. Tools may include biodiversity credits, covenant support, environmental bonus lots, streamlined consenting for restoration, and recognition programmes for committed land stewards.	
<b>Why this is a priority:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many priority biodiversity areas are on private or shared Māori land and need practical support.</li> <li>• Community feedback emphasised that whilst “no net loss” is a good starting point, many biodiversity areas need restoration and protection to secure their long-term sustainability.</li> <li>• Incentives lower cost barriers, support voluntary action and encourage landowners to go beyond compliance.</li> <li>• Tailored support helps address the specific challenges of shared Māori land.</li> <li>• Rewarding active enhancement builds long-term stewardship and ecological resilience.</li> </ul>	
<b>19</b>	<b>Build shared understanding and better knowledge through targeted research, consistent biodiversity monitoring and clear, accessible information</b>
<b>What this means:</b> Promote consistent monitoring methods and shared indicators (including mātauranga Māori and cultural measures) to track biodiversity across ecosystems and land tenures. Provide clear, accessible reporting tools such as maps, dashboards and visual summaries so that people easily understand where biodiversity is located, how it is changing, and where action will have the greatest impact. Promote standardisation of data collection and storage.	
<b>Why this is a priority:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">There is a strong desire from those involved in biodiversity restoration to be able to demonstrate measurable progress in order to justify investment.</a></li> </ul>	

- Patchy and inconsistent monitoring limits our ability to assess trends or understand regional change; scaling it up will give a clearer picture of ecosystem health and restoration effectiveness.
- People want simple, reliable information to guide action and avoid duplication.
- Cultural and social indicators ensure tangata whenua values and community perspectives inform biodiversity decisions.
- Clear, visible reporting supports transparency, collaboration and more effective, evidence-based decisions.

### 3 Strategy implementation and monitoring | Te whakatinanatanga me te aroturukitanga o te rautaki

#### 3.1 Implementation

Indigenous biodiversity in the Waikato region is in decline, and delay will lock in higher costs, greater risk, and fewer future choices. This strategy sets a regional direction towards stopping further biodiversity loss, reverse decline where it matters most, and invest where the return for communities and nature is highest.

It prioritises rare and threatened ecosystems, landscape-scale connections from mountains to sea, building capability and readiness, and actions that deliver multiple public benefits - including climate resilience, flood protection, water quality, cultural wellbeing and economic productivity.

Success depends on a number of shifts including:

- From fragmented projects to coordinated, region-wide action.
- From short-term funding to sustained, aligned investment.
- From data gaps and duplication to shared evidence, spatial planning, consistent limits and rules.

Rather than assuming increased funding, the implementation plan will identify where existing resources can be redirected, consolidated or better coordinated, clarify which focus areas need early investment and outline how partners can support delivery within current budgets.

#### Strategy to Implementation Pathway

This strategy defines outcomes, pou and strategic focus areas (Table 1). A full suite of indicators and measures will be developed as part of the implementation phase ( some examples are provided in Table 2).

**Table 1 Strategy hierarchy overview**

Level	Purpose	Key Question	Example
Vision	Long-term future state	What future condition do we seek?	Biodiversity in the Waikato region: thriving, connected, resilient
Outcomes	Measurable regional changes that realise the vision	What changes must occur by 2050?	Ecosystem connectivity; species and habitat recovery; Māori leadership; regional collaboration; people and nature prosper together
Pou	Strategic domains where effort must occur	Where must effort occur?	Ecosystem protection; communities; tangata whenua partnerships; data, policy and investment systems
Strategic Focus Areas	Priority directions within each pou	What must progress within each pou?	E.g. Habitat restoration; pest control; biodiversity hubs; funding frameworks; Māori-led restoration; spatial planning; restoration incentives
Indicators	Evidence that outcomes are improving	Is the outcome improving?	E.g. Ecosystem health monitoring; pest tracking; biodiversity indicators; mātauranga Māori monitoring; regional reporting

Table 2 shows a strategy to implementation pathway, based on the pou structure. The purpose is to begin to identify broad timeframes, possible lead agencies and indicators or measures of success. This pathway is designed to provide a clear line of sight from the strategy to the full implementation plan.

Each strategic focus area below has a suggested timeframe for commencement: short term (<2 years); medium term (<5 years) and long term (>5 years). Timeframes for commencement consider existing progress, reliance on multiple entities, national priorities, complexity of issues and working within available resourcing.

Following release of the strategy, a collaborative implementation planning process will begin. The implementation plan is the primary delivery mechanism and will provide a more detailed level of analysis around feasibility, priorities, timeframes and budgets (see below).

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**Table 2 Strategy to Implementation Pathway**

Outcomes	Pou	Strategic Focus Area	Timeframe	Responsibility (Lead*)	Potential Indicators to Measure Progress
1. Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai (mountains to the sea) 2. Indigenous/taonga species and their habitats are recovering 3. Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion the Waikato region's biodiversity 4. Māori leadership, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga guide biodiversity restoration 5. People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region	<b>POU 1 Protecting and restoring what matters</b>	1. Focus on the most threatened ecosystems	LONG	WRC in collaboration with other entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecosystem health indicators</li> <li>Habitat extent and connectivity</li> <li>Threatened species status</li> <li>Taonga species trends</li> <li>Pest population trends</li> </ul>
		2. Landscape connectivity	LONG	WRC in collaboration with other entities	
		3. Nature-based solutions	LONG	WRC* in collaboration with other entities	
		4. Pest animal/plant control	MEDIUM	WRC*, DOC*, MPI	
	<b>POU 2 Empowering landowners and communities</b>	5. Biodiversity hubs	SHORT	WRC* and DOC* in collaboration with other entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration funding levels / investment leveraged from partners</li> <li>Participation in restoration programmes</li> <li>Number of active community hubs</li> <li>Community engagement indicators</li> <li>Restoration project coverage</li> <li>Biodiversity awareness indicators</li> </ul>
		6. Funding frameworks	MEDIUM	All entities	
		7. Community education	SHORT	All entities	
		8. Capacity development	MEDIUM	All entities including education providers	
	<b>POU 3 Partnering with tangata whenua</b>	9. Embed te ao Māori into planning	MEDIUM	WRC* and iwi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mātauranga Māori monitoring indicators</li> <li>Number of Māori-led restoration programmes</li> <li>Cultural engagement indicators</li> <li>Trends in taonga species</li> </ul>
		10. Sustainable funding and incentives	MEDIUM	WRC*, DOC* in collaboration with other entities	
		11. Māori-led monitoring	MEDIUM	Iwi*, WRC, DOC	
		12. Co-design and partnerships	SHORT	Iwi*, WRC, DOC	
		13. Restoration on shared Māori land	MEDIUM	Iwi* in collaboration with other entities	
	<b>POU 4 Strengthening data, policy, and investment</b>	14. Policy alignment	LONG	WRC* and territorial authorities* in collaboration with DOC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy alignment indicators across councils</li> <li>Biodiversity datasets and monitoring coverage across ecosystems</li> <li>Accessibility and use of regional biodiversity datasets</li> <li>Consistency of biodiversity reporting</li> </ul>
		15. Biodiversity spatial planning	SHORT	WRC*, DOC	
		16. Environmental limits	SHORT	WRC*	
		17. No net loss policy	MEDIUM	WRC*, territorial authorities	
		18. Restoration incentives	MEDIUM	WRC*, DOC, territorial authorities and other entities	
		19. Accessible monitoring information	SHORT	WRC*, DOC*	

## Oversight of Implementation

To support collaboration and implementation of the Strategy, the regional council will establish a core implementation group with membership that includes tangata whenua, territorial authorities, Department of Conservation, QEII National Trust and other entities and organisations as required. This group will guide collective work programmes and maintain focus on long-term outcomes.

Adding independent oversight of the biodiversity strategy keeps momentum focused on long-term biodiversity outcomes and builds public trust and accountability.

The regional council will maintain the overall responsibility and will prepare a detailed implementation plan, in collaboration with the core implementation group and others as required.

## Implementation Plan

The implementation plan for the regional biodiversity strategy will be a working document, updated regularly as actions evolve, new work is identified, or funding and timeframes change. It will translate the technical and procedural requirements of the NPS-IB into a practical, region-wide approach, ensuring that the strategy delivers on national biodiversity obligations while supporting local action.

The implementation plan will be developed soon after the final strategy is adopted and will operationalise outcomes, pou and strategic focus area through a funded delivery programme with sequenced, funded actions with confirmed responsibilities, timeframes, partnership alignment and monitoring/reporting expectations. It will outline:

- **What is being done now** - current work under each strategic focus area
- **What will be done and when** – the specific actions planned each year or across multiple years
- **Responsibilities** – who will lead and support each action
- **How each action contributes** – how the action supports the strategy outcomes
- **How tangata whenua will be involved** – including how Pou 2 partnership, resourcing and cultural monitoring commitments will be implemented in practice (e.g. agreements and data stewardship arrangements)
- **How the actions will be funded** – including alignment with partner budgets and investment
- **What resources are needed** – staff, technical support, equipment, or funding required for delivery
- **Any risks and how they will be managed.**
- **How progress will be tracked** – any monitoring, reporting or evaluation needed
- **How to address emerging issues that contribute to biodiversity decline** – e.g. climate change.

The initial implementation plan will be developed to cover the first phase until 2030, focusing on setting the systems in place to deliver the strategy, especially the short to medium term priorities. A three-year implementation cycle will follow this initial phase, in line with agency long-term planning cycles. This will allow the strategy to accommodate our understanding of the best methods and approaches to meet the outcomes as new knowledge and tools become available.

Annual reporting will track progress against strategy commitments and actions in the implementation plan.

### 3.2 Monitoring and reporting

The NPS-IB requires a regional biodiversity monitoring programme, to help us understand whether indigenous biodiversity is improving, what threats are most urgent, and whether strategy actions are working.

Table 2 shows some potential indicators that could be used to track progress. Existing state of the environment monitoring for the region provides some baseline and trend information but gaps remain across ecosystems, species assemblages and emerging pressures, meaning important changes can go unnoticed. Developing a more comprehensive suite of indicators is one of the strategic focus areas in this strategy and this will be an important part of the implementation process.

Monitoring will align with existing reporting systems [across different organisations](#) and incorporate mātauranga Māori indicators through partnership with tangata whenua.

Monitoring reporting will occur at the end of each implementation cycle to allow that monitoring to inform the development of the next implementation plan.

### 3.3 Review

The Strategy will be formally reviewed every 3–5 years, aligned where possible with Long-Term Plan cycles and national biodiversity strategy timing. Earlier review may occur if significant policy or system changes arise.

The next formal review is planned for 2030.

## Glossary | Ngā kupu whakamārama

Term	Definition
<b>At risk</b>	A species that is not currently threatened, but could quickly become so if their decline continues, or if new threats arise (as identified in the New Zealand Threat Classification System lists <sup>34</sup> ).
<b>Awa</b>	River, stream, creek.
<b>Biodiversity</b>	Biological diversity or the variability among living organisms from all sources including land, marine and freshwater ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species (including genetic diversity), between species and of ecosystems.
<b>Biosecurity</b>	The exclusion, eradication or management of pests and diseases that pose a risk to the economy, environment, human health or cultural/social values.
<b>Capacity</b>	The skills, knowledge, resources and organisational capability required to undertake biodiversity work.
<b>Climate change</b>	Long term shifts in global or regional climate patterns (typically over decades or longer). May be due to natural factors or human activities.
<b>Climate refugia</b>	Areas that remain suitable for species, natural communities or ecosystems despite wider climate change impacts.
<b>Compensation / biodiversity compensation</b>	Actions, excluding offsets, that address residual adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity after all avoidance, minimisation, remediation and biodiversity offsetting measures have been sequentially applied.
<b>Ecosystem</b>	A community of living organisms interacting with each other and with their physical environment.
<b>Ecosystem health</b>	The ability of an ecosystem to function naturally, support life, and remain resilient to stress or disturbance.
<b>Ecosystem services</b>	The benefits people obtain from nature, such as in nutrient cycling, soil development, clean water, climate regulation and cultural identity.
<b>Endemic species</b>	An indigenous species found only in Aotearoa New Zealand or within a particular locality or region.
<b>Enhancement</b>	The active, deliberate, and ongoing improvement of condition, resilience and biodiversity value of ecosystems, species, and genetic resources
<b>Fragmentation</b>	The breaking up of habitat into smaller, isolated areas that results in a loss of ecological connectivity.
<b>Habitat</b>	The area or environment where an organism or ecological community lives or occurs naturally for some or all of its life cycle, or as part of its seasonal feeding or breeding pattern.
<b>Hapū</b>	Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe.
<b>Healthy ecosystem</b>	An ecosystem that functions naturally, is resilient to stress and supports diverse species.

<sup>34</sup> New Zealand Threat Classification System

Term	Definition
<b>Indigenous</b>	Native to Aotearoa New Zealand.
<b>Indigenous biodiversity</b>	The living organisms that occur naturally in New Zealand, and the ecological complexes of which they are part.
<b>Indigenous vegetation</b>	Vascular and non-vascular plants that are native to the ecological district in which that area is located.
<b>Intensification</b>	An increase in the stocking rate of animals, or an increase in the level of production from a given area of land.
<b>Iwi</b>	Tribal group of Māori people descended from a common ancestor(s).
<b>Kaitiaki</b>	A person practising guardianship of ecosystems and natural resources.
<b>Kaitiakitanga</b>	Active protection and enhancement of the life force/mauri of ecosystems.
<b>Ki uta ki tai</b>	Managing the environment as an interconnected system – from the mountains to the sea.
<b>Mahinga kai</b>	Traditional food gathering areas.
<b>Maintaining indigenous biodiversity</b>	Ensuring no overall reduction in the population size of indigenous species; the functioning, range, extent, connectivity or resilience of their habitats and ecosystems; and where necessary, the restoration and enhancement of ecosystems and habitats.
<b>Mana</b>	Authority and prestige; can be lost, diminished or restored.
<b>Mana whenua</b>	People with ancestral authority over an area.
<b>Maramataka</b>	The traditional Māori lunar calendar used to guide environmental rhythms and seasonal activities.
<b>Mātauranga Māori</b>	Māori customary knowledge, values, practices and world views developed through long-term relationships with place.
<b>Maunga</b>	Mountain, peak.
<b>Moana</b>	Sea, ocean.
<b>Native species</b>	Species found naturally in Aotearoa New Zealand, including migrant species visiting on a regular or irregular basis.
<b>Nature</b>	A holistic term that encompasses the living environment (te taiao) i.e. all living organisms and the ecological processes that sustain them. By this definition, people are a key part of nature. <i>This strategy uses the term “biodiversity” to refer to biological diversity and “nature” when considering the wider processes, functions and connections of the natural environment, of which biodiversity is a part.</i>
<b>Nature-based solutions</b>	Actions that restore, manage or protect ecosystems to address challenges such as climate impacts, flooding and erosion while simultaneously providing community wellbeing and biodiversity benefits.
<b>No net loss</b>	Ensuring there is no overall, measurable reduction in indigenous biodiversity — including the diversity of species, their population sizes and

Term	Definition
	long-term viability, their natural range, and the extent and ecological health of native habitats and ecosystems.
<b>Offset / biodiversity offset</b>	A measurable conservation outcome (result in a net gain in the type, amount, and condition of indigenous biodiversity compared to that lost) that replaces residual adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity, after avoidance, minimisation and remediation have been applied.
<b>Pest</b>	Any introduced plant, animal or organism that causes significant harm to native biodiversity, the environment, human health or the economy.
<b>Private land</b>	Land owned by individuals or entities (not managed by the Department of Conservation or any other public body).
<b>Protected area</b>	Land or water protected primarily for nature conservation purposes.
<b>Public conservation land</b>	Land administered by the Department of Conservation for whatever purpose.
<b>Pou</b>	A carved wooden post, pillar, or upright support used in traditional architecture.
<b>Resilience</b>	The ability of an ecosystem to recover from and absorb disturbances, and its capacity to reorganise into similar ecosystems.
<b>Restoration</b>	Active work to improve or reinstate degraded ecosystems or habitats so that they regain their natural character, ecological processes, and cultural or visual qualities. Restoration may also include enhancement.
<b>Rohe</b>	Territory or region.
<b>Significant natural area</b>	An area identified in a council plan as an area of significant indigenous vegetation or significant habitat of indigenous fauna.
<b>Taiao</b>	The natural world.
<b>Tangata whenua</b>	The people of the land.
<b>Taonga</b>	In the context of the strategy, are plants and animals treasured by tangata whenua.
<b>Te ao Māori</b>	The Māori world; A Māori perspective / world view.
<b>Threatened species</b>	A species facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild and includes nationally critical, nationally endangered and nationally vulnerable species as identified in the New Zealand Threat Classification System lists.
<b>Wai</b>	Water.
<b>Wetland</b>	Includes permanently or intermittently wet areas, shallow water, and land water margins that support a natural ecosystem of plants and animals that are adapted to wet conditions.
<b>Whakapapa</b>	Genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent.
<b>Whenua</b>	Land.

## Appendix 1 Organisations and agencies involved in the biodiversity system

Organisation	Roles and Responsibilities
<b>Regional councils</b>	<p>WRC is responsible for maintaining indigenous biodiversity across the region under the RMA 1991, which requires regional councils to establish, implement and review objectives, policies and methods for maintaining indigenous biological diversity. This includes managing the effects of land use on freshwater, coastal and terrestrial ecosystems, protecting significant native vegetation and habitats, and supporting pest management under the Biosecurity Act 1993. The council also leads regional-scale monitoring, catchment management, and policy development to ensure biodiversity is safeguarded across all land tenures—public, private, and Māori.</p> <p>The council’s role is further guided by national direction, including the NPS-IB, which requires councils to identify and manage significant natural areas, work in partnership with tangata whenua, and maintain indigenous biodiversity through clear policies and monitoring.</p>
<b>Territorial authorities</b>	<p>Under the RMA, territorial authorities have the role of controlling the effects of the use, development and protection of land, including for the purpose of the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity.</p> <p>Territorial authorities (city and district councils) share significant responsibilities for biodiversity management under the RMA 1991. They are required to control the effects of land use and subdivision to maintain indigenous biodiversity, and to protect significant natural areas and significant habitats of indigenous fauna through their district plans. Under the NPS-IB, territorial authorities must identify and map SNAs and manage the effects of new activities on these areas, and update district plans to give effect to national and regional requirements.</p> <p>Territorial authorities also play a practical, on-the-ground role by managing biodiversity on council-owned land such as parks, reserves and road corridors, supporting local restoration groups, and aligning district-level biodiversity strategies with regional priorities.</p>
<b>Department of Conservation (DOC)</b>	<p>Responsible for conserving the natural and historic heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand on behalf of and for the benefit of present and future New Zealanders. DOC is funded and empowered to manage the public conservation estate, including on land and in marine protected areas. In the Waikato region, DOC owns or administers 347,053 hectares of protected terrestrial indigenous cover, representing 89% of all protected natural land cover in the region. DOC also directly manages 800 hectares of marine reserve - while this is the primary "no-take" area owned/managed by DOC, the region has broader marine protection coverage across the east coast (Hauraki Gulf Marine Park) and west coast (West Coast North Island marine mammal sanctuary). DOC works with private landowners, councils and other agencies to manage biodiversity in these areas.</p>
<b>Ministry for the Environment (MfE)</b>	<p>Responsible for advising the Government on policies and issues affecting the environment and for developing and providing a national environmental</p>

Organisation	Roles and Responsibilities
	management system, including laws, regulations, national policy statements and national environmental standards
<b>Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI)</b>	Responsible for growing and protecting Aotearoa New Zealand by maximising export opportunities for the primary industries, improving sector productivity, increasing sustainable resource use and protecting the country from biological risk. Te Uru Rākau (Forestry New Zealand) supports the planting of exotic and indigenous forests, sustainable forest management, programmes such as the Emissions Trading Scheme, and forestry grants. Fisheries New Zealand works to ensure that fisheries resources are managed to provide the greatest overall benefits to New Zealanders. Biosecurity New Zealand leads the biosecurity system, which includes our efforts to prevent pests and diseases from arriving and eradicating or managing those that do arrive or have been here for some time.
<b>Land Information New Zealand (LINZ)</b>	Responsible for land titles, topographical information, managing Crown property and a variety of other functions.
<b>New Zealand Fish and Game Council (Fish and Game)</b>	Fish & Game manages, maintains and enhances sports fishes and game birds in the interests of anglers and hunters.
<b>Queen Elizabeth the II National Trust (QEII Trust)</b>	The QEII Trust works with private landowners who wish to have some or all of their land legally protected. A covenant is registered on the title to the land, providing legal protection that binds the current and all subsequent landowners. The Trust contributes to the establishment of the covenant and regularly monitors the land to ensure it is managed in accordance with the covenant conditions. On private land in the Waikato region, QEII covenants cover 15,234 hectares.
<b>Waikato River Authority</b>	The WRA funds and guides projects that restore and protect the health of the Waikato River, such as wetland and riparian restoration, habitat enhancement, and initiatives that revive mahinga kai and taonga species.
<b>Public Research Organisations (PRO)</b>	There are four PROs in New Zealand – Earth Sciences New Zealand, Bioeconomy Science Institute and the New Zealand Institute for Public Health and Forensic Science and New Zealand Institute for Advanced Technology. Science New Zealand is the representative organisation. Together, the four PROs provide science-based solutions to environmental and economic challenges, bringing connection, innovation, and commercial focus to the science sector.

## Appendix 2 Key legislation and policy documents for biodiversity management

Legislation / Policy Document	Summary
<b>Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)</b>	The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit, is the global treaty to conserve biodiversity, use it sustainably, and share the benefits of genetic resources fairly and equitably. The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022) sets global goals and targets such as protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030 and restoring nature.
<b>Te Mana o te Taiao - Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020</b>	New Zealand’s national direction for addressing biodiversity decline by 2050. It sets long-term goals for protecting ecosystems, restoring degraded environments, strengthening Māori leadership in biodiversity management, and improving biosecurity. The strategy guides collaboration across central and local government, iwi/Māori, landowners, and communities, and underscores the need for coordinated monitoring and action at regional and local levels.
<b>Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)</b>	New Zealand’s national direction for addressing biodiversity decline by 2050. It sets long-term goals for protecting ecosystems, restoring degraded environments, strengthening Māori leadership in biodiversity management, and improving biosecurity. The strategy guides collaboration across central and local government, iwi/Māori, landowners, and communities, and underscores the need for coordinated monitoring and action at regional and local levels.
<b>National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 (NPS-IB) (amended 2025)</b>	The NPS-IB is a regulatory framework under the RMA designed to halt the decline of native flora and fauna, and is the national direction for addressing biodiversity decline by 2050. It sets long-term goals for protecting ecosystems, restoring degraded environments, strengthening Māori leadership in biodiversity management, and improving biosecurity.
<b>National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020</b>	The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 sets requirements for managing freshwater in a way that gives effect to <b>Te Mana o te Wai</b> , prioritising the health of water bodies and freshwater ecosystems. Councils must protect wetlands and streams, improve degraded water bodies, set environmental outcomes for values such as aquatic life, and manage fish passage barriers. It also requires comprehensive monitoring, annual reporting, and the development of freshwater plans.
<b>Resource Management (NES for Freshwater) Regulations 2020</b>	The NES-FW regulate activities that pose risks to the health of freshwater and freshwater ecosystems. A nationally consistent set of rules that cover wetland protection, fish passage, stream reclamation, intensive winter grazing, feedlots, agricultural intensification, and fertiliser use. Councils must administer consenting pathways, monitor compliance, and update regional plans to align with the regulations. For Waikato Regional Council, this work is linked to Plan Change 1 in managing land use impacts on water quality.
<b>Marine Reserves Act 1971</b>	Marine reserves provide the highest level of marine protection in New Zealand.

Legislation / Policy Document	Summary
	This act provides for the establishment of fully protected marine reserves where all extraction and disturbance are prohibited. Reserves safeguard entire marine ecosystems from the surface to the seafloor, allowing species and habitats to recover. They serve as reference areas for scientific research and long-term monitoring and contribute to wider marine biodiversity outcomes.
<b>Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana Protection Act 2025</b>	Strengthens the legislative framework for protecting the Hauraki Gulf, building on the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 and the <i>Sea Change</i> spatial plan. It supports integrated management across agencies, iwi, and stakeholders; introduces enhanced marine protection tools; and enables implementation of an ecosystem-based fisheries plan. Measures include restricting bottom trawling to a few specific corridors and improving environmental outcomes for the Gulf.
<b>Biosecurity Act 1993</b>	New Zealand's core legal framework for managing pests and diseases that threaten the environment, economy, and human health. It provides regional councils with powers to detect, control, and eradicate unwanted organisms and supports border biosecurity, surveillance, and incursion response. For Waikato Regional Council, implementation occurs through the Regional Pest Management Plan and wider biosecurity programmes.
<b>New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (amended 2025)</b>	The NZCPS requires councils to protect coastal biodiversity, preserve natural character, manage coastal hazards, and avoid adverse effects on significant coastal ecosystems. The NZCPS has strong legal force: regional policy statements and coastal plans must give effect to it. Its provisions guide how councils manage coastal development, activities, and resource use.
<b>Planning Bill (introduced in 2025)</b>	As part of the RMA reform programme, the Planning Bill replaces current regional and district plans with a single <b>Combined Plan</b> for each region, integrating spatial planning and land-use planning. The Bill embeds environmental limits, encourages urban development within clear environmental boundaries, and provides opportunities to map and protect areas of significant biodiversity value within future planning frameworks.
<b>Natural Environment Bill (introduced in 2025) (NE Bill)</b>	The purpose of the NE Bill is to establish a framework for the use, protection, and enhancement of the natural environment as a replacement to the RMA. The act requires that environmental limits and targets are prescribed for biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems, and introduces the goal of "no net loss". The NBE bill also requires that "significant biodiversity areas (SBA)" are identified and protected. There is also provision for the identification of "highly vulnerable biodiversity areas (HVBA)".
<b>Local Government Act 2002</b>	This Act requires councils to prepare Long Term Plans and Annual Plans to state a community's long-term goals and priorities and key performance targets. Key elements of Long Term/ Annual plans relating to biodiversity include funding local government activities through rates and charging development contributions.
<b>Predator Free 2050 strategy</b>	Predator Free NZ Trust and DOC are the key players of the Predator Free strategy with a goal to eradicate rates, stoats, ferrets, weasels and possums in New Zealand by 2050. The movement brings together iwi and hapū, individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, central government, local government, community groups, and landowners.

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Legislation / Policy Document	Summary
<b>Conservation Act 1987</b>	Sets out DOC's core responsibilities for conserving natural and historic heritage, including species protection, freshwater ecosystem management, and the stewardship of public conservation land. DOC works in partnership with councils, iwi, and communities to support biodiversity protection, restoration, and advocacy in environmental decision-making to protect taonga for future generations.
<b>Wildlife Act 1953</b>	Provides legal protection for most native wildlife and regulates game bird management. It specifies which species are protected, partially protected, or unprotected, and enables the creation of wildlife sanctuaries and refuges. The Act underpins protections for threatened species and guides how people may interact with wildlife. Under this Act, the Crown owns all wildlife, except unprotected species.
<b>Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato – the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River</b>	Te Ture Whaimana is the primary direction-setting document for the Waikato and Waipā rivers. It has the same effect as a national policy statements and therefore, district and regional plans and regional policy statements must give effect to it. The direction provided in Te Ture Whaimana influences the management of freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity in the Waikato region.
<b>Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS)</b>	The WRPS is a document required under section 59 of the RMA. The WRPS provides region-wide objectives and policies for managing natural and physical resources. The ECO chapter sets priorities for protecting, maintaining, and enhancing indigenous biodiversity. District and regional plans must give effect to the WRPS, ensuring consistent delivery of biodiversity requirements across the region.
<b>Waikato Regional Coastal Plan (WRCP)</b>	The WRCP contains policies, methods and rules relating to the management of the coastal environment in the Waikato region. The coastal plan recognises water quality, natural hazards and indigenous biodiversity whilst also managing the use of coastal resources (for example, dredging, sand extraction, aquaculture, and the discharge of contaminants).
<b>Waikato Biosecurity Strategy 2022-2032</b>	The Waikato Biosecurity Strategy is a non-statutory document that sets out WRC's blueprint for ensuring that the council operates and maintains a comprehensive biosecurity system within the next 10 years. It integrates the non-regulatory and regulatory biosecurity functions including the WRPMP and all other biosecurity activities such as monitoring and surveillance, research, incursion response and collaborative action.
<b>Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022 – 2032 (WRPMP)</b>	A statutory plan under the Biosecurity Act identifying pests in the region and setting objectives, rules, and methods for their management. The WRPMP supports biodiversity by controlling harmful species, aligning regional pest management with neighbouring regions, and enabling compliance and enforcement where required.

## Appendix 3 Waikato Biodiversity Accord: Principles

### Waikato Biodiversity Accord: Principles

[waikatoregion.govt.nz/biodiversity-accord](http://waikatoregion.govt.nz/biodiversity-accord)

#### Te Tiriti o Waitangi and treaty settlements as a foundation

We acknowledge that tangata whenua are kaitiaki at place and that they wish to exercise their tino rangatiratanga (authority and self-determination) over their land. We respect their mana, kawa, tikanga, mātauranga and whakapapa.

The Accord honours the deep connection between tangata whenua and the natural world through whakapapa. It will ensure that mātauranga Māori informs our biodiversity vision while upholding tikanga (protocols) and addressing historical breaches of Māori land rights. We are guided by the principles of partnership, protection, participation and shared decision-making.

*Hāpaitia te ara tika e pūmau ai te rangatiratanga  
mō ngā uri whakatipu  
Foster the pathway of knowledge to strength,  
independence and growth for future generations*

#### Collaboration and partnership

Shared responsibility, working together, and forming partnerships are essential for maintaining, restoring and enhancing indigenous biodiversity.

*Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi  
With your food basket and my food basket,  
the people will thrive*

#### Integrated and coordinated approach

We will achieve a greater positive impact on habitat connectivity and ecological integrity by coordinating our collective efforts, resources, expertise, funding and actions (including working within resource and financial constraints) beyond administrative boundaries.

*Mā te rongo ka mōhio; mā te mōhio ka mārāma;  
mā te mārāma ka mātau; mā te mātau ka ora  
Through resonance comes cognisance; through  
cognisance comes understanding; through  
understanding comes knowledge; through  
knowledge comes life and wellbeing*

#### Honesty, trust and accountability

Transparency, honesty, and accountability will be maintained in all biodiversity management actions and decisions. This includes respecting the interests and mandates of all signatories.

*Tā te tika ka hua, tā te pono ka toha  
From truth comes growth, from honesty  
comes generosity*

#### Inclusiveness and participation

All signatories will be involved in and participate in delivering actions to foster a sense of collective responsibility for managing indigenous biodiversity.

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini  
My success is not the work of one, but the work  
of many*

#### Long-term commitment and adaptability

We need a long-term, inter-generational and adaptable strategy that is regularly reviewed to acknowledge the need for sustained effort and flexibility when circumstances change.

*Ko te pae tawhiti, whāia kia tata; ko te pae  
tata, whakamaua kia tina  
Seek out distant horizons and cherish  
those you attain*

## 6.3 UPDATE ON NATIONAL DIRECTION - STOCK EXCLUSION REGULATIONS AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE

**Rā | Date:** 10 April 2026

**Kaituhi | Author:** Naomi Crawford, Team Leader - Water Policy

**Kaituku | Authoriser:** Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

### TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report provides an update on recent amendments to national direction, including the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Activities) Amendment Regulations 2026 and the Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Amendment Regulations 2026, and their implications for the Waikato Region.
2. In relation to stock exclusion, the report summarises the current regulatory framework applying in the Waikato Region, including the operative Waikato Regional Plan (WRP), the Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Regulations 2020 (as amended), and the Waikato and Waipā catchment-specific provisions of Proposed Plan Change 1 (PC1), noting the status of the Environment Court's 2025 and 2026 interim decisions.
3. The report is intended to support the Strategy and Policy Committee's understanding of the current state of national standards and their interaction with regional planning instruments.

### KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4. This report provides an update on recent amendments to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), focusing on changes to the Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Regulations 2020 (as amended in April 2026) and the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Activities) Amendment Regulations 2026.
5. In relation to electric vehicle charging infrastructure, the amended national environmental standards extend the existing electricity transmission framework to include EV charging activities. The amendments adopt an enabling, nationally consistent approach that is primarily relevant to territorial authority functions. Interaction with Waikato Regional Council functions is limited and largely confined to earthworks controls, with analysis indicating no conflict with, or requirement to amend, the operative Waikato Regional Plan.
6. In relation to stock exclusion, the report outlines the current regulatory framework operating in the Waikato Region, including the Waikato Regional Plan, the stock exclusion regulations (as amended), and Proposed Plan Change 1 for the Waikato and Waipā river catchments. The April 2026 amendments reduce certain national stock exclusion requirements, particularly for non-intensively grazed beef cattle and deer, while retaining the ability for more stringent regional plan provisions to prevail. The report is provided for information only, to support the Strategy and Policy Committee's understanding of how

recent national direction interacts with regional planning instruments, noting that implementation matters will continue to be managed operationally.

**TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

That the report *Update on National Direction - Stock Exclusion Regulations and Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 6 May 2026) be received.

**HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND**

7. The Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Activities) Amendment Regulations 2026 extend the existing NES for electricity transmission to include electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
8. The primary intent of the amendments is to address inconsistent regulation of EV charging infrastructure across district plans; and support the rollout and uptake of EV infrastructure through a nationally consistent, enabling framework. The regulatory design reflects the generally low-impact nature of EV charging infrastructure and recognises that barriers to deployment have largely arisen at the territorial authority level.
9. The amended NES is strongly land-use focused, with provisions primarily addressing, location and placement; operational effects, including noise; and minor associated earthworks. As a result, the NES is principally relevant to territorial authority functions, rather than regional council responsibilities. Interaction with regional council functions is narrow and largely limited to earthworks associated with EV charging infrastructure.
10. Only Regulation 42 (EV charging infrastructure ancillary to a primary activity) includes conditions engaging regional matters, and these are confined to standard earthworks controls such as cut and fill thresholds, erosion and sediment management, and site stabilisation. Advice from internal Resource Use Directorate staff indicates that the earthworks thresholds are modest and unlikely to be exceeded for typical EV charging installations; where EV charging infrastructure is part of a larger development, any regional consenting requirements are far more likely to be triggered by the primary activity itself; and very few additional regional consents are anticipated to arise as a result of the EV charging provisions.
11. Under Regulation 45 of the amended NES, plan rules are explicitly allowed to be more lenient than the national standard. However, under section 43B(1) of the RMA, a regional plan may only be more stringent than an NES where the NES expressly provides for this. As Regulation 45 is silent on stringency, the NES operates as a regulatory ceiling.
12. This enabling approach means that plan rules regulating EV charging infrastructure may be more permissive than the NES. Under section 44A of the RMA, a plan must be amended without using the Schedule 1 process only where a rule conflicts with an NES. Analysis of the Waikato Regional Plan indicates that its effects-based earthworks provisions are generally more permissive than the NES thresholds, regulate soil disturbance generically rather than EV charging infrastructure specifically, and do not create any conflict requiring mandatory plan alignment.

13. Stock exclusion requirements applying in the Waikato Region are set through a combination of regional plan provisions and national regulations. Under the operative Waikato Regional Plan (WRP), stock access to rivers and lakes is generally permitted provided that strict conditions are met and water quality standards are not breached. A resource consent is required to authorise stock access to the bed or bank of a waterway within defined and mapped livestock exclusion areas. The WRP also includes methods that support voluntary riparian management, including fencing, education, incentives, and community-led initiatives.
14. In September 2020, the Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Regulations 2020 established mandatory, nationally consistent requirements controlling livestock access to waterbodies by dairy cattle, dairy support cattle, beef cattle, deer, and pigs. The applicable requirements vary depending on stock class and whether grazing is intensive. Since gazettal, the regulations have been amended several times.
15. In October 2024, amendments removed the low-slope land map and the associated requirements that applied to beef cattle and deer on low-slope land, including requirements to exclude all stock from natural wetlands greater than 0.05 hectares on such land.
16. In April 2026, the Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Amendment Regulations 2026 were gazetted as part of a wider programme of amendments to national direction under the RMA and come into force on 7 May 2026. Specifically, these amendments altered regulation 17, removing the requirement for beef cattle and deer that are not intensively grazed to be excluded from natural wetlands supporting a population of threatened species identified under the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (including wetlands in the coastal marine area).
17. For the purposes of the regulations, intensively grazed refers to break feeding, grazing of annual forage crops, or grazing of pasture that has been irrigated within the previous 12 months. The stated policy intent <sup>5</sup>of the April 2026 amendments is to improve regulatory quality and enable the resource management system to operate more effectively, including by reducing unnecessary constraints on primary sector growth and development, while retaining protections for the most sensitive wetland environments.
18. Key requirements of the stock exclusion regulations, as currently in force, include:
  - (a) Dairy cattle, dairy support cattle, pigs, and beef cattle and deer when intensively grazed must be excluded at least three metres from lakes and wide rivers (wider than 1 metre) on any terrain, when crossing these waterbodies, stock must use a dedicated bridge or culvert, except when they are supervised and actively driven across and do not cross the same waterbody more than twice per month. Deer when intensively grazed must also be excluded (except when crossing). The 3-metre setback does not apply to areas accessed to enter or exit a bridge or culvert, or where permanent fencing or riparian vegetation that effectively excludes stock was in place on or before 5 October 2023.
  - (b) Stock must be excluded from any natural wetland identified in a regional plan or district plan or policy statement that was operative at the commencement of the regulations.

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<sup>5</sup> MfE 'Updating National Direction: Changes to Stock Exclusion Regulations April 2026'

- (c) Dairy cattle, dairy support cattle, pigs, and beef cattle and deer when intensively grazed must be excluded from natural wetlands that support a population of threatened species identified under the NPSFM 2020.
  - (d) Compliance timeframes vary depending on stock class and whether the activity is a new pastoral system, with key dates being 3 September 2020, 1 July 2023, and 1 July 2025.
19. Regional councils and unitary authorities remain responsible for managing and enforcing stock exclusion in their regions and may continue to apply more stringent requirements through regional plan provisions. Regulation 19 of the Stock Exclusion Regulations expressly provides that where a regional plan contains a more stringent rule for the same matter, the regional rule prevails over the national regulations.
  20. The accompanying Ministry for the Environment factsheet (MfE, 2026) for the April 2026 amendments (See Attachment 1) signals that existing national direction under the RMA, including stock exclusion provisions, will be reassessed and transitioned into the new planning framework proposed under the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill. Broadly, the policy intent underlying the April 2026 amendments is expected to be carried through into that future system.
  21. PC1 inserts additional stock exclusion requirements into the WRP for farming activities within the Waikato and Waipā river catchments. PC1 does not incorporate or give effect to the Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Regulations 2020; rather, the two regulatory instruments operate in parallel, with the more stringent requirements prevailing.
  22. At a high level, PC1 can be characterised as setting greater expectations than the national regulations, due to its application to a wider range of stock classes, a broader range of waterbodies, and larger ungrazed setbacks in certain circumstances. This approach has been considered through two interim decisions of the Environment Court (issued in 2025 and 2026). However, the degree of direct overlap between PC1 and the national regulations is limited, reflecting differences in how requirements are triggered, how existing fencing is treated, and the applicable compliance timeframes.
  23. To date, the Environment Court has issued two interim decisions on appeals to PC1, which provide direction on aspects of the proposed provisions, including stock exclusion. Under the RMA, PC1's interim permitted activity rules and Schedule C requirements for stock exclusion currently have legal effect. However, because the specific timeframes for completing the physical exclusion works are calculated from the date the chapter is made fully operative, there are no immediate enforcement deadlines for these physical works. Furthermore, as the appeals process is ongoing, the final PC1 stock exclusion provisions remain subject to change.

## **WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION**

24. Recent amendments to national direction under the RMA form part of a broader programme of change signalled by central government, with all new and amended instruments taking immediate effect and intended to be transitioned into the future planning system.
25. For Waikato Regional Council, the amended national environmental standards for electric vehicle charging infrastructure have minimal implications for regional council functions and do not necessitate changes to the Waikato Regional Plan. Stock exclusion will continue to be

addressed through regional plan provisions, including PC1 once operative, where those provisions are more stringent than the national regulations.

26. While the April 2026 amendments to the stock exclusion regulations reduce some national requirements, they also further clarify the relationship between national and regional instruments by reducing overlap. Determining relative stringency may still present practical challenges, but supporting landowners and practitioners to navigate these requirements is an implementation matter. Overall, no policy response or plan change is required at this time, and the report is provided to support committee oversight and awareness.

## **ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS**

1. **Updating National Direction Changes to Stock Exclusion Regulations April 2026** [↓](#)



# Updating National Direction: Changes to Stock Exclusion Regulations

April 2026

Recent changes have been made to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to make the resource management system work more effectively.

Regulation 17 of the Stock Exclusion Regulations has now been amended so that it no longer applies to beef cattle and deer that are not intensively grazing.

## Context

The Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Regulations 2020 (Stock Exclusion Regulations) regulate access to water bodies by beef cattle, dairy cattle, dairy support cattle, deer and pigs. Regulation 17 previously required all stock to be excluded from natural wetlands that support threatened species, as described in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020.

Regulation 17 has now been amended so that it no longer applies to beef cattle and deer that are not intensively grazing. This regulation continues to exclude dairy cattle, dairy support cattle, pigs, beef cattle and deer that are intensively grazing<sup>1</sup> from any natural wetland that supports a population of threatened species.

This change helps to meet the Government's objectives for resource management reform, making it easier to get things done by enabling primary sector growth and development while also improving regulatory quality in the resource management system.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Stock Exclusion Regulations, intensively grazing means break feeding, grazing on annual forage crops, or grazing on pasture that has been irrigated with water in the previous 12 months.

## Key changes

### Key changes to Stock Exclusion Regulations

- Amendment to Regulation 17: Exclusion of stock from natural wetlands that support threatened species described in National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020.
  - No longer applies to beef cattle and deer that are not intensively grazing.

## Implementation considerations

### For local government

Regulations made under section 360 of the RMA will apply immediately once they come into effect.

Regional councils and unitary authorities may adopt more stringent stock exclusion requirements in their regional plans as part of their Freshwater Management Plan. Other existing rules related to stock exclusion continue to apply.

### For farmers

The Stock Exclusion Regulations apply to any person who owns or controls stock. Local authorities (regional councils and unitary authorities) are responsible for managing and enforcing stock exclusion, and may adopt stock exclusion requirements in their regional plans. Check with your regional council or unitary authority for further details on stock exclusion rules in your region.

### Transition to the new planning system

All existing national direction under the RMA will be reassessed and restructured to ensure it aligns with the goals and framework of the new planning system that will be established by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills.

The policy intent of the changes to national direction under the existing RMA will be transferred to the new system as appropriate.

For more information about the transition into the new planning system see the Ministry for the Environment fact sheet [The New Planning System: Transitioning into the new planning system](#)

## For further information

For more information, see the Ministry for the Environment website's page on [Stock exclusion regulations](#)



## 6.4 WAIKATO RESIDENTS' ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTIONS SURVEY 2025

**Rā | Date:** 16 April 2026

**Kaituhi | Author:** Melissa Hackell, Social Scientist

**Kaituku | Authoriser:** Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

### TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report provides an overview of the 2025 Waikato Residents' Environmental Perceptions Survey (WREPS), a survey which tracks residents/ratepayers experience and perceptions of environmental issues relevant to the region and helps the Council to understand community expectations concerning rates investment. This helps the Council to identify community impacts and support community-informed planning decisions.

### KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Waikato Residents' Environmental Perceptions Survey tracks residents' perceptions and experiences of environmental change and their relationship to socio-economic conditions and quality of life. The survey has been undertaken by Waikato Regional Council every three years for over 20 years, building a long time series for tracking locally observed ecosystem changes.
3. The spectrum of residents' views on the most important environmental issues facing our region allows us to compare the ways environmental change is understood by different groups and reveals their specific concerns and priorities for investment in environmental protection. The 2025 report, when compared with previous surveys, indicates that the public conversation about environmental issues, their causes and solutions is changing.

### TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Waikato Residents' Environmental Perceptions Survey 2025* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 6 May 2026) be received.

### HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

4. The Waikato Residents' Environmental Perceptions Survey, also previously known as 'Your environment – What matters?', is a survey of residents' perceptions of environmental issues. The 2025 survey maps the spectrum of views of a sample of 1266 Waikato residents<sup>6</sup> providing a complete picture of the range of issues and positions held by the communities WRC serves.

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<sup>6</sup> The sample is representative for gender and age.

5. The survey contributes to the requirement to work collaboratively, consult, and involve communities as part of collaborative participatory planning. Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) provisions provide a strong policy basis for requiring or justifying meaningful engagement and consultation with communities. The survey results to date have been used as inputs into reports including catchment management plans, state of the environment reporting and strategic documents as evidence of residents' priorities for environmental regulation and protection.
6. The survey contributes to policy development that is responsive to community aspirations and is cognisant of the range of positions held by the wider public. In this way the survey is a counterweight to the majority of policy engagement effort with directly affected landowners and resource users.

### TE TAKE | ISSUE

7. The 2025 survey indicates continued concern about declining water quality from a large proportion of participants who want sources of declining water quality to be addressed – including urban stormwater runoff, municipal waste, and agricultural runoff, as well as rising concern about the need to secure water resources from the impacts of extreme weather events.
8. Participants' concern over potential water shortages rose in the 2022 survey and continues to be a strong theme in 2025. Among these participants are rural participants' who comment on the challenges of farming in drought conditions and the prospect of reduced farm productivity.
9. There has also been a noticeable increase in the numbers of residents who raise the issue of poor-quality drinking water. This issue was raised by participants spread evenly across the city and districts. Among these were concerns regarding the threat of invasive gold clams to the safety of our drinking water.
10. Concerns raised by many participants about residential developments in peri urban and rural areas, water security, waste, and rates indicates that participants perceive increasing urbanisation is degrading the quality of the environment and placing pressure on existing services such as waste and water supply, leading to increasing claims on rates spending. Population growth and attendant residential development, particularly the urbanisation of rural areas, is also viewed as in conflict with the need to protect food-producing land and biodiversity, and the socio-economic benefits that flow from these.
11. Concern over the impacts of climate change has risen over time, including in 2025 – with a strong focus on the need to prepare for extreme weather events. Participants are concerned about the impacts of climate change on the costs of energy, rates, food, and insurance. Alongside these concerns is growing support for investment to reduce emissions and adapt to these impacts. There is substantial agreement among participants about the need to manage natural resources in ways that anticipate extreme weather events, across participants of varying beliefs of climate change. These results indicate that prioritising investment in activities that preserve environmental resources and minimise the impacts of extreme weather is mobilising increasing social support.
12. Differences in participants' perspectives are more about priorities for action and less about disagreement regarding the problems to be solved. Overall, participants want the Council to make decisions that: build resilience to the impacts of climate change; reduce waste at

source including especially waste to water; secure the health of drinking water supplies and increase food security by supporting local food production for domestic food supply as well as export earnings.

### **ĒTAHI ATU TAKE | OTHER MATTERS**

13. The 2025 survey report includes summary findings from our region's State of the Environment (SOE) 2022 report, including updates from WRC scientists alongside an analysis of how residents perceive these issues. The inclusion of the region's State of the Environment Report reporting in the survey report supports community environmental knowledge needed to build greater recognition of our ongoing relationship with, and dependence on, ecosystem services as well as public understanding of WRC activities. In this way, the report serves to both inform our communities and be informed of our communities' experiences and priorities.

### **WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION**

14. The 2025 survey indicates continued concern about declining water quality, as well as rising concern about the need to secure water resources from the impacts of extreme weather events.
15. The survey results can continue to be used as inputs into reports including catchment management plans, state of the environment reporting and strategic documents as evidence of residents' priorities for environmental regulation and protection.

### **NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES**

16. [TR26-05 – Waikato Residents' Environmental Perception Survey](#) – (Doc # 32924467)

### **ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS**

Nil

## 6.5 SUBMISSIONS SUMMARY REPORT - MAY 2026

Rā | Date: 16 April 2026

Kaituhi | Author: JP Silva, Senior Policy Advisor

Kaituku | Authoriser: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

### TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report provides an update on the submissions that the Waikato Regional Council (the Council) has lodged and identifies upcoming advocacy opportunities.

### KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Council receives notice of legislative and national policy proposals at various stages of development. Some of these have the potential to impact significantly on the Council and its customers. A number of plan changes and reviews also continue throughout the region's territorial authorities. This is a regular report that summarises the consultation opportunities and the submissions that the council has prepared.

#### TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Submissions Summary Report - May 2026* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 6 May 2026) be received.

### HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

3. Staff provide the committee this report at each meeting, identifying current and upcoming opportunities for submissions by the Council and outcomes of previous submissions, including those signed out under delegated authority.
4. Key partners communicate consultation opportunities in different ways, with some not writing directly to the Council. Staff are on various distribution lists and monitor the webpages of key partners once a week to identify consultation opportunities. This includes parliamentary websites, central government department websites, and the consultation webpages of district and regional councils relevant to our region.
  - A spatial map of active local planning processes is provided at **Attachment 1**.
  - A table of district planning processes by territorial authority, and central government legislative and policy updates, is provided at **Attachment 2**.
  - A summary of Fast Track locations and details is provided at **Attachment 3**.

### ĒTAHI ATU TAKE | OTHER MATTERS

National Direction Update

5. The government has approved amendments to two further national direction instruments following the consultation process mid-last year and provided an update on other amendments.

#### *NES-ETA and Stock Exclusion Regulations*

6. Changes to these two instruments were notified on 9 April 2026, and they will come into force on **7 May 2026**. These instruments are further explained in a separate report to this committee.
  - The [Resource Management \(National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Activities\) Amendment Regulations 2026](#) will permit the installation of vehicle charging infrastructure in certain locations.
  - The [Resource Management \(Stock Exclusion\) Amendment Regulations 2026](#) amend the Stock Exclusion Regulations by removing the need to exclude non-intensively grazed beef cattle and deer from wetlands that support threatened species.

#### Upcoming changes

7. MfE has signalled that further changes to the following instruments (also following last year's consultation) are expected soon:
  - National Environmental Standards for Marine Aquaculture
  - National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry
  - National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities
  - National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities
  - National Environmental Standards for Papakāinga (new).

#### Update on freshwater instruments

8. As part of last year's consultation, the government also sought feedback on broad changes to freshwater national direction (the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management and National Environmental Standards for Freshwater). MfE has announced that freshwater changes are now expected to be progressed under the new planning system, once the two bills replacing the RMA have been enacted.

### **WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION**

9. This report provides an update on national direction from central government, plus upcoming changes as well as the links for the submissions lodged after the last Strategy and Policy Committee meeting in February 2026. These reports are provided regularly to the committee.

### **NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES**

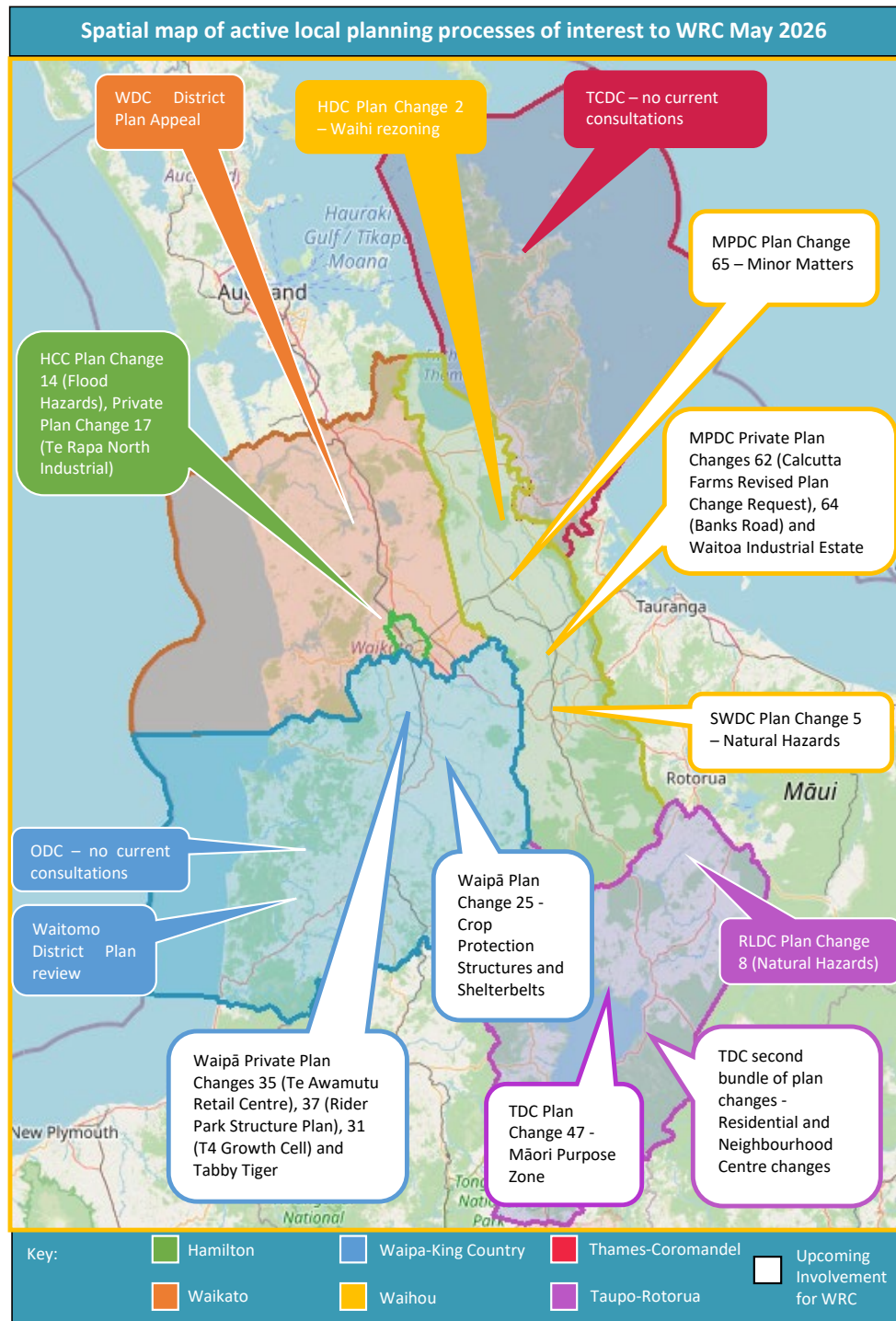
10. Below are the links for the previous submissions lodged after the last Strategy and Policy Committee in February 2026:
  - (a) [Waikato Regional Council Submission on the Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill](#)

- (b) [Waikato Regional Council Submission on the DIA Draft Proposal on Simplifying Local Government](#)
- (c) [Waikato Regional Council Submission on the Rates Target Model Proposal for New Zealand](#)
- (d) [Waikato Regional Council Submission on the Infrastructure Funding and Financing Amendment Bill](#)
- (e) [Waikato Regional Council Submission on the discussion document Supporting Growth through a Development Levies System](#)

### ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Spatial Map of Active Local Planning Processes – (Doc # 35605213)** [↓](#)
2. **District Planning and Central Government Processes – (Doc # 35605725)** [↓](#)
3. **Map of Fast Track Applications May 2026 – (Doc # 35603717)** [↓](#)

Attachment 1



**District Planning processes by territorial authority**

**Hamilton City Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Private Plan Change 17: Te Rapa North Industrial	Decision	A private plan change request by Fonterra to "live zone" 91ha of land in the Te Rapa North Industrial Zone by removing the 'Deferred Industrial Zone' overlay.	Decision released on 31 March. Staff are reviewing.
Plan Change 14 - Flood Hazards	Hearing	HCC is looking to improve how new development responds to flooding to help better protect people and property in Hamilton. This includes considering areas where water is expected to flow overland in an extreme weather event and where there is likely to be ponding in high rainfall events. This plan change will update HCC's resource management approach to flood hazards, in conjunction with updated flood hazard modelling.	Plan decisions notified on 24 Dec 2025, with appeals due by 12 Feb 2026. Staff have determined that there is no need to appeal or join any other appeals as a s274 party.
Draft Financial Contributions Policy		HCC is consulting on a draft Financial Contributions Policy to help fund projects to protect and restore the Waikato River. The draft policy is needed to enable implementation of financial contributions provisions that were included in the district plan via Plan Change 12.	Staff have reviewed the draft policy and determined there is no need to submit.

**Hauraki District Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Proposed Plan Change 2 - Waihi Rezoning	Appeal	Seeks to rezone land in Waihi for residential and industrial purposes. The draft has been prepared following a number of technical studies/assessments (i.e. transportation, 3 waters, heritage, liquefaction, housing/industrial land supply, etc) along with landowner and iwi consultation.	The panel's decision was released on 24 March 2026 - staff are satisfied with the decision. No appeal needed.

**Matamata Piako District Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 65 – Minor Matters (PC65).	Pre-notification	This plan change aims to fix a range of issues in the District Plan that have caused inefficiencies, unintended outcomes, or implementation challenges. Some of these issues were originally included in PC61.	Plan Change 65 has been approved to move to the next stage which is for MPDC to formally approve the plan change for formal notification.
Calcutta Farms - Revised Plan Change Request - Plan Change 62	Pre-notification	The revised plan change proposes to rezone approximately 20 hectares of rural land at the eastern edge of Matamata (south of Tauranga Road/SH24) to General Industrial Zone.	Pre-notification engagement. Staff are assessing the proposal.
Draft Private Plan Change - Waitoa Industrial Estate	Pre-notification	This is seeking to rezone approximately 26.3 hectares of land near the southeastern edge of Matamata from Rural Zone to Residential Zone. PC64 is consistent with the Future Residential Policy Area and the Banks Road to Mangawhero Road Structure Plan. The proposal “live-zones” approximately 26.3 hectares as Residential Zone, updates the Structure Plan to reflect master planning and introduces a 400m <sup>2</sup> minimum net lot size with a Restricted Discretionary pathway for 325-399 m <sup>2</sup> lots (Comprehensive Residential Development).	Pre-notification engagement. Staff are assessing the proposal.
Land Transport Bylaw Review		The MPDC Land Transport Bylaw Review is a statutory 10-year review proposing updates to the existing bylaw to improve clarity and road safety, including revised rules for roads and footpaths, heavy vehicles, stock movement, boat ramps, and shared pathways, with consultation closing on 19 April 2026 and the updated bylaw taking effect on 1 July 2026.	Staff are assessing the proposal.

**Rotorua Lakes District Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 8 (Natural Hazards)	Pre-notification	This reviews the objectives and policies for natural hazards and changes the rules relating to how the District Plan manages specific natural hazards – flooding, wildfire, fault rupture, land stability (slope stability, liquefaction and soft soils) and geothermal hazards –for the whole district, including in the Lakes A Zone.	The hearing is planned for 4-5 May 2026

**South Waikato District Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 5 - Natural Hazards	Pre-notification	This will consolidate provisions relating to natural hazards into one chapter, as per the National Planning Standards. The plan change will map urban flood hazard risks as per the WRPS.	SWDC indicated they will progress this plan change as this topic will be automatically exempt from the plan stop direction from central government.

**Taupo District Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Second bundle of plan changes	Submission	The Taupō District Plan is being reformatted to comply with the National Planning Standards. Concurrently, Taupō District Council is advancing a sectional review of the plan, which includes three proposed plan changes. The pre-consultation will be used to shape their second bundle of plan changes. Sections under review: PC 44 Residential Zones; PC 45 Neighbourhood Centre Zone; PC 46 Open Space Zones.	TDC sought an exemption in response to 'plan stop' direction and have had a response on whether they can continue with their plan changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residential and Neighbourhood Centre changes (Plan Changes 44 and 45) – Only the parts that rezone land for housing or neighbourhood centres can go ahead.</li> </ul>

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open Space changes (Plan Change 46) – This has been declined and will be discontinued.</li> </ul>
Plan Change 47: Māori Purpose Zone	Submission	This introduces a Māori Purpose Zone (MPZ) to support the development of Māori land by Māori owners. PC47 aims to rezone Māori land to MPZ to better facilitate activities such as papakainga, marae upgrades, kaumātua housing, small scale commercial and agricultural ventures, cultural, educational and community activities	Staff determined no submission was required.

**Waikato DC**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
WDC District Plan Review	Appeal	WDC undertook a full review of the Waikato District Plan. WRC submitted on a number of aspects and participated in the hearing process.	WRC interest on the topics relates to rural subdivision remains. Staff are working with legal counsel to resolve outstanding topics.

**Waipa District Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Draft Plan Change 25 - Crop Protection Structures and Shelterbelts	Submission	Waipa DC has resolved to remove the crop protection structures and shelterbelt topic from PC30 and progress it as a separate plan change. This is because of intense interest and lobbying from landowner and industry groups and recent Environment Court proceedings.	Staff determined that no submission was required.
Proposed Private Plan Change 37-	Submission	Private plan change proposal to rezone 94ha of land on the eastern fringe of Cambridge/Leamington for residential and commercial development. Proposal brings forward C5	Submission is subject of a separate report on the agenda.

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Rider Park Structure Plan		Cambridge growth cell from post-2035 for development now.	
Proposed Private Plan Change 31 - Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell	Pre-notification	This proposes to rezone the T4 growth cell on the western side of Te Awamutu from Deferred Residential to Residential Zone. The T4 growth cell is 29ha and is currently identified in the Waipa District Plan for residential development beyond 2035.	Plan change was lodged in September 2023. Waipā DC has requested further information from the applicant. As this is a private plan change, the 'Plan Stop' requirements do not apply.
Draft Private Plan Change 32 - Tabby Tiger	Pre-notification	Private plan change to rezone 33 hectares of land between Raynes and Lochiel Roads from Rural to Airport Business Zone (Agri-Tech Precinct).	Plan change application lodged in September 2024. Waipā DC has requested further information from the applicant. As this is a private plan change, the 'Plan Stop' requirements do not apply.
Proposed Private Plan Change 35 - Te Awamutu Retail Centre	Pre-hearing	The plan change seeks to amend the provisions of the Waipā District Plan for the Te Awamutu Large Format Retail Centre at 670 Cambridge Road, Te Awamutu. It also proposes to rezone the nearby land at 638 Cambridge Road from Medium Density Residential to Commercial Zone and to include this land as part of the centre.	Submission lodged, focusing on the flood hazard assessment for the plan change. As this is a private plan change, the 'Plan Stop' requirements do not apply.

#### Waitomo DC

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Waitomo DC Plan Review	Appeal	Waitomo DC are undertaking a full review of their district plan.	WRC lodged an appeal relating to future urban zoning in areas of natural hazard risk. WRC joined aspects of Forest and Bird's appeal relating to the removal of indigenous vegetation in areas of natural features and landscapes. The plan review is sufficiently progressed and won't be stopped by the 'plan stop' direction.

**Central Government Proposals - Current processes**

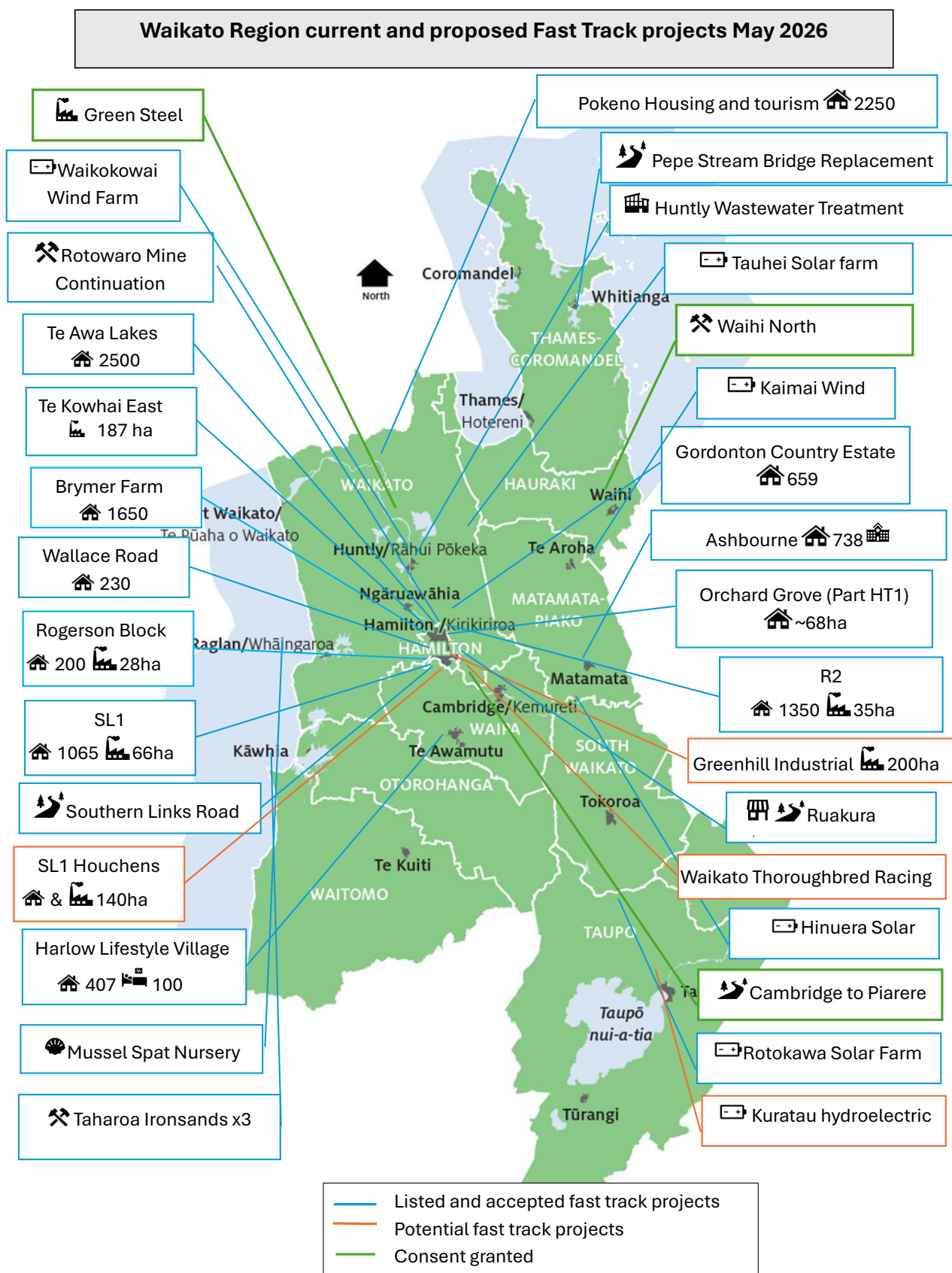
Process	What is it?	Current status
Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill	The government introduced two new acts to replace the RMA - a Planning Act and Natural Environment Act. The new resource management legislation will be based on the enjoyment of property rights.	Submission lodged. WRC presented to the Select Committee on 18 March.
Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill	This primary policy objective of this bill is to reduce pressure on council rates by refocusing the purpose of local government, better measuring and publicising council performance, prioritising core services in council spending, strengthening council accountability and transparency, and providing regulatory relief to councils.	The Bill has been overtaken by first readings of several other Bills and no progress is expected until after ANZAC day.
Paeroa Water Supply Transfer Validation Act	The PCO/DIA Paeroa Water-supply Transfer Validation Act consultation seeks feedback on the proposed repeal of a local Act that is now redundant and superseded by modern legislation as part of the Parliamentary Counsel Office's Legislation Repeals Project.	To be reviewed to determine if there is a need to submit.

**Central government proposals - upcoming processes**

Process	What is it?	Current status
Climate Change Response Act (Efficiency and Effectiveness) Amendment Bill	Bill sets the legal framework for powers and responsibilities with respect to climate adaptation.	Expected early 2026.
Biosecurity Amendment Bill	Bill to give effect to any policy decisions to modernise this legislation. Previously submitted on a discussion document in December 2024.	Expected in 2026.
Local Government Legislation Amendment Bill (title TBC)	Bill to give effect to policy decisions around rate-capping, simplifying LG and potentially other items from the 'forward work programme'.	Policy announcements on 1 December. Legislation not expected until the third quarter of 2026.

**Other relevant processes - upcoming**

Process	What is it?	Current status
Review of Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato	<p>Te Ture Whaimana is the primary direction setting document for the Waikato River and activities within its catchment and was reviewed in 2011 with no amendments made.</p> <p>Under the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, clause 19, the review of Te Ture Whaimana is to be initiated no later than 10 years from the previous review. Therefore, this is the first major review of Te Ture Whaimana since it was established more than 10 years ago as a key part of the River Settlement.</p>	<p>The project is going through a rescope with project director, WRA and iwi staff working closely together on this. WRA Board has asked for increased iwi engagement from what was initially scoped. It is likely that formal comment will be sought mid 2026.</p>



**7 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA**

**Unuhia, unuhia**

**Unuhia mai te uru tapu nui**

**kia wātea, kia māmā,**

**te ngākau, te tinana, te hinengaro,**

**i te ara takatū**

**Koia rā e Rongo**

**e whakairia ake ki runga**

**kia tina! TINA!**

**Haumi ē, hui ē, TĀIKI ē!**

**Draw on, draw on,**

**Draw on to the supreme sacredness**

**To clear, to free**

**our heart, body and soul**

**Our pathway prepared**

**Lo, there is peace**

**suspended high above**

**manifest!**

**draw together!**

**Affirm!**