

An aerial photograph of a river winding through a dense forest. The water is calm and reflects the sky. In the foreground, a wooden boardwalk curves through the trees, with a few people walking and a person on a bicycle. The forest is a mix of green and brownish-yellow, suggesting a natural, somewhat wild environment.

Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato

Waikato Regional Council
May 2026

Jodi Sackett

Purpose & Context

Develop a shared understanding of progress to date including:

- Background
- Created co-governance regime – including establishment of WRA
- Intended to be primary guiding document for decisions that affect the river and catchment
- Span across all legislation, not just RMA
- Requires a 10 year review – this is the first
- Waikato River Settlement Acts (including Waipaa River legislation):
 - enables Waikato River Authority (WRA) to set targets and methods
 - sets consultation process similar to Local Government Act (LGA)



An aerial photograph of a river winding through a dense, lush forest. The water is calm and reflects the sky and surrounding trees. A wooden boardwalk or path runs along the right bank of the river, with a few people walking on it. The forest is composed of various green trees and ferns, with some areas showing reddish-brown soil. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

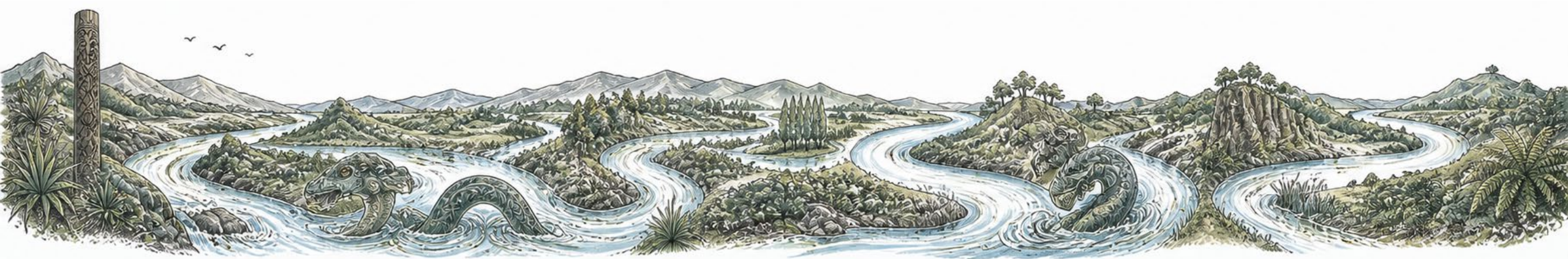
Introduction

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Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato

Tooku awa koiora me oona pikonga he kura tangihia o te maataamuri

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.



Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato

It is the primary direction-setting document for the Waikato and Waipaa River catchments and holds a unique and elevated status within New Zealand's legislative framework.

Te Ture Whaimana contains a vision supported by 13 objectives and associated strategies. These focus on restoring and protecting the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River for future generations, recognising economic, social, cultural and spiritual relationships that underpin them.

No other river vision or external planning documents in New Zealand has this level of authority.

Its vision is simple and powerful:

To restore and protect the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River, and all it embraces, for future generations.



Significance for Communities and Decision-Making

- Te Ture Whaimana represents a fundamental shift in how the Waikato River is understood and managed.
- It brings together maatauranga Maaori and statutory planning, ensuring that the awa is not treated as a resource to be used, but as a taonga to be protected and restored whilst sustaining her people.
- For communities, councils, and decision-makers, this means that all activities within the catchment must be considered in terms of their impact on the river's health and its mauri.
- It also requires genuine partnership with iwi, recognising their role as kaitiaki and their enduring relationship with the awa.



How Te Ture Whaimana fits into the wider system?

Co-Governance and Co-Management Arrangements

Te Ture Whaimana is also the foundation for co-governance and co-management of the Waikato River. This means:

- Iwi and the Crown share responsibility for setting direction
- Decision-making reflects both cultural values and environmental outcomes
- Māori relationships with the river are recognised as central, not optional

These arrangements are not just good practice — they are legally supported through the river settlement legislation.



Waikato River Authority

Who is driving this project?

- The Waikato River Authority are the project governors who commission the project and take stewardship of document implementation. The Waikato River Authority's enabling legislation has given it an important role as the custodian of Te Ture Whaimana.
- The Waikato River Authority is a statutory body formed under the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, the Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010, with additional responsibilities from the Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012 and He Mahere Taiao – The Maniapoto Iwi Environmental Management Plan.
- The Authority has ten Board Members appointed by river iwi and Ministers of the Crown.

Who are the WRA?

- The Authority safeguards the importance of Te Ture Whaimana in policy relating to the health of the river. This applies across 11,000 square kilometres of the Waikato River catchment, with government contributing \$220 million over a 30-year period.
- The Waikato River Authority also works toward creating an endowment fund so river restoration and clean-up can continue long-term.
- The Authority sets the primary direction through the Vision and Strategy to restore and protect the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River for future generations, promoting an integrated and coordinated approach to river management.



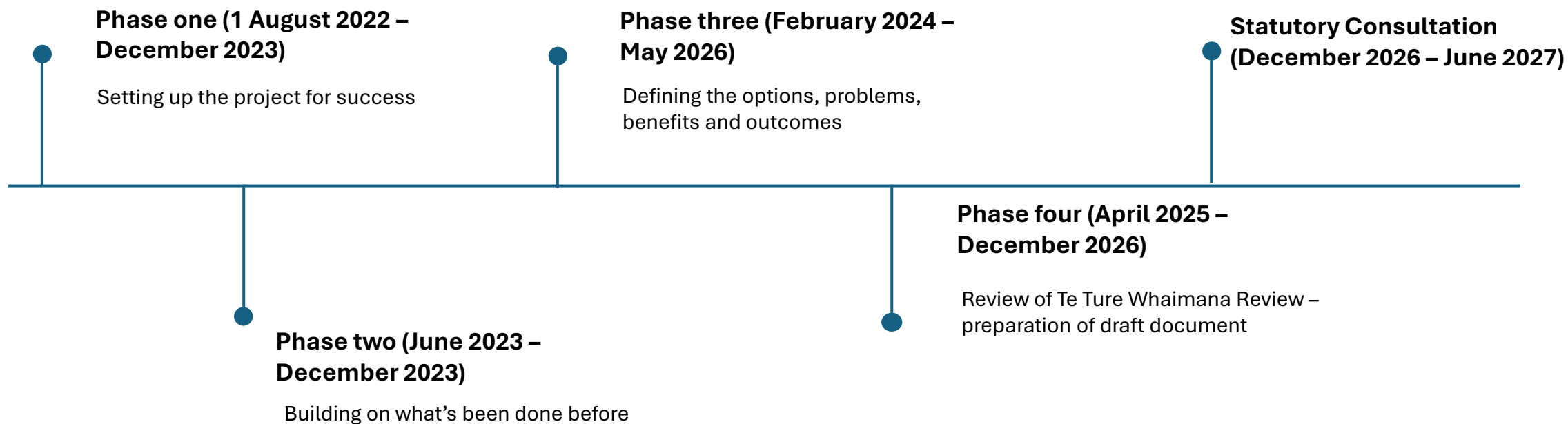
Waikato River
Authority

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The Review - Journey to date

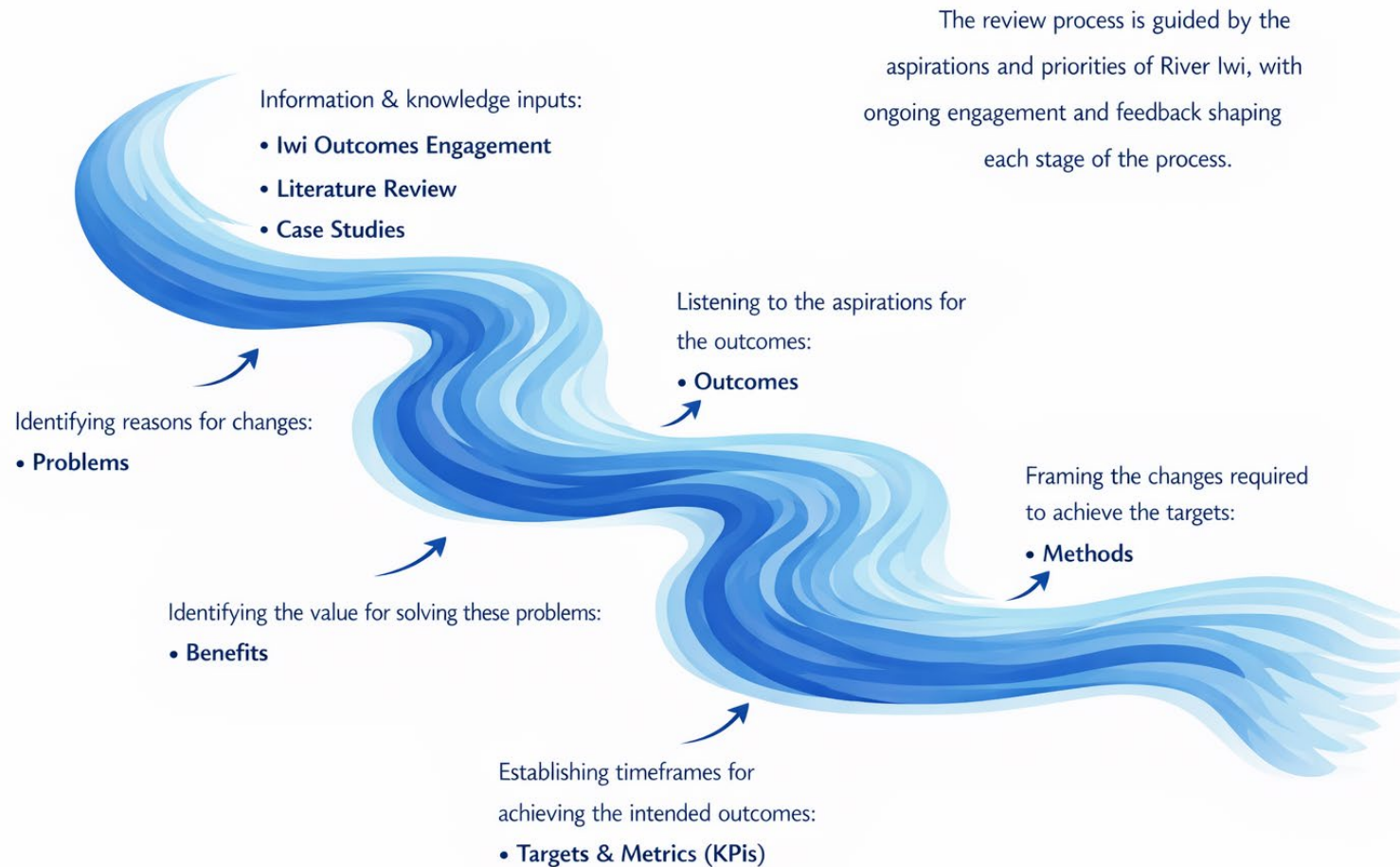
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Project journey



Method for review

The review has been based on an Investment Logic Map – Identifying Problems and benefits and using this information as well as River Iwi outcomes to guide the development of initial changes.



Information and Knowledge inputs

- **Literature Review** – 54 documents reviewed to support identification of past, present and future challenges
- **Horizon Scan** – Looking beyond current issues to understand wider future potential changes that should be considered when shaping policy direction.
- **Case studies** – real world examples used to understand how Te Ture Whaimana has been applied in practice.

Co-governance

Mahinga Kai

Restoration

Watercare water take consent

Water allocation

Waikato Expressway

Significant Sites

Urban Development

Biosecurity

Cambridge Wastewater
Treatment Plant

Legislative Review

Catchment management

- **River Iwi Outcomes** – outcomes that articulate what successful restoration and protection of the river should look like.



What we found – Literature Review & Horizon Scan

Key Themes:

The literature says we need to:

- Integrate maatauranga Maaori
- Strengthen co-governance and iwi leadership
- Implement holistic and integrated catchment management
- Establish robust monitoring, compliance and accountability
- Focus on capacity-building, education and partnerships

These findings support the need for developing targets and methods.

Future risks we need to consider:

- Population growth – increased demand for water and services
- Urban development and infrastructure planning and design
- Climate change – extreme weather, rain, drought etc
- Political changes – e.g. Legislation reform, Fast Track
- Community needs and expectations – cost of living pressures vs prioritising the Awa



What we heard - Case studies key themes

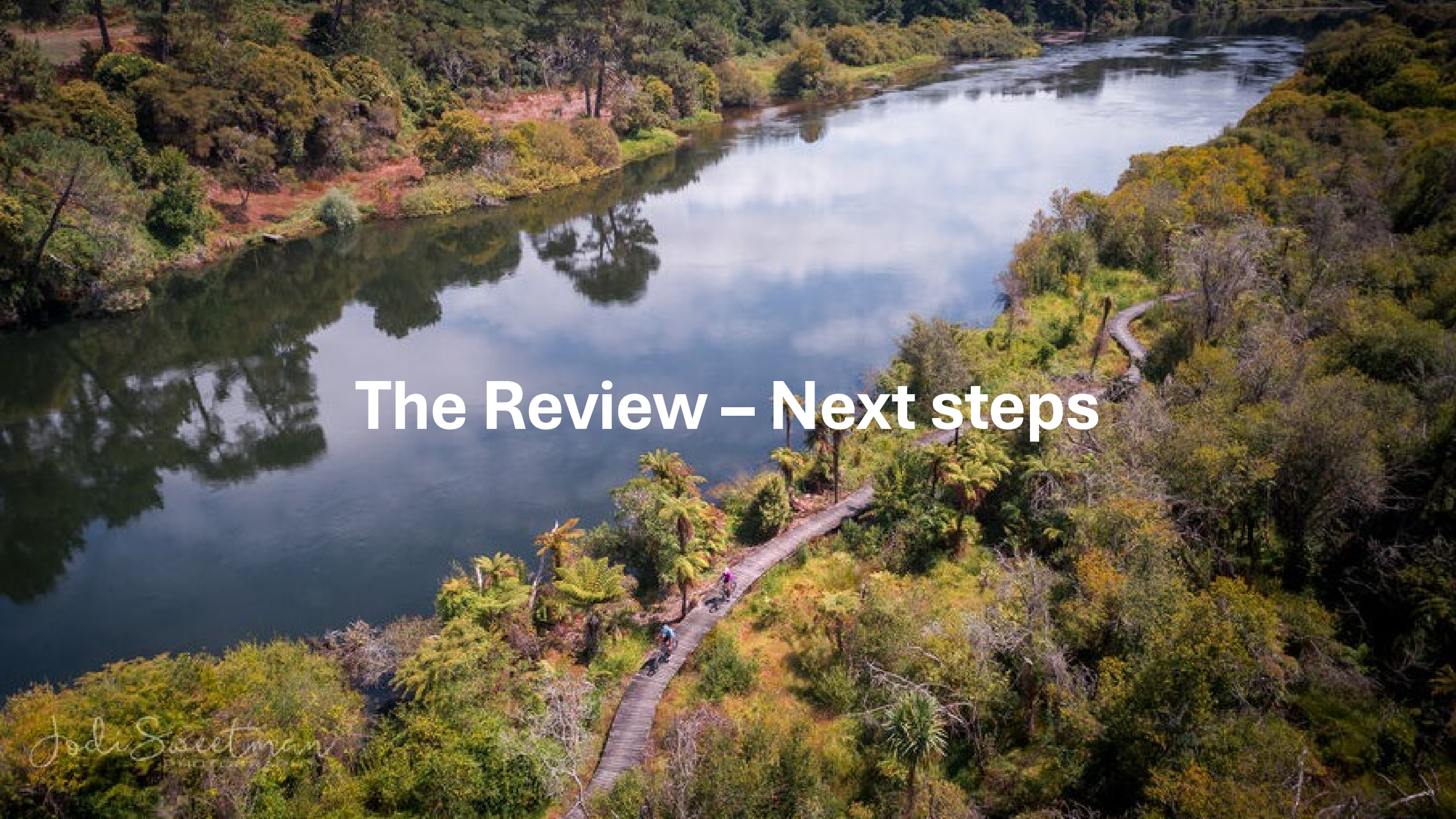
- **Implementation hasn't been driven in a coordinated or integrated way.** A strong desire for something that integrates, supports and guides the various things happening.
- It has **taken considerable effort from River Iwi to keep Te Ture Whaimana front and centre.** Some feel burnt out.
- **Awareness, knowledge and use varies.** Implementation has relied on individuals, champions and relationships. Implementation has been the most effective where relationships are strong. A need to build capacity and capability.
- **Good examples of implementation are not being shared** and we are not seeing Te Ture Whaimana embedded at an agency/systems level.
- **Often viewed as something for iwi** rather than something that everyone has a role in implementing.
- **Te Ture Whaimana is clear in its objectives**, but some say it is lacking teeth. Non-regulatory tools will only go so far.



Iwi Engagement

- Direct engagement with iwi leadership, kaitiaki, marae representatives and whaanau
- Over 400 outcomes identified, reflecting iwi expressions for restoration and protection of the awa
- Outcomes will be key inputs into the drafting of potential Targets and Methods.



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The Review – Next steps

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What happens next

- Engagement with Central and Local Government in preparation of the draft April – July
- Continued engagement with River Iwi on development of potential Targets and Methods
- Engagement with Key Stakeholders June - July
- Drafting of potential changes to Te Ture Whaimana including potential targets and methods April - September
- Notification of proposed Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato expected December
- Formal consultation and hearings expected to commence in January 2027.

