Waikato Regional Council Policy Series 2026/05

Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy Feedback Summary

Phase 1 workshops and stakeholder meetings – October to December 2025

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Acknowledgements

Waikato Regional Council would like to acknowledge and thank the communities and stakeholders who gave their time to attend workshops and meetings to provide input into the Draft Waikato Biodiversity Strategy.

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Kōrero whakataki | Executive Summary

The National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 (NPS-IB) requires all regional councils to prepare a regional biodiversity strategy setting out their priorities for managing indigenous biodiversity.

This report summarises the outcomes of the Phase 1 engagement for the Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy. This phase gathered feedback from stakeholders and the community on aspirations, challenges, and opportunities for restoring biodiversity across the region. The engagement comprised a series of four workshops and several stakeholder meetings over a period of two months from mid-October to mid-December 2025.

The findings establish a foundation for preparing the draft of the Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy and for the next stage (Phase 2) of public consultation on the draft strategy through an online Engagement HQ platform launching in mid-2026. The report highlights strong stakeholder expectation for ongoing dialogue and collaboration as the strategy progresses.

He timatanga kōrero | Introduction

Purpose of document

This report brings together the whakaaro (views) and kōrero (feedback) received from Phase 1 of the regional biodiversity strategy engagement process. It is a synthesis of of aspirations (what people would like to see in the biodiversity strategy), barriers & obstacles, solutions and opportunities to move the region forward in biodiversity restoration.

The insights shared by iwi, individuals, community groups, industry representatives, environmental organisations and central government agencies through this engagement have directly shaped the development of the draft biodiversity strategy. Community feedback has helped guide what the strategy focuses on and highlighted what matters most to communities across the region. In this way, the draft strategy is grounded in the voices of those who care for and interact with the region's natural environment, providing a strong foundation for collective action.

It provides a step towards the next phase of public consultation on the draft strategy through an Engagement HQ online platform, to be launched in mid-2026.

Feedback has been incorporated into this paper but not attributed to any particular party.

Project background

WRC led the development of a Waikato Biodiversity Accord in 2023/24 as a means of gaining commitment from a range of partner organisations to coordinate and align biodiversity activities and develop an overarching regional biodiversity strategy.

The Accord can be found here. It is a living document that organisations can sign up to at any time.

The biodiversity strategy is the next step on from the Accord and will be the first of its kind for the region. It is non-statutory, aiming to align and build on biodiversity-related mahi already underway. It will recognise the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, and align with community aspirations and tangata whenua values, in support of thriving biodiversity across the region.

Process to date

A discussion document entitled "Te Reo o te Taiao: A Call from Nature" was prepared and distributed to over 150 stakeholder representatives and interested parties in September 2025, accompanied by letters and emails inviting them to participate in the workshops and in the development of the draft biodiversity strategy (Appendix 1).The strategy discussion document themes align with Te Mana o te Taiao, the NZ Biodiversity Strategy 2020 - with an added focus on partnering with tangata whenua, which reflects the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (Figure 1).

The engagement process began with four workshops/hui which were held in October 2025 (Hamilton, Thames and two online workshops). The purpose of these workshops was to seek feedback on the aspirations, barriers, solutions and opportunities for restoring biodiversity in the Waikato region to inform the development of the biodiversity strategy.

Approximately 70 people attended the workshops, representing a range of stakeholders including:

- territorial authorities
- community organisations and trusts
- NGOs (e.g. Fish & Game, QEII)
- central government (DoC and MPI)
- iwi JMA partners
- industry groups (e.g. Foresta, Tatua Dairy Co.)
- Interested individuals.

Stakeholder meetings were also held with Forest & Bird, WRC Dairy Sector, Central North Island Wood Council and the Advisory Committee for the Regional Environment. Meetings were also held with WRC staff to reflect on the external engagement feedback and to provide additional input for the draft strategy. Further insights were also gathered through surveys conducted as part of Council's Integrated Catchment Management Framework project in the latter half of 2025.

These workshops and meetings also complemented previous engagement efforts carried out for the development of the Waikato Biodiversity Accord.

Figure 1: "Te Reo o te Taiao: A Call from Nature – Developing a Regional Biodiversity Strategy" Discussion document themes

An overriding expectation of parties during the engagement process is that this is just the start of an ongoing discussion about biodiversity in the Waikato region. The council has been greatly assisted and encouraged by the generosity of interested stakeholders and iwi over this initial engagement period.

Workshop questions

The engagement sessions followed a similar format with an opening presentation by WRC staff (Appendix) and a workshop where participants were asked the following questions:

Regional Aspirations For Biodiversity

Focus Question: *What would you like to see in a regional biodiversity strategy?*

What Is Our Current Reality And How Do We Respond?

Focus Question: *What are some of the obstacles and constraints preventing us from successfully achieving our aspirations?*

How Might We Set Out To Achieve Our Aspirations for Biodiversity?

Focus Question: *What do we need to do to address these obstacles and constraints?*
Focus Question: *What key opportunities are available to move us forward?*
Focus Question: *What could we practically accomplish over the short (10 years), medium (20 years) and long term (50 years)?*

Feedback gathered was then analysed, summarised and sorted by discussion document theme. During the engagement, communities also shared their views on biodiversity issues and priorities by sub-region and these have also been summarised.

Next Steps

The feedback provided through Phase 1 has been invaluable in informing the vision, outcomes and strategic focus areas in the draft Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy.

The draft strategy will be discussed at a Council workshop in April 2026. Following this, the final draft of the strategy will be presented to Council in early May 2026 for approval to release online for public feedback.

Feedback on Themes (Aspirations, Obstacles & Constraints, Solutions & Opportunities)

THEME 1 EMPOWERING LANDOWNERS AND COMMUNITIES

1.1 Missed opportunities for connection or collaboration

Description:

Strengthening connections and collaboration between agencies and community groups has emerged as a key priority across local and regional council planning documents.

Currently, coordination in biodiversity efforts varies across the region, and in some cases, groups operate in isolation, missing opportunities to align actions, share knowledge and pool resources.

When collaboration does occur, whether through cross-sector partnerships, joint training initiatives, or informal networks, it often leads to more impactful and enduring outcomes. Supporting and expanding these collaborative approaches can significantly enhance biodiversity efforts and community engagement.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Strategic Vision and Direction

Establishing a clear long-term goal or vision, such as a 250-year or 2050 regional target, is essential for providing direction to all stakeholders. A well-articulated vision statement helps unify efforts and ensures that even district councils with varying levels of engagement have a common purpose. This vision does not need to be numerically defined but should clearly outline the intended outcomes in a compelling way that guides collaborative efforts.

Connectivity, Collaboration and Partnerships

There was a strong emphasis on enhancing connectivity and collaboration between agencies, iwi, community groups, landowners and key organisations like councils, Department of Conservation (DOC) and the Waikato River Authority. This includes fostering collective partnerships and creating regional alliances similar to the examples like the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance, Bay Conservation Alliance, Reconnecting Northland and Wild for Taranaki.

Alignment and Coordination of Efforts

Aligning and coordinating the mahi (work) of district councils, local groups, and key organisations is seen as essential for maximising impact. This includes opportunities for workstream alignment (e.g. synchronising local biodiversity strategies with a regional biodiversity strategy) and ensuring that all ongoing projects are visible to stakeholders. Improved visibility will help connect efforts, prevent duplication, and support a more integrated approach to biodiversity management.

Public Engagement and Buy-In

Securing buy-in from the wider public and harnessing existing community interest are seen as critical for the success of biodiversity initiatives. Encouraging partnerships and making opportunities for public involvement visible can help maintain momentum and ensure that initiatives are community-driven and supported. Schools are seen as important community hubs for engaging diverse groups, promoting education, and driving action.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Coordination and Collaboration Challenges

Community feedback highlights a lack of coordination between agencies, councils, community groups, volunteers, farmers and iwi. Many feel there is no effective inter-agency coordination, leaving the public to push for change on their own.

Local hubs that could enhance connectivity and collaboration are stretched for resources, meaning that groups may need to work independently within rigid administrative boundaries. This leads to duplicated efforts, initiatives and tools.

During tough times, connections between groups weaken. Differences in the capacity of groups to tackle issues and a siloed approach make collaboration difficult, and conflicting interests within and between organisations add to the challenges.

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Improve Collaboration and Connection**

There is an opportunity to build district-level and cross-district biodiversity forums (including scaling up the existing Waikato Biodiversity Forum) to build stronger relationships, align priorities and drill down to operational level discussions.
A regional dashboard/portal, similar to the Te Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance which shows all current restoration projects, could better connect participants, share data, and coordinate actions.
Multi-agency projects (like the Peninsula Project) could be revitalised to strengthen partnerships across government, iwi, industry, and communities for joined-up delivery.
Communities and landowners are ready to lead biodiversity initiatives if given the right support and autonomy (“freedom within a frame”).
Ecosystem-focused approaches and collaboration can replace fragmented, single-species approaches (but noting that single species can be a flagship for ecosystem restoration projects e.g. Hamilton Halo).

1.2 Funding and resource challenges

Description:

Across the Waikato region, many community organisations and industry groups (such as forestry companies) are actively engaged in biodiversity-related restoration work, including pest plant and predator control, riparian planting and sharing best practice. These groups are well positioned to lead sustained, place-based action, yet their impact is often limited by short-term funding cycles and inconsistent government support.

Without reliable and long-term investment, it becomes difficult to plan effectively, build strong relationships between landowners and agencies, and maintain or expand restoration efforts.

Strengthening support for these local stewards is essential to realising the full potential of community-led conservation and ensuring lasting environmental outcomes.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Intergenerational and Sustainable Investment

An intergenerational (mokopuna) perspective is essential, striving to leave biodiversity in a better state for future generations. Sustainable funding models are critical to support ongoing improvements and stewardship, ensuring that biodiversity protection is maintained over the long term.

Coordinated and Strategic Funding Support for Community Groups

A coordinated and strategic approach to funding is essential to support biodiversity initiatives across the region. Regional funding mechanisms, along with project-specific funding streams, should be established to help prioritise and fund critical work. This could include supporting existing hub organisations that advocate for biodiversity protection. A more coordinated regional approach is needed to navigate multiple sources, timeframes, and priorities, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently.

Innovative and Alternative Funding Mechanisms

Exploring new funding avenues is crucial to diversifying financial resources and reducing reliance on traditional streams. This includes mechanisms such as:

- endowment funds;
- biodiversity credit markets (as exemplified by the Maungatautari project);
- participation in government pilot programmes such as the biodiversity credit pilot led by Manaaki Kaimai Mamaku Trust and Boffa Miskell Ltd (adapting international methodology to NZ environments);
- income-generating activities such as farm walks.

Embedding Biodiversity Support in Long-Term Planning

Hardwiring biodiversity support into Long Term Plans (LTPs) and agency core budgets ensures sustained support and strategic alignment of funding across sectors. Funding should be made accessible through established channels, with the LTP process serving as a key funding vehicle, while also considering additional opportunities such as biodiversity credits.

Decision-Making and Outcome-Focused Funding

Using the strategy as a decision-making tool will help to clearly identifies which actions will yield significant outcomes. This clarity will underpin financial mechanisms, supporting the development of alternative funding mechanisms to alleviate pressure on rates and enabling more targeted investments. Focusing on outcome-driven funding ensures that resources are invested in actions with the greatest potential impact.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Insufficient Funding for Biodiversity Restoration

Community members express concern over insufficient funding and resources for biodiversity restoration. They report that incentives are lacking and funding is often misaligned or unavailable where it is needed most. Competition between groups for the same funding pie is also an issue.

Funding Instability

Continuity of funding is an issue (e.g. Jobs for Nature programmes). Very few people have wide comprehensive knowledge of national and local funding opportunities and what funders actually want. Many groups say they spend too much energy just trying to survive amid funding cuts.

Lack of Volunteer and Governance Capacity

Rising living costs affect volunteer availability. Effective governance and expertise shortages strain efforts. Over-reliance on volunteers without enough support threatens sustainability, and competition for limited funds causes inefficiencies. Structural gaps in capital funding and biodiversity networks remain, with volunteer burnout a growing worry.

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Improve Funding & Resourcing**

New funding mechanisms such as biodiversity credits, biodiversity/tourist tax, district-level targeted rates, endowment funds and etc. could unlock investment in biodiversity restoration.

Funding for coordinators through LTPs may offer more permanent solutions and stabilise biodiversity delivery.
Collective or bulk purchasing models (buyer's collective) offer cost efficiencies for restoration tools, services and equipment.
Co-funding agreements with farmers through their EPAs creates shared outcomes.
Large scale investment models (e.g. Kaimai Mamaku) demonstrate the impact of sustained catchment funding.
Long term staffing and regional champions could stabilise delivery and reduce burnout.

1.3 Lack of awareness and celebrating success

Description:

Opportunities to share progress and celebrate success in biodiversity efforts are often underutilised, limiting public awareness and engagement.

Recognising achievements highlights the valuable work being done, but also helps build momentum, inspire wider participation and reinforce the importance of collective action.

Celebrating success also strengthens long-term commitment to biodiversity goals and fosters a sense of shared purpose across communities and organisations.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Normalising Biodiversity Care Across Communities

Emphasising that we are all part of nature helps foster a culture where caring about biodiversity is a shared community value. Efforts should focus on bringing people up to speed and fostering widespread community pride in local biodiversity initiatives, such as through taglines like "Coromandel Naturally."

Celebrating Success and Positive Actions

Community education and storytelling should be prioritised, with good stories about biodiversity restoration outcompeting everyday narratives. There is enthusiasm for opportunities to celebrate achievements and share good news, so people can witness positive change. Strategies should identify and showcase small actions; clear, consistent communication will help the public understand that even minor projects can have significant impacts.

Platforms such as webpages or online portals that connect people, places and projects are valued for sharing updates, success stories and inspiring further involvement.

Visualising Progress and Case Studies

The community appreciates visual tools, such as maps that show changes in biodiversity and restoration work over time. Developing new maps to highlight completed work across catchments enables communities to see tangible progress. Case study examples are encouraged to showcase successful projects and inspire further action.

Balancing Compliance with Celebration

Feedback highlights the importance of enabling and recognising positive actions, ensuring that the celebration of achievements is balanced alongside necessary compliance and limitations.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Low Awareness of the Value of Biodiversity

Feedback reveals a widespread lack of understanding and appreciation of the value of biodiversity. There is a general feeling that the public feel disconnected from nature and unaware of the state of biodiversity (e.g. loss of indigenous vegetation in the region), and its importance (e.g. ecosystem services). This leads to low prioritisation of biodiversity issues. These gaps in awareness and advocacy hinder efforts to celebrate successes and build wider support for restoration.

Unclear Roles and Responsibilities

Community voices point to unclear roles and responsibilities as a major barrier. There is uncertainty about who should act and champion initiatives. This results in reactive rather than proactive approaches.

There is a role for councils to interpret and be a "funnel" for central government statutory and policy frameworks. Feedback also emphasised that both central and local government need to complement (i.e. "do the stuff that others can't") and support the role of communities and iwi in biodiversity restoration. Sharing successful biodiversity restoration practices and leading by innovation and example was also seen as an important role (e.g. the "Revive Our Gulf" project, restoring mussels and kelp beds in the Hauraki Gulf).

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Improve Awareness & Celebrate Success**

Storytelling, marketing campaigns and media coverage can shift public perception and celebrate biodiversity success.
Positive framing of biodiversity actions (exploring "what's in it for me?" for different stakeholders), rather than focusing on limitations, can inspire action.
Accessible information and campaigns (e.g., "Coromandel Naturally") offer models for localised engagement.
Greater public appetite exists for more accessible, inspiring biodiversity content with a bit more everyday relevance and humour that resonates with the public (e.g. current DOC "Be Naturing" campaign).
When lead agencies or organisations are known and responsibilities are clear, communities, hapū, iwi, and landowners know who to go to for guidance, partnership, and funding — making it easier to plan and deliver effective restoration.

THEME 2 PARTNERING WITH TANGATA WHENUA

2.1 Ecosystem restoration and protection

Description:

Collaborative restoration efforts led by iwi, hapū and marae have the potential to deliver significant environmental and cultural benefits.

To fully realise these opportunities, consistent support, adequate resources, and formal recognition are essential. Strengthening partnerships and investing in joint strategies with local and regional councils can help unlock the full potential of these initiatives, ensuring the restoration of native ecosystems and the protection of culturally significant sites.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Consistency With Iwi Environmental Management Plans

It is important to understand iwi and tangata whenua aspirations for biodiversity, as Treaty settlements are likely to lead to tangata whenua seeking opportunities to undertake biodiversity work on their own land. Iwi throughout the region have shared their aspirations and interests in biodiversity through iwi environmental management plans.

2.2 Biodiversity management and monitoring

Description:

Collaborative approaches to pest control, environmental monitoring, and customary practices are demonstrating strong results.

Greater coordination, resourcing, and integration of Māori-led initiatives are important. Supporting these efforts improves biodiversity protection and allows better tracking of environmental health.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Empowering Whanau and Community

Feedback highlights the need to strengthen the skills and resources of whānau and local communities to actively monitor key freshwater taonga species such as koura, kākahi, and koaro. This ensures that mātauranga/indigenous knowledge and iwi values and priorities play a central role in ongoing biodiversity efforts.

Protecting Taonga Species

It was also suggested that a clear hierarchy of taonga species be established to focus efforts on creating the best possible conditions for priority species to flourish, supporting long-term ecological resilience and cultural wellbeing.

2.3 Knowledge sharing and education (mātauranga)

Description:

Preserving and sharing mātauranga-ā-iwi, mātauranga-ā-hapū, and mātauranga-ā-whānau is key for intergenerational biodiversity outcomes.

Delivering initiatives in education and training can inspire emerging kaitiaki. To ensure lasting impact, these efforts benefit from sustained support, coordinated action and formal recognition.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Understanding and Incorporating Te Ao Māori Approaches

Feedback highlighted the importance of sharing knowledge and fostering partnerships between councils, iwi, community members, and kaimahi working on the ground. Community members emphasised the need to embed Te Ao Māori—Māori worldviews and values—into biodiversity restoration. There is a strong call to recognise and respect mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) alongside western scientific approaches, ensuring Māori perspectives are meaningfully reflected in restoration efforts. Treating both knowledge systems as equally valuable ensures a more complete, fair, and inclusive definition of success for biodiversity projects.

2.4 Innovation and funding

Description:

Sustainable, equitable and accessible funding mechanisms are essential to support iwi and hapū-led initiatives.

Strengthening long-term financial support and fostering inclusive collaboration will help ensure grassroots conservation efforts are well-resourced, resilient, and able to thrive over time.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Incentivising Māori Landowners for Biodiversity Protection

Māori landowners play a crucial role in preserving indigenous biodiversity, and there is strong community support for introducing incentives to encourage them to retain and protect native ecosystems on their lands.

There is a clear call from the community for meaningful and effective support mechanisms to help Māori landowners achieve positive outcomes for both their development aspirations and biodiversity protection, especially in areas where significant indigenous vegetation remains on Māori land. The strategy should recognise these interests and incorporate specific actions to ensure both development and biodiversity goals are considered and respected.

Sustaining Māori-Led Biodiversity Initiatives

Sustainable, equitable and accessible funding is essential to empower iwi and hapū-led conservation projects. Long-term financial backing, along with inclusive partnerships, enables biodiversity restoration by Māori to be well-resourced and enduring. Ongoing education and training for iwi and hapū, consistent support and formal recognition are needed – including partnerships with councils that enable restoration and protection of important sites.

2.5 Cultural practices and resilience

Description:

Cultural practices such as rāhui (temporary restrictions), maramataka (Māori lunar calendar), and rongoā (traditional healing) carry deep ecological and spiritual significance.

These practices are being revitalised in some communities to enhance wellbeing, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

Expanding their integration into environmental policy, planning and funding frameworks presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen holistic and culturally grounded approaches to environmental stewardship.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Embedding Iwi Aspirations for Cultural Wellbeing

Community feedback highlighted the importance of embedding cultural and iwi aspirations at the heart of the biodiversity strategy. There is a strong desire to respect and support Māori customary rights, especially relating to traditional kai gathering practices. The strategy should ensure that iwi and Māori communities are empowered to maintain and revive practices such as rongoā and rāhui.

Wellbeing Through Biodiversity and Restoration of Traditional Kai

Another key theme is the connection between individual and collective wellbeing and healthy biodiversity. Iwi want the strategy to encourage the restoration of populations of native species, with the long-term goal of bringing traditional Māori kai, such as freshwater crayfish and paua, back onto marae tables. This approach not only supports ecological health but also strengthens community wellbeing and cultural identity.

Obstacles and Constraints

Protecting Biodiversity Versus Development on Māori land

Approximately 44% of Māori freehold land in the region is in indigenous vegetation. Protecting Significant Natural Areas (SNA) on Māori freehold land was identified as a sensitive issue, requiring careful balance between ecological protection and landowner aspirations for economic return.

Lack of Understanding of Culturally Grounded Practices

Participants also pointed to broader attitudes toward biodiversity loss, observing that limited understanding of mātauranga Māori amongst non-Māori can undermine restoration efforts. Overall, the feedback underscored that successful biodiversity initiatives depend on building trust, recognising cultural values, and fostering a shared biodiversity vision across the community.

Many respondents stressed the importance of genuine iwi engagement, noting that collaboration must respect cultural practices and the resilience of iwi communities.

Iwi Capacity Constraints

Many iwi, hapū and whānau face significant financial constraints and limited access to adequate funding for large-scale or long-term restoration projects. While some iwi are major contributors to conservation efforts, consistent and sufficient funding remains a sector-wide challenge. Feedback noted the kaupapa that falls on Māori shoulders given the extensive biodiversity restoration opportunities present on their whenua.

Solutions and Opportunities to Improve Working Alongside Iwi and Hapū

Iwi aspirations present a rich opportunity for on-the-ground projects and biodiversity leadership, but they need the space and support to do this.
Iwi environmental management plans (IEMPs) are a kete of biodiversity aspirations which can inform the biodiversity strategy so that it aligns with iwi values and priorities.
Dedicated funding for iwi and hapū engagement benefits both the community groups doing the work and iwi themselves.
Joint monitoring and reporting with a strong mātauranga Māori focus can enhance understanding and trust between iwi, government, and communities.
Alignment between the biodiversity strategy and relevant iwi legislation (e.g. Te Ture Whaimana Vision and Strategy) offers a pathway to a shared vision.
Embedding iwi perspectives in the strategy design can enhance its legitimacy.
Sharing knowledge and supporting mentoring initiatives especially for rangatahi drives inter-generational succession in long term biodiversity restoration projects.

THEME 3 STRENGTHENING DATA, POLICY AND INVESTMENT

3.1 Monitoring, reporting and data gaps

Description

A clear and accurate picture of regional biodiversity health depends on comprehensive and accessible data across ecosystems, land tenures and biodiversity groups. Currently, gaps in data collection and sharing mean that critical information, such as species populations, habitat conditions, and restoration outcomes, can become siloed, outdated or missing altogether. Community members recognise that while many good monitoring tools and data sets are available, they are often scattered and difficult to access. This limits our ability to assess trends, identify priority areas and coordinate effective responses across sectors and communities.

Additionally, cultural and social indicators are not well integrated into monitoring and reporting frameworks, which limits the inclusion of tangata whenua and community perspectives in biodiversity assessment and decision-making. Addressing these gaps will improve early detection of environmental changes, support more informed strategic decisions and ensure that diverse values and knowledge systems are reflected in environmental planning.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Collaborative Monitoring and Standardisation

Feedback highlights the need for increased dialogue and collaboration between community groups, regional council monitoring teams, and other stakeholders. There was a call for a standardised monitoring system with clear frameworks and clarified responsibilities. Setting up partnerships and utilising existing capabilities are seen as key to building a consistent approach to monitoring across the region.

Improved Biodiversity Data Coordination and Accessibility

A key piece of feedback was that the biodiversity strategy needs to prioritise easy access to reliable data. An example was given of a forestry company that collects native bat (pekapeka) sighting data which could be matched with databases held by Department of Conservation and other agencies. There was emphasis on the need for a coordinated and centralised regional data portal (e.g. Global Biodiversity Information Facility) to consolidate biodiversity information and bring together existing datasets. This would make it simpler for everyone to find, share, and use information, supporting informed decision-making and collaboration.

Tracking Strategy Progress and Measuring Success

Stakeholders emphasise the importance of establishing clear indicators to track the success of the biodiversity strategy. There is a desire for regular reporting tools that can tell the story of how the strategy is being implemented and its impact. This includes developing a robust monitoring plan—both to create a baseline of current conditions and to assess changes over time. A standardised, regional approach would help ensure that biodiversity outcomes are measured in the same way across the region.

Focusing on Ecological Connectivity

Feedback also stressed the significance of assessing the connectivity between existing habitats and refugia. Stakeholders and community members would like to the strategy to include ecological connectivity analysis to prioritise key linkages and identify critical “pinch points” in the landscape, so that restoration efforts can be focused where they are most beneficial for the overall health of the region’s ecosystems.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Lack of Consistent Monitoring

Community members highlighted the lack of consistent monitoring of biodiversity projects as a major obstacle. While initiatives are often launched with good intentions, limited follow-up and weak outcome monitoring make it difficult to assess progress or learn from results. Without clear evidence of what works, restoration efforts risk being fragmented and less effective.

Data Gaps & Inconsistencies

Community feedback highlighted significant gaps in biodiversity data, with participants noting both a lack of awareness about what information is needed and the difficulty of obtaining it. Restoration projects often rely on dispersed, incomplete or outdated datasets, leaving communities uncertain about how to proceed. Inconsistent datasets and standards create confusion and make it difficult to compare results or coordinate across projects, reducing the overall effectiveness of biodiversity restoration at regional and national levels.

Measuring Biodiversity

Respondents emphasised that measuring biodiversity itself is inherently difficult. The complexity of ecosystems, combined with limited tools and resources, makes it challenging to capture accurate indicators of ecological health. This difficulty contributes to uncertainty in evaluating restoration success.

Information and Science Limitations

Another obstacle raised was the lack of accessible, up-to-date scientific information. Communities expressed the need for better models, visuals, and communication tools to understand biodiversity trends and restoration outcomes. Without these resources, it is harder to build shared understanding and support for action.

A Spatial Approach

Community members prefer a spatial approach or interactive map format for the biodiversity strategy that is accessible to everyone, rather than a document that may be difficult for some to engage with.

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Address Data and Monitoring Gaps**

Standardised biodiversity monitoring methods and tools across the region can improve data quality and comparability.
Centralised biodiversity data portals could streamline access to biodiversity information.
New technologies for spatial planning, GIS tools and AI offer new frontiers for data-driven restoration (e.g. Eco-Index platform).
Evidence-based, accurate guidance documents can better connect restoration efforts across the region.
Building training programmes for monitoring, data gathering and reporting that are consistent across the region results improves trust in the data.

3.2 Policy gaps and inconsistencies

Description

Biodiversity policies must evolve to better address the cumulative impacts of land use and climate change, which can compound over time and across landscapes. When these impacts are not considered holistically, responses tend to be fragmented and insufficient to protect biodiversity at scale. For instance, while land development, agriculture and infrastructure projects may meet individual compliance standards, their combined effects can erode habitat connectivity, water quality and native species resilience.

Inconsistent monitoring and enforcement of biodiversity protections can further weaken outcomes. At the same time, restoration efforts need the backing of clear, practical and supportive rules. If policies are overly complex or restrictive, they may discourage participation and limit the potential for community-led action. Strengthening policy frameworks to be both effective and enabling is key to achieving long-term biodiversity goals.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Regulatory Tools and Compliance

Community feedback strongly emphasises the need for robust regulatory tools to monitor and enforce biodiversity outcomes. There is strong support for fair and consistent enforcement of these rules, with transparent reporting, and increased policing of non-compliance. Respondents advocate for meaningful penalties to serve as effective deterrents especially for native vegetation clearance, and consistency across the region.

Strategy Resilience to Political Change

Many participants express concern about the vulnerability of biodiversity strategies to shifting political priorities. Feedback suggests that strategies should be designed to withstand changes in government and policy direction, with strong legislative backing and oversight by an independent group. This resilience is seen as critical for maintaining continuity and achieving long-term restoration goals.

Clearer Priorities

Setting clear priorities and ensuring fairness in support for biodiversity initiatives should be a key component of the strategy. There was support for the use of transparent prioritisation tools to guide investment and restoration efforts. People noted, for example, that there is often a focus on threatened species but that landscape-level action is needed. There is also a call for equitable approaches that recognise the diverse needs of different communities and landowners, particularly in areas with competing land uses.

Regional and National Alignment

Feedback highlighted the importance of aligning regional and district biodiversity strategies, and with the national biodiversity strategy and the strategies of neighbouring regions. Respondents noted that there are inconsistencies between territorial boundaries and strategy approaches and that this can undermine restoration efforts. They want less confusion across boundaries and better teamwork between local councils and regions to make sure restoration efforts are successful everywhere.

Practical, Local Solutions That Link with Related Plans

Stakeholders stressed the need for biodiversity strategies to be regionally or locally relevant and integrated with related initiatives, such as climate adaptation and land or catchment management plans. There is a desire for clear, practical actions that reflect local ecological conditions, community aspirations and existing partnerships - supporting a more holistic approach to biodiversity restoration.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Regulatory Constraints

Community feedback emphasised that biodiversity restoration is limited by high-level regulatory frameworks such as regional plans, district plans, and the regional policy statement. These rules set priorities and boundaries, meaning projects can only proceed within the constraints of existing regulations and planning controls.

Central Government Policy and Control

Participants raised concerns about central government resource management reforms and changing policy directions. Issues included fast track developments, negative attitudes toward biodiversity, entitlement narratives around private property rights, removal of controls on fossil fuels and support for mining activities. Central government's ability to override local processes—by speeding up consents and reducing public participation—was seen as a major obstacle to effective restoration.

Political Cycles and Inconsistency

Feedback highlighted the instability caused by the three-year political cycles, with shifting priorities and inconsistent support for biodiversity initiatives. This lack of continuity creates uncertainty and undermines long-term planning, making it difficult to sustain restoration efforts across successive governments.

Fragmentation of Strategies

Another challenge identified was the compartmentalisation of issues that require holistic consideration. Biodiversity strategies, catchment planning, climate change and pest control strategies are often treated separately, rather than integrated, which reduces the effectiveness of restoration and management. Feedback noted the lack of spatial planning, both on land and in the marine environment.

Compliance and Enforcement

Communities noted that monitoring compliance and appropriate prosecution is needed to enforce the biodiversity "bottom line", but limited capacity and resources weaken enforcement.

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Address Policy Gaps & Inconsistencies**

Resource Management reforms and the "one plan" offers a chance to embed biodiversity into the regional spatial plan.
Incorporating catchment, climate change and biosecurity issues into the strategy provides a more complete context for biodiversity restoration.
Alignment of the regional strategy with other regional documents (e.g. Te Ture Whaimana), district biodiversity strategies and the NZ Biodiversity Strategy means that people can better understand the NZ biodiversity context.
Clear, identified priorities and/or prioritisation frameworks in the regional biodiversity strategy can focus efforts where they matter most.
Agreed priorities for biodiversity between WRC, district councils and DOC would help to focus efforts where it counts.

3.3 Underutilised non-regulatory tools

Description

Non-regulatory tools, such as conservation covenants, landowner grants, and restoration advice, offer valuable support for protecting and enhancing biodiversity, particularly on private and Māori-owned land. However, uptake of these tools has been uneven. Many potential users are unaware of the support available or find the processes too complex, time-consuming or not well-suited to their needs.

Clear and accessible support tools encourage wider participation from landowners, iwi and hapū, individuals and community groups. Easy-to-use tools tailored to practical needs can also increase uptake and improve biodiversity management across the region.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Enabling Infrastructure and Incentives

Providing incentives and building capacity are key to enabling landowners and community groups to secure funds for biodiversity protection and associated infrastructure. This includes support for measures such as fencing and actions that prevent stock incursion, as well as recognising and rewarding those who actively protect and enhance biodiversity values. Such incentives not only support on-the-ground action but also encourage a culture of stewardship and ongoing improvement.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Lack of Incentives for Positive Action

Feedback noted the lack of incentives for positive action. Clearing land for production is seen as more economically rewarding than creating/preserving biodiversity, yet biodiversity on farms has a benefit to the regional community.

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Better Utilise Non-Regulatory Tools**

Mechanisms that incentivise and recognise biodiversity-enhancing actions are more likely to engage private landowners/farmers.
Biodiversity credits, environmental benefit lots and rates remission reward positive biodiversity action on private land.
Co-funding agreements that include mechanisms like conservation covenants and restoration grants/advice encourage shared outcomes.
Removing barriers (such as consents for wetland restoration) make it easier to do positive biodiversity actions.

THEME 4 PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS

4.1 Biosecurity/pest management risks

Description:

Pests and disease continue to pose serious threats to biodiversity and ecosystem health in the Waikato region, disrupting the ecological balance and reducing habitat quality for indigenous species.

Managing the impact of priority pest plants and animals and supporting iwi and community-led action in this area will improve biodiversity and help to make ecosystems more adaptable to environmental disturbances like the effects of climate change.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Reducing Competition and Supporting Native Species

There is a call to identify and minimise sources of competition for food and habitats, particularly from pest plants and animals, in order to create environments where native plants and animals can thrive. The community would like to see targeted actions that prioritise the health and resilience of native ecosystems. The priority species mentioned were: goats, deer, pigs, possums, mustelids and rats. Forestry companies also mentioned reinvasion from public land as an issue that needs to be addressed.

Pathogen Control and Biosecurity Measures

Community feedback highlights the importance of effective biosecurity protocols, such as pathogen management, to protect native species and habitats. People would like to see practical strategies and controls put in place to prevent the introduction and spread of harmful organisms.

Restoring Biodiversity Through Whole-Habitat Approaches

Community biodiversity restoration in Aotearoa New Zealand works best when it goes beyond predator free efforts and considers the entire ecosystem. While removing predators is essential, long term recovery also relies on restoring native vegetation, protecting waterways, and rebuilding the complex habitats that species depend

on. Taking a whole habitat view helps ensure resilient, thriving ecosystems (this includes plantation forests where the indigenous species are present).

Promoting Awareness and Changing Attitudes

There is a strong desire to shift perspectives around gardening and the use of civic spaces, encouraging the community to adopt practices that support biosecurity and native biodiversity. This includes fostering a greater understanding of how individual and collective choices impact local ecosystems.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Pest Management and Coordination

Communities noted the widespread challenges of weed control and lack of local coordination, especially for those species that are not in the RPMP. Social licence issues around issues such as the use of 1080 and cat control were also noted.

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Address Pest & Disease Risks**

Coordinated control of pest animals and plants is considered to be the most effective and efficient tool to restoring biodiversity in many situations and contexts.
Joined-up initiatives between DOC, WRC, iwi and community groups with an overall goal (e.g. RTC 5%) offers a good chance of success.
Strengthening integrated predator control across private and public lands—targeting species from possums to deer—offers a key opportunity to protect high value biodiversity areas, reduce reinvasion risk, and support healthy forests that deliver the greatest soil and water benefits.
Scaled-up pest control including use of 1080, reinstatement of large-scale, multi-agency collaborative projects such as the Peninsula Project, Project Crimson etc. and the Predator Free 2050 umbrella could reignite community enthusiasm for biodiversity protection.

4.2 Habitat fragmentation

Description:

Land use activities such as subdivision, agricultural intensification and road construction interrupt continuous habitat, creating isolated patches. Fragmented landscapes can limit the ability of species to move, feed, breed and adapt to environmental changes. Restoring ecological buffers and corridors is essential to reduce vulnerability to pest plants and animals including predators and climate-related stressors.

Addressing disconnected or fragmented protection efforts across land tenures, districts and management regimes can also help close gaps in the broader ecological network. While some areas benefit from strong conservation measures, expanding these efforts more consistently can enhance connectivity and resilience across the landscape.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

No Net Loss and Protection of Biodiversity

Community feedback strongly emphasises the importance of halting biodiversity decline and achieving no net loss in natural habitats and that this should be established as a bottom line in planning and policy.

Prioritising the Protection and Enhancement of Key Priority Biodiversity Areas

People want to see a strong focus on protecting both public and private areas, including marine, freshwater and terrestrial environments. Strengthening the connections between and around indigenous vegetation fragments, maintaining existing biodiversity priorities (such as riparian areas and wetlands), and prioritising high-value areas are seen as more effective than restoring already degraded sites. There is also support for a corridor approach and landscape-level thinking, emphasising connectivity between habitats and the importance of small refuges as stepping stones for mobile species.

This approach calls for a clear direction and prioritisation of actions, ensuring that resources are allocated to locations where they can have the greatest immediate impact on biodiversity outcomes.

Focus on Private Land

Feedback highlights the need to collaborate closely with private landowners, industry, and community groups, recognising that strategies already exist for public land. The strategy should include practical, achievable actions for landowners, even outside priority biodiversity areas. Connecting stakeholders through local hubs, supporting incremental behavioural changes, and fostering community-led, peer-supported initiatives are viewed as essential for success.

Integrating Land, Freshwater and Coastal Ecosystem Health

Community members stress the importance of addressing land use practices and respecting biophysical systems, including freshwater ecosystem health. This includes considering upstream-downstream relationships such as how the health of Kaimai Mamaku influences Tikapa Moana through nutrient and sediment runoff. Forestry companies also emphasised the mosaic of habitats e.g plantation forests adjacent to wetlands and native forests where species can move between them.

Clear Priorities and Action-Oriented Planning

There is a strong preference for clear priorities and moving away from trying to be "all things to all people," which can reduce impact. The strategy should set a clear, realistic scope by separating overarching direction from specific actions tailored to distinct ecological areas and land types, making it easier to identify and monitor priorities. A stepwise approach is favoured rather than trying to do everything everywhere. It should also be easy to understand (not too technical). People also want a spatial overview or "stock-take" of regional issues and activities to inform planning and engagement.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Infrastructure and Land Development Priorities

Habitat fragmentation in the Waikato region is compounded by multiple environmental and systemic challenges. People noted the economic drivers of land development/land-use changes, urban/coastal development and subdivision. Communities noted competing priorities such as infrastructure development, which is often valued more highly than ecological protection. Broader environmental pressures—including soil degradation, declining water quality, and climate change—further exacerbate fragmentation, making it harder to maintain connected ecosystems.

Fragmented Planning Frameworks

Community feedback highlighted that conflicts between different priorities make biodiversity restoration difficult. People pointed to tensions such as protecting wetlands versus managing flood risks. They also noted that planning is fragmented and lacks a clear, joined-up approach. The absence of coordinated, integrated spatial planning that clearly shows "no go" areas for development makes it hard to achieve connected, landscape-scale solutions. The dairy sector noted that farm environment plans (FEPs) are akin to "property-scale spatial planning", and are a good opportunity to build in biodiversity protection on farms (they do not wish to have two plans (an FEP and a biodiversity plan)).

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Address Habitat Fragmentation**

Catchment-wide approaches (e.g. mountains to sea) can reconnect fragmented ecosystems such as bush, riparian, wetlands and estuaries.
Considering the connection to the coastal marine area in the strategy e.g. riparian buffers and sediment control in catchments provides multiple benefits to freshwater ecosystems and also downstream estuaries, the sea and fisheries.
Biodiversity corridors identified in spatial plans helps to guide land use decision-making and infrastructure planning.

4.3 Recognition of social values

Description:

The natural environment contributes significantly to the recreational, spiritual and economic wellbeing of communities across the region. From forests, rivers to wetlands and coastlines, these environments provide spaces for leisure, cultural practices and connection to place. The coastal marine area, for example, is a valued site for recreation and food gathering.

However, these values are increasingly at risk. Declining water quality, habitat degradation and diminishing wildlife populations can limit access to safe swimming areas, reduce fishing opportunities and weaken people's connection to the environment. Protecting these landscapes is essential not only for individual wellbeing, but also for maintaining community identity, resilience and intergenerational connection to place.

Summary of feedback received:

- **Regional Aspirations**

Connecting Biodiversity Restoration to Social and Recreational Activities

Community members emphasise that a successful biodiversity strategy should highlight the link between biodiversity and recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, and mountain biking. They note that recognising these connections not only broadens the relevance of biodiversity to other sectors but also encourages wider community engagement and stewardship.

Promoting Education and Awareness

There is a strong desire for education initiatives that deepen understanding of native biodiversity, its uniqueness, and its importance. Feedback calls for targeted communication, especially for those in decision-making roles and for groups with less knowledge, such as urban residents and bach owners. Making biodiversity information accessible and easy to understand is seen as crucial to fostering community care and involvement.

Feedback highlighted the need to understand public perceptions of nature and acknowledge that world views are changing. They suggest the strategy should include efforts to track these shifts and actively promote a broader appreciation for the rights of nature and human responsibility in environmental stewardship.

Supporting Positive Pathways for Community Involvement

Feedback suggests that the strategy should support pathways for communities to participate in biodiversity efforts, reducing negativity/blame towards landowners and presenting information in a more positive light. This includes acknowledging and incorporating social indicators (e.g. attitudes, participation levels etc.) as key measures of success.

- **Obstacles / Constraints**

Lack of Understanding of Links Between Biodiversity and Social/Economic/Recreational Values

When ecosystems deteriorate, communities lose spaces for safe swimming, fishing and shellfish/food gathering as well as other activities such as tourism. Feedback, however, pointed to the lack of widespread understanding and appreciation of biodiversity's role in supporting social, recreational and economic values.

Biodiversity is natural capital; its decline reduces the productive capacity of the economy, while restoration enhances it, creating long-term value. Biodiversity needs to be seen as natural capital, to shift the focus from viewing community biodiversity restoration as a cost, to seeing it as an investment that yields long-term economic and social prosperity, driven by local stewardship. This is especially relevant now when all levels of government are struggling to fund restoration amid massive fiscal constraints on their budgets.

- **Solutions and Opportunities to Address Recognition of Social and Recreational Values**

The development of recreational linkages – such as walkways, cycle trails and circuits – can help biodiversity when they are planned and managed well by creating habitat corridors and increasing public support for biodiversity.
An effective, coordinated education and awareness programme about the importance and value of biodiversity at all levels across schools, industries, and communities can deepen understanding and care for nature.
There is a clear opportunity for the strategy to view biodiversity as natural capital, so that communities can see biodiversity restoration as more than just a cost but also as a long term investment that can provide jobs and strengthen local economies.

Feedback – Practical Actions

SHORT TERM (10 YEARS)

Ensure that the regional biodiversity strategy: ○ **articulates a clear vision to which the various parties such as community, iwi and industry can align with so that we are on the same path** ○ **focuses on collaboration between all parties** ○ **identifies biodiversity priorities/priority sites and corridors ("connect the dots")** ○ **focuses first on the "low hanging fruit"** ○ **is aligned with other biodiversity strategies (districts, other regions, national)** ○ **is aligned with other Waikato region strategies (e.g. Waikato River)** ○ **is reviewed when the RMA context changes** ○ **is embedded into catchment management and farm environment plans** ○ **has a right-sized, strategic approach to protecting biodiversity (not too ambitious).**
Establish and pilot a community empowerment framework, including a blueprint for community leaders, which ensures the sustainability of biodiversity actions
Establish a regional alliance to monitor strategy implementation
Develop an online, spatial, centralised regional data and information portal to bring together existing monitoring tools, datasets and priorities such as biodiversity sites or corridors.
Explore and implement a coordinated funding framework for biodiversity restoration in the region that: ○ **provides more secure long term funding for iwi, hapu and community biodiversity mahi** ○ **encourages joint funding applications** ○ **is resilient to shifting political winds.**
Explore new models of funding for biodiversity including: ○ **supporting the development of biodiversity credits schemes that attracts private capital investment in restoration** ○ **endowment funds** ○ **targeted rates** ○ **rates remission for ecologically significant areas** ○ **tourism levies** ○ **buyer's collectives for restoration equipment (e.g. traps)** ○ **corporate partnerships** ○ **community revenue streams (e.g. guided walks).**
Provide more support to hubs and collectives (especially in areas of the region where there are gaps such as South Waikato), who can in turn: ○ **promote local collaboration including joint funding applications** ○ **function as a funding advisory body** ○ **advocate for more committed and long term funding from central government** ○ **develop local funding mechanisms to attract philanthropic and business investment at place.**
Build capacity in community plant nurseries and also contractors to maintain pest control (employment and skills training).
Develop a clear, compelling, co-designed and smart communications/education programme that: ○ **promotes the good biodiversity work that is happening;**

○ is aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the value of biodiversity (the "big picture") ○ demonstrates the biodiversity loss issue (e.g. print posters of habitat loss and make them available in schools and communities) ○ includes a really good biodiversity education resource for schools through the Enviroschools programme ○ includes resources for others e.g. industry, landowners.
Create videos celebrating success and sharing what is going on in the community to inspire others to get involved.
Make available opportunities for the community to see successful biodiversity restoration projects – on farm, on whenua etc.
Partner with iwi to explore potential incentives and strategies to support biodiversity protection on their whenua whilst providing for their development aspirations.

MEDIUM TERM (20 YEARS)

Establish another large eco-sanctuary like Maungatautari.
Identify and/or protect zones for migration of species or habitats affected by climate change e.g. kauri, wetlands.
Increase employment and skills training for rangatahi (by 2043, 1 in 3 tamariki will be Māori).
Have yearly community meetings on the land where the action happened celebrating the success.
Focus council long term plans (LTPs) on prioritising nature-based solutions for climate change as a well-recognised tool for our resilience and adaptation approaches.
If biodiversity action is successful, we would see the following in 20 years: ○ Stopping/reversing habitat loss ○ Greater ecological connectivity and corridors, including cross-regional ○ Landscape biodiversity restoration, especially Waikato Awa with connections through tributaries and gullies to bush and wetland areas ○ Reduction in the amount of invasive plant and animal species ○ Net increase in indigenous vegetation ○ Improved and coordinated biodiversity monitoring and data collection ○ Greater public/general recognition that people are also part of nature – our personal and collective wellbeing is interconnected with that of te taiao ○ Coordinated funding between local, regional and central government plus business and industry plus some form of biodiversity credit system ○ Better economic valuation of biodiversity, its benefits and land uses that protect and enhance biodiversity (or at least ways to recognise externalised costs).

LONG TERM (50 YEARS)

If biodiversity action is successful, we would see the following in 50 years:

- **Intentional management of biodiversity, region-wide**
- **Native habitat is growing across the region**
- **Ecological corridors through the urban environment linking remaining native bush**
- **Resilient ecosystems**
- **Increases in many threatened species and other biodiversity outcome measures (would success be eating a kereru again…?)**
- **Biodiversity/nature no longer needs a separate focus or separate rules, and are instead embedded in all decision-making processes**
- **Biodiversity is an exemplar of how central and local government/iwi/community can work together and address challenges**
- **We are 100% Pure (or maybe 95%) Pure Waikato**
- **Our kids talking to their kids about the changes and improvements in biodiversity that their parents made.**

Feedback – Biodiversity in Sub-Regional Areas

During the engagement, the community also provided whakaaro and kōrero about their biodiversity issues and priorities for particular areas of the Waikato region. This feedback is captured below and arranged according to "sub-regions". These sub-regions roughly align with the Freshwater Management Units (FMUs) that Waikato Regional Council has identified as part of the current Freshwater Policy Review, although some have been combined (e.g. Upper Waikato and Taupo).

LOWER WAIKATO

- **Coordinated catchment action:** Improve cross-district predator and pest control, including weeds and koi carp, alongside better sediment and drainage management.
- **Stronger landowner engagement:** Increase buy-in for soil conservation, land retirement in flood prone areas, and uptake of restoration and riparian management practices.
- **Integrated planning & incentives:** Support farm plans, offer incentives (e.g. grants, biodiversity credits), and provide clear guidelines for restoring flood prone and degraded areas.
- **Waikato River focus:** Minimise discharges and prioritise restoration efforts across the river system.
- **Regional data visibility:** Create a whole region dashboard broken down by catchments to guide decision making and track progress.

MIDDLE WAIKATO & WAIPA

- **Strengthen ecological corridors and public access**, restoring and managing access routes to support native vegetation, predator control, and community involvement.
- **Engage communities and schools**, using education, youth participation, and local success stories (e.g. the Hamilton Halo project) to build long term stewardship especially where they are located adjacent to biodiversity areas.
- **Guide urban growth and industrial development** away from high value ecosystems, ensuring housing and infrastructure do not increase pressures such as water quality degradation or inappropriate offsetting.
- **Address biodiversity pressures** and impacts from high human density such as domestic animals on wildlife (and specific toxoplasmosis risk to Maui dolphins).
- **Support backyard biodiversity and local action in residential areas**, leveraging knowledge institutions and community networks to expand restoration, trapping, and ecological enhancement.

UPPER WAIKATO & TAUPO

- **Share successful environmental stories** such as the Lake Taupo water quality project and golden clam awareness - highlighting long timeframes, strong science, effective partnerships, and nitrogen reduction incentives.
- **Support tools and systems** including catchment and Waikato River Authority funding and the nitrogen cap/tradeable nitrogen system.
- **Recognise tangata whenua leadership**, noting the strong iwi presence and significant proportion of Māori land.
- **Protect geothermal systems and their habitats** - is vital for tourism.
- **Strengthen ecological connectivity** e.g. linking forested areas with the upper Waikato River, and key biodiversity corridors such as the west side of the Waikato River e.g. Maungatautari to Pureora.

- **Partner with iwi and hapū** to identify, protect, and enhance culturally valued sites, including marae/hapū-valued sites and mahinga kai areas.
- **Engage landowners** (particularly farmers) with clear messaging and support to improve biodiversity outcomes across the zone.
- **Improve landscape-scale habitat resilience**, including managing forestry harvest patterns to maintain continuous habitat corridors.
- **Build biodiversity considerations into development planning along the Waikato River and hydro lakes**, ensuring that rural residential housing proactively addresses habitat connectivity for bats, mitigates flooding risks, and prevents further "squeezing" of habitats due to solar farms, industrial and rural-residential expansion.

HAURAKI (WAIHOU/PIAKO)

- **Improve ecological connectivity**, e.g. linking the Kaimai Mamaku Ranges to the Kopuatai Peat Dome, utilising the Waihou–Piako River system connections, and mountain to sea pathways.
- **Integrate flood and peatland management**, using restoration to reduce long term flood management costs and protect peat ecosystems.
- **Support sustainable farming transitions**, aligning biodiversity goals with existing and future freshwater requirements, exploring land retirement, biodiversity credits, and "farm retreat" conservation opportunities.
- **Strengthen community capacity**, including funding hubs for restoration groups, outreach to schools and residents, and training opportunities for iwi and young farmers.
- **Reduce key pressures on biodiversity**, such as domestic pet impacts (e.g., cat microchipping) on wildlife and improving fertiliser management to include biodiversity considerations.

COROMANDEL

- **Strengthen coordinated pest control**, joining up efforts across WRC, DOC, iwi, landowners, and community groups to manage ungulates (goats, pigs, deer), possums, plant pests, and wilding pines, using consistent monitoring and defined control regimes (e.g., RTC 5%).
- **Reestablish or evolve multiagency programmes**, such as the former Peninsula Project, to deliver integrated land management, improved social licence, and a mountain to sea (ki uta ki tai) approach.
- **Protect priority ecosystems and species**, including Thames Coast pōhutukawa, and identify key areas where interventions will have the greatest biodiversity impact.
- **Address habitat squeeze of coastal wetlands** through coastal development and subdivision on one side, and sea level rise on the other.
- **Apply a landscape-scale approach**, incorporating both terrestrial and coastal/marine areas (CMA), understanding pressures like sedimentation, and maintaining ecological connectivity across groups and ecosystems.
- **Use existing strategic foundations**, such as the Predator Free Hauraki Coromandel plan and earlier initiatives (e.g., the Pōhutukawa Project), to guide effective implementation and revive proven ideas that were not previously realised.

WEST COAST

- **Partner with Māori landowners** to balance development aspirations with biodiversity protection, ensuring Maniapoto Environmental Management Plan priorities are reflected in future work.

- **Protect vulnerable ecosystems** across unstable, erosion prone hill country, karst landscapes, wetlands, lakes, harbours and coastal dunes, with a focus on restoring riparian margins of the Mōkau, Awakino and Whaingaroa Harbours and improving water quality.
- **Strengthen coordinated pest control**, especially for goats and possums, supported by subsidised tools and community led stewardship.
- **Build capacity for restoration**, including expanding nursery and contractor capability and supporting long term maintenance and pest control.
- **Enhance ecological connectivity**, linking land and sea (ki uta ki tai), protecting wildlife nursery areas, and securing significant natural areas to support threatened species.

Appendix 1: List of organisations invited to participate

Territorial Authorities	Central Government	Statutory Public Entities
Hamilton City Council	Department of Conservation (Hauraki/Waikato/Taranaki)	QEII National Trust
Waipā District Council	Te Puna Kōkiri	Fish & Game (Auckland/Waikato)
Waikato District Council	Ngā Whenua Rāhui	Hauraki Gulf Forum
South Waikato District Council	Ministry for the Environment	Waikato River Authority
Hauraki District Council	**Philanthropic, Research & Education**	**NGOs & Community Organisations**
Thames-Coromandel District Council	Trust Waikato	Go Eco
Taupō District Council	Manaaki Whenua - Landcare Research	Whaingaroa Environment Centre
Ōtorohanga District Council	University of Waikato – Environmental Research Institute	Project Tongariro
Waitomo District Council	University of Waikato – People, Cities, Nature	Predator Free Hauraki Coromandel Community Trust
Rōtorua District Council	Enviroschools	Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari
Matamata-Piako District Council	**Industry**	Manaaki Kaimai Mamaku Catchment Forum
	Federated Farmers	Piako Waihou Catchment Trust
	Fonterra	King Country River Care
	Tatua Dairy Company	West Coast Coastal Community Catchment Group Inc.
	Miraka	A.C.R.E. (Advisory Committee for Regional Environment)
	Dairy NZ	Waikato Biodiversity Forum
	Beef & Lamb NZ	The Karioi Project
	Deer Industry NZ	Moehau Environment Group
	Marine Farms Association	Whenuakite Kiwi Care Group
	Central North Island Wood Council	Project Kiwi Trust

	Foresta	Thames Coast Kiwi Care
Iwi and iwi authorities		Mahakirau Forest Estate Society
Te Kotahitanga o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Tūwharetoa	Waikato-Tainui	Predator Free Franklin
Raukawa Charitable Trust	Te Nehenehenui	Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society
Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board	Te Arawa River Iwi Trust	Kaitiakitanga Charitable Trust
Ngāti Hei ki Wharekaho Charitable Trust	Ngāti Whanaunga	Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust
Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki	Te Rūnang o Ngati Porou ki Hauraki	Puniu Rivercare/Puniu Inc.
Te Tāwharau o Ngāti Pūkenga	Te Patukirikiri	Ōtorohanga Kiwi House
Ngāti Tamaterā	Ngāti Tumutumu Trust	Taiea te Taiao – Maungatautari to Pirongia Ecological Corridor
Ngāti Tara Tokanui	Te Kupenga o Ngāti Haki Tūpuna Trust	Waikato River Care Inc.
Ngāti Paoa Iwi Trust	Ngāti Huarere ki Whangapoua	H.E.L.P. Waihi Catchment Group
Ngāti Tūrangitukua Charitable Trust	Ngāti Apakura Rūnanga Trust	Forest & Bird (Waikato)
Ngāti Haua Iwi Trust	Ngāti Hinerangi	NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust
Ngāti Kearoa Ngāti Tuarā	Ngāti Tahu Ngāti Whaoa Runanga Trust	The Nature Conservancy
Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Hikairo	Waahi Whaanui Trust	
Ngāti Haua Mahi Trust	Ngaa Muka Development Trust	
Wai Ora River Care Ltd	Lake Taupo Forest Trust & Rotoaira Forest Trust	

Appendix 2: Presentation for Workshop Session 1

Workshop – Session 1

Setting the Scene

A snapshot of biodiversity in the Waikato region

Key environmental features

- Waikato River, the longest river in New Zealand
- Lake Taupō, the largest lake in New Zealand
- Three RAMSAR wetlands – Whangamarino, Kopuatai Peat Dome and Firth of Thames
- Tongariro National Park, which is a World Heritage Area
- Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari, New Zealand's largest mainland ecological island
- New Zealand's largest karst area
- 10,000km² of coastal marine area, including parts of the Hauraki Gulf
- 70% of New Zealand's geothermal resources
- 74% of New Zealand's geothermal vegetation

The Waikato region is home to:

- More than 900 species of native plants
- 121 native bird species
- Two native frog species
- Two species of native bat
- 23 reptiles (including geckos, skinks and tuatara)

The region's streams, rivers and lakes provide habitat for many species of fish and invertebrates.

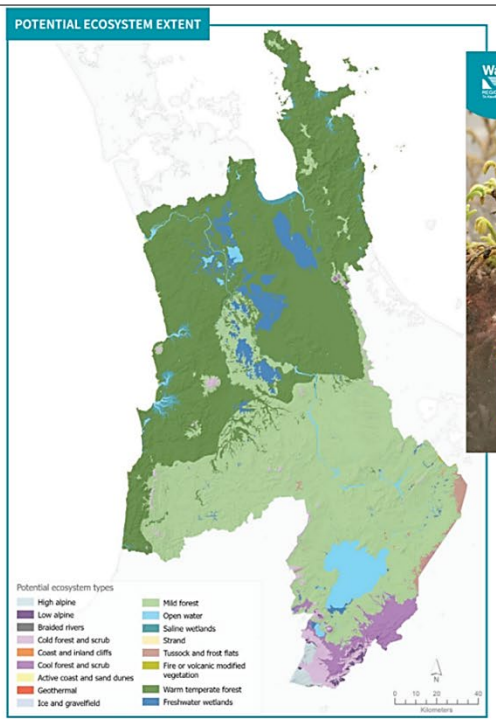
Around 17% of the region's land is in some form of legal protection:

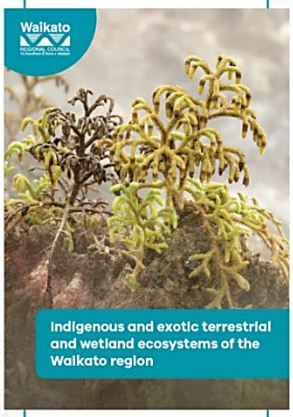
- 91% public land (DOC and local authority reserves)
- 8% private land (QEII covenants and Ngā Whenua Rāhui kawenata)
- 431,278ha of marine mammal sanctuaries

At least 16 species endemic to the Waikato region

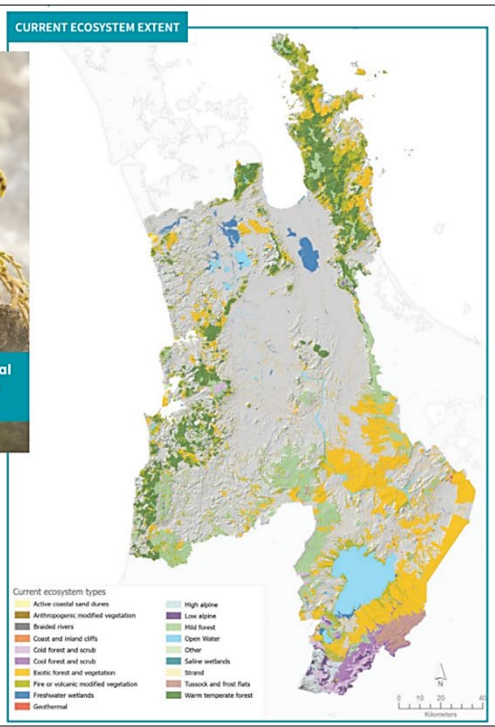
Proportion of the region's threatened or at risk indigenous species

Bats	Amphibians	Reptiles	Birds	Vascular plants
100%	100%	83%	75%	22%

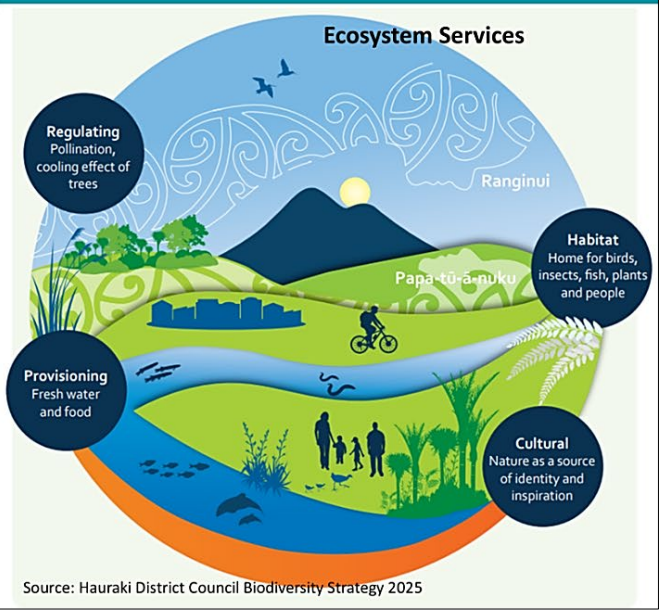




There are 89 terrestrial and wetland ecosystem types in the Waikato region



Key Pressure #1 – Human activities and disturbance



Key Pressure #2 – Introduced invasive species

Pest Animals

- Mammalian predators (e.g. rats, mustelids, feral cats, possums, pigs, hedgehogs)
- Mammalian browsers (e.g. feral goats, deer, rabbits, hares, wallabies, possums)
- Others e.g. rooks, magpies, wasps

Freshwater & marine pests

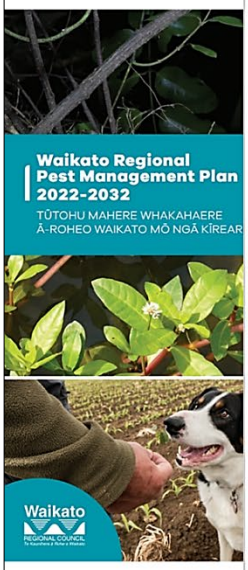
E.g. *Caulerpa*, turtles, clams

Diseases

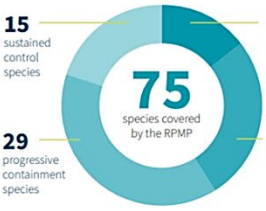
e.g. kauri dieback, myrtle rust, avian bird flu

Key Pest Plants

- Alligator weed
- Boneseed
- Evergreen buckthorn
- Mile-a-minute
- Nassella tussock
- Yellow flag iris
- Wild kiwifruit
- Water poppy
- Lantana
- Wilding pines



Key stats 2024/25



15 sustained control species

11 exclusion species

29 progressive containment species

20 eradication species

0 new exclusion sites found

11 new eradication sites found

76% of programmes are on track

19,247km covered during pest plant control and surveillance

3391 properties inspected for RPMP pest plants

5 biocontrol releases:

2 tradescantia leaf beetle

2 tradescantia spot fungus

1 green thistle beetle

9415.5 hours of goat control

6194 goats culled

5687km walked for wallaby surveillance

722km drone flown for wallaby surveillance

59 'out of containment' sighting reports of wallaby

116,493ha of Priority Possum Control

987ha Hamilton Halo possum and rat control

673 hull inspections for unwanted marine organisms

22 community events attended

1252 individuals engaged with kauri protection VR

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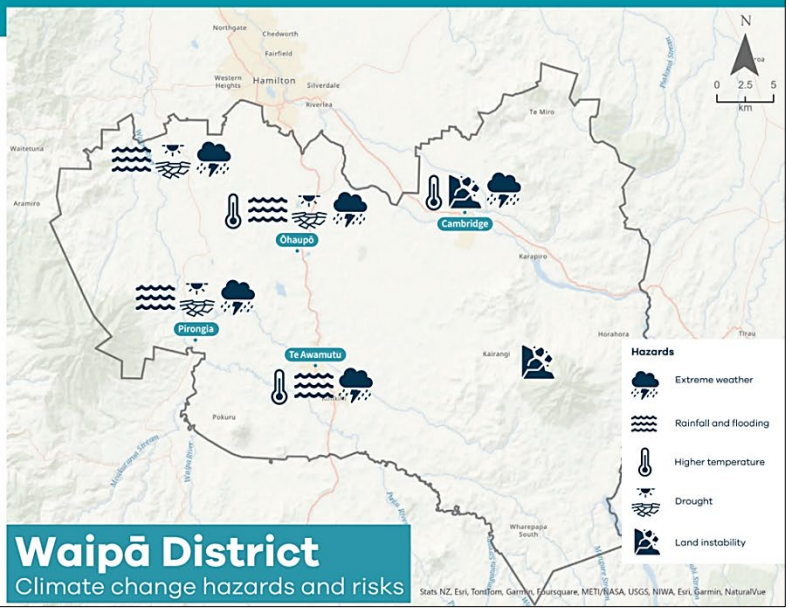
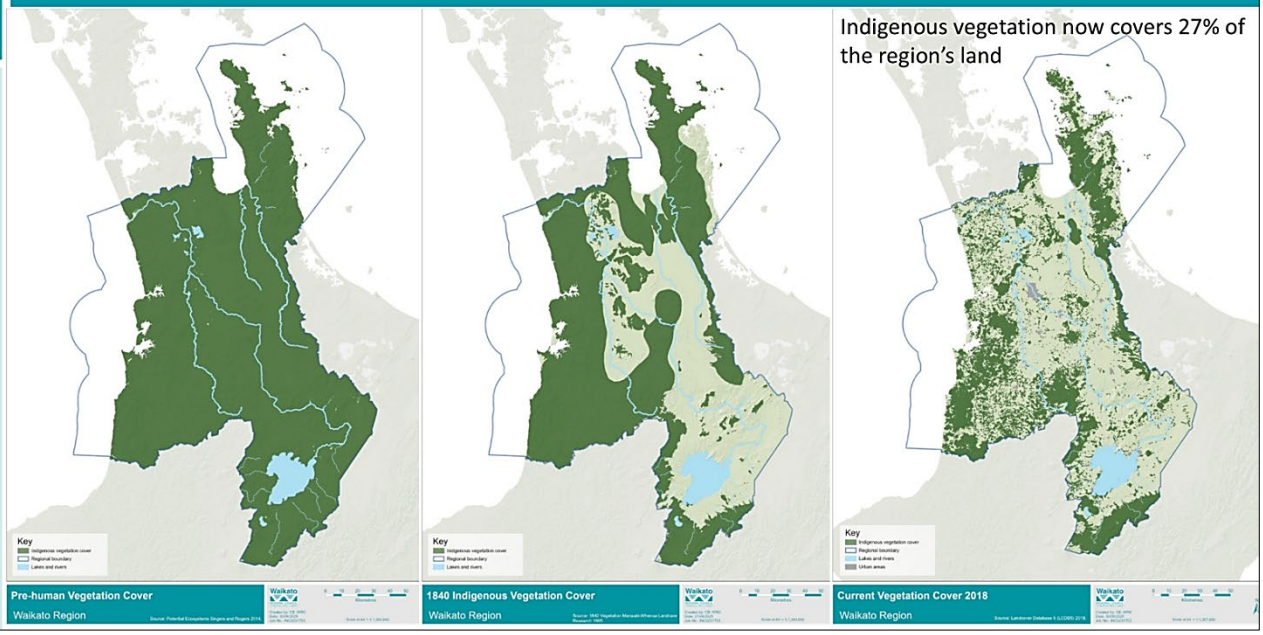
Key Pressure #3- Climate change

The Waikato region's key climate issues:

- Droughts and water availability
- Severe weather and flooding
- Landslides and erosion
- Coastal inundation, erosion and sea level rise
- Temperature increase
- Increased fire risk



- Fragmentation of forest habitat



• Wetlands


Swamp helmet orchid

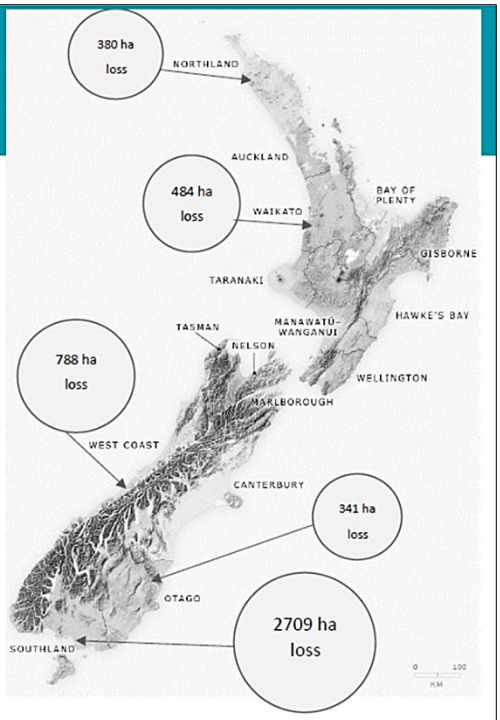
"Fred the Thread"

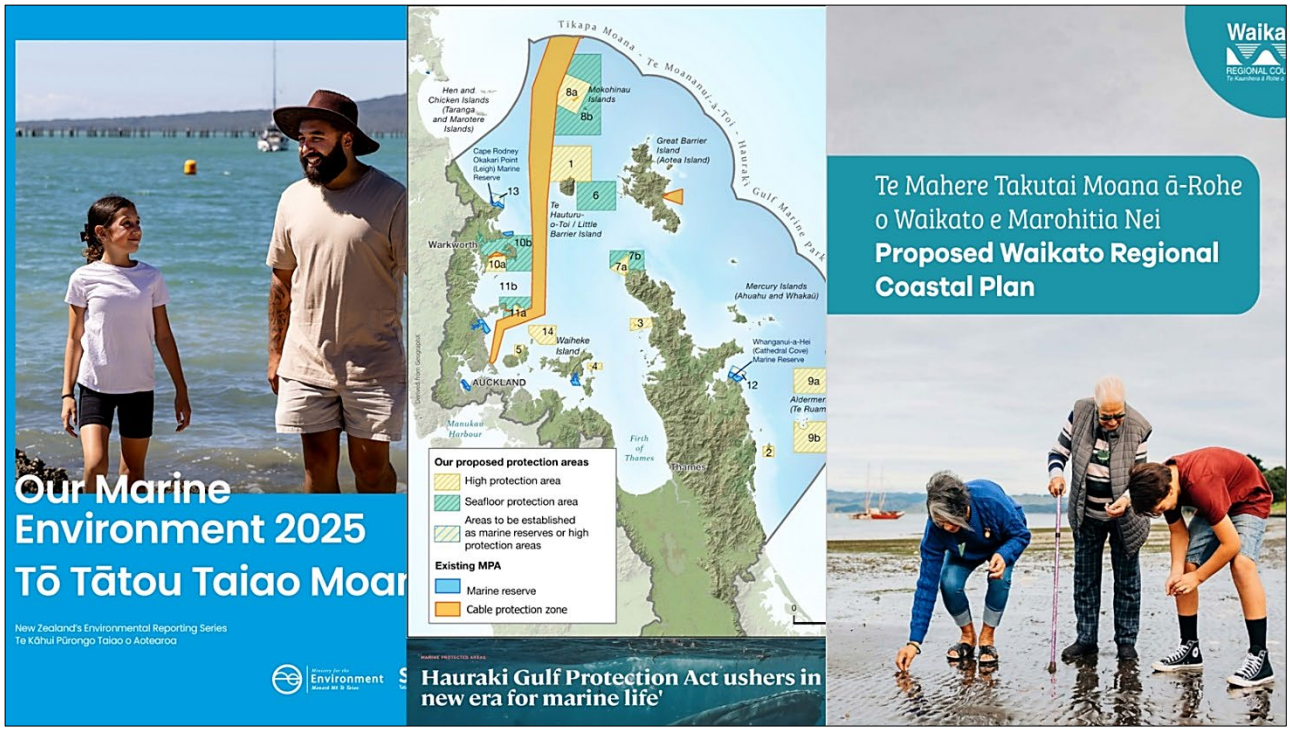
- Current extent of freshwater wetland = 33,268 ha (2018) – about 9% of pre-human extent
- 83% occur within the most threatened environments
- 78% in Waikato / Hauraki / Matamata Piako districts
- Waikato is an important stronghold for peatland
- Wetlands support the highest concentration of biodiversity out of all habitats
- Submontane and coastal wetlands are the least well-protected

• Root causes of wetland loss

National Wetland Trust - "Root Causes of Wetland Loss" report series:

- Waikato region - 484 hectares wetland lost 1996-2018
- Scale of wetland restoration does not keep up
- Most wetland loss is the result of unconsented activity, rather than weak policies or absence of rules
- Lack of monitoring, enforcement and prosecution

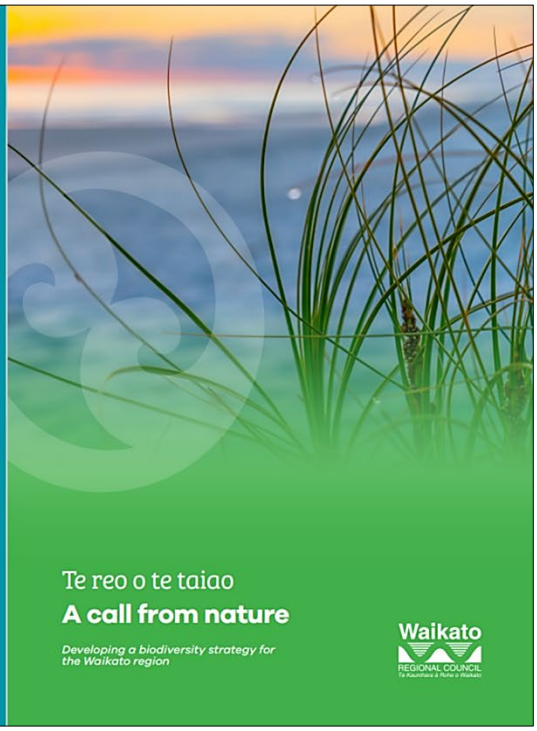




- Sensitive estuaries

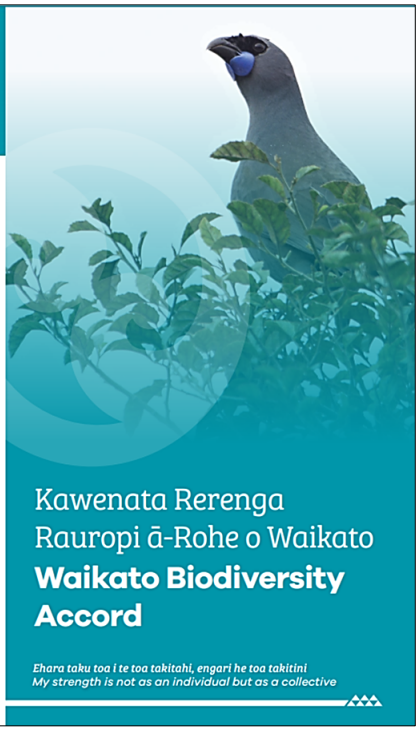
- Estuaries are sensitive receiving environments for what happens on land
- Waikato estuaries moderately healthy or good at 13 of the 15 sites monitored
- But many indicator animals declining in numbers over the 2001-2018 period
- Deposited sediment and increasing nutrient concentrations are the key pressures (e.g. smothering of benthic animals)
- River ecosystems depend on healthy estuaries – fish migration

A biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region



Why do we need a biodiversity strategy?

- Roles and responsibilities – biodiversity in the RMA, NPSIB
- Need to act now – increasing population, growth, new legislative reforms
- Lots of opportunities to work together better
- Need a greater range of approaches and tools to manage biodiversity



Regional biodiversity strategy - themes

Theme 1

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.

Theme 2

Partnering with tangata whenua

Working alongside iwi and hapū to embed mātauranga Māori in biodiversity efforts while upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Theme 3

Strengthening data, policy and investment

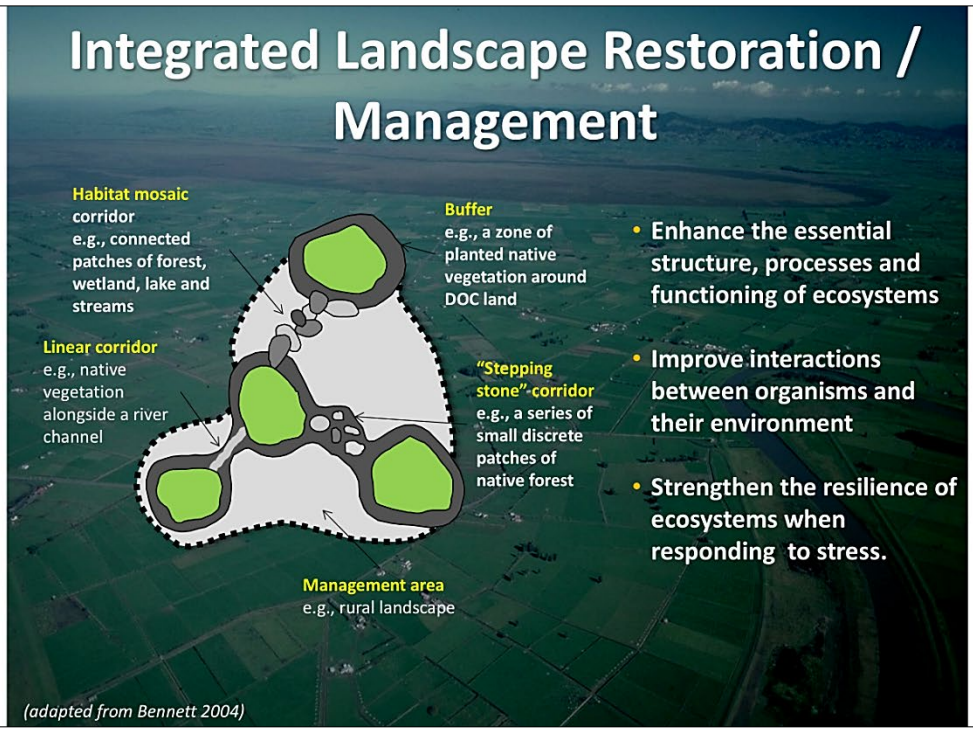
Investing in quality data alongside social, cultural and scientific monitoring information to guide action and track impact while addressing policy gaps and exploring effective non-regulatory tools.

Theme 4

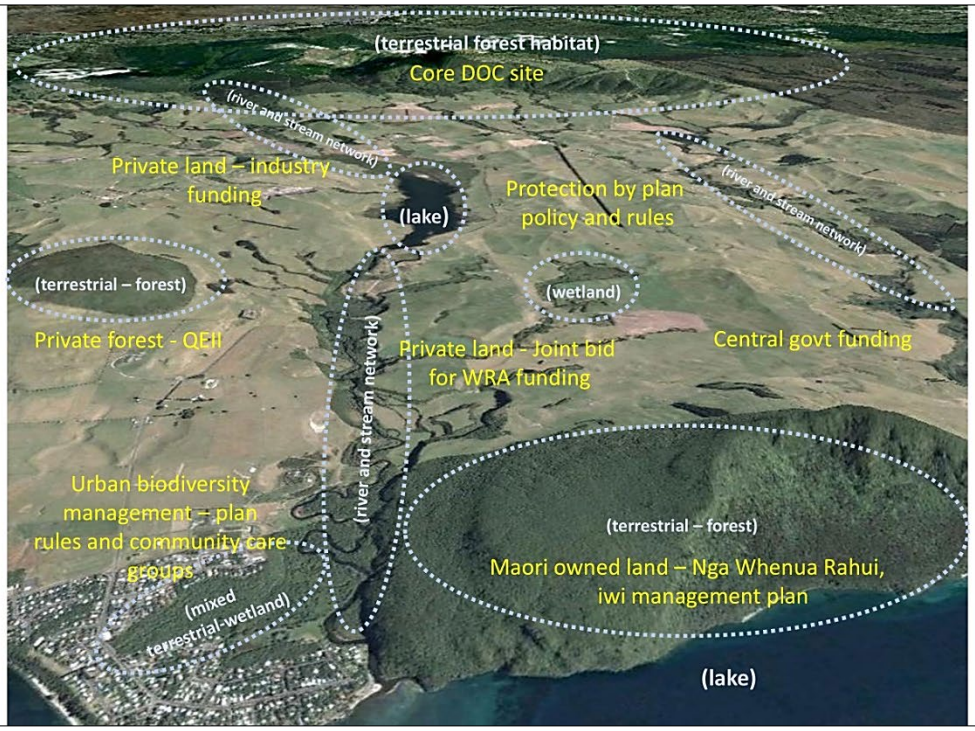
Protecting what matters

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

Integrated Landscape Restoration / Management



- Enhance the essential structure, processes and functioning of ecosystems
- Improve interactions between organisms and their environment
- Strengthen the resilience of ecosystems when responding to stress.



Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance

https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/asia-pacific/new-zealand/stories-in-new-zealand/new-zealand-alliance/