



AGENDA

Strategy and Policy Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, 17 September 2026

Time: 9:30 am

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

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

Strategy and Policy Committee

Ngā Tikanga Whakahaere | Terms of Reference

1. *Mana ā-Ture* | Status

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

2. *Ngā Kawenga* | Responsibilities

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

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

3. *Ngā Apatono* | Powers

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

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

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

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

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

4. *Ngā Tūranga* | **Membership**

4.1 *Ngā Mema* | **Members**

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

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

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

5. *Tokamatua* | **Quorum**

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

6. *Ngā Tikanga Pōti* | **Voting**

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

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

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

Bi-monthly or as required.

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1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA

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

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

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

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

5 MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION OR RECEIPT

5.1 MINUTES OF THE SUBMISSIONS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 2 SEPTEMBER 2026

Rā | Date: 3 September 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Brooke Roebeck, Democracy Advisor

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

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the minutes of the Submissions Subcommittee meeting held on 2 September 2026 be confirmed as a correct record.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This summary sets out decisions made at the meeting in table format, except for the following procedural items:
 - (a) Apologies
 - (b) Confirmation of agenda
 - (c) Confirmation (or receipt of) minutes
 - (d) Receipt of reports
 - (e) Resolutions to enter and/or leave public excluded sessions
 - (f) Procedural motions pertaining to meeting process.
2. This extract is a solely a reference tool for those readers who find it helpful. It does not replace the minutes which are the official record of the meeting.
3. Key:
 - (a) **Delegated Authority:** The decision made falls within the delegated authority of the committee.
 - (b) **Recommendation:** The decision is a recommendation for council (or other body) to consider. These recommendations may be included with the minutes for consideration, or by a separate report.
 - (c) **Recorded Action:** These are not resolved decisions, but rather administrative requests made informally during the meeting.

Title / Description	Delegated Authority	Recommendation	Recorded Action
6.1. WAIKATO REGIONAL COUNCIL'S SUBMISSION ON THE PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE 4 – URBAN GROWTH TO THE SOUTH WAIKATO DISTRICT PLAN			
COMMITTEE RESOLUTION SS26/05 That the Submissions Subcommittee approves for lodgement the proposed Waikato Regional Council's submission on the Proposed Plan Change 4 – Urban Growth to the South Waikato District Plan.	✓		

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Minutes of the Submissions Subcommittee meeting held on 2 September 2026



MINUTES

Submissions Subcommittee Meeting

Wednesday, 2 September 2026

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7 Karakia Whakamutunga5

Waikato Regional Council
Submissions Subcommittee Meeting
OPEN MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 2 September 2026, 1.00pm

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

Members Present: Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith – Committee Chair
Cr Liz Stolwyk – Committee Deputy Chair (virtually via Teams)
Cr Chris Hughes
Cr Warren Maher
Cr Garry Reymer (virtually via Teams)

In Attendance: Cr Robert Cookson

Staff Present: Tracey May – Director, Science, Policy and Information
Brooke Roebeck – Democracy Advisor

The contents of these minutes meet all legal requirements and include a full set of decisions.

An audio-visual recording of the open session of the meeting is available on Waikato Regional Council's public website.

Recording	Document ID #	YouTube Link
Recording	38631493	https://youtu.be/LZFC3IPdphQ

1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA

Item commenced in recording, at 30 seconds.

The Committee Chair (Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith) opened the meeting with a karakia.

2 APOLOGIES

Item commenced in recording, at 1 minute 20 seconds.

Nil.

3 CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA

Item commenced in recording, at 1 minute 53 seconds .

COMMITTEE RESOLUTION SS26/04

Moved: Cr Warren Maher

Seconded: Cr Chris Hughes

- 1. That the agenda of the Submissions Subcommittee Meeting of 2 September 2026, as circulated, be confirmed as the business of the meeting.**
- 2. That the order of items follows the order set out in the minutes.**

CARRIED

4 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Item commenced in recording, at 2 minutes 19 seconds.

No interests were disclosed pertaining to items on the agenda or interests not already recorded on a relevant register.

5 MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION OR RECEIPT

Nil

6 GENERAL ITEMS**6.1 WAIKATO REGIONAL COUNCIL'S SUBMISSION ON THE PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE 4 – URBAN GROWTH TO THE SOUTH WAIKATO DISTRICT PLAN.**

Item commenced in recording, at 2 minutes 30 seconds

Presented by the Senior Policy Advisor (Joao Paulo Silva) Refer Document # 38608705 for the PowerPoint presentation or on the public website.

COMMITTEE RESOLUTION SS26/05**Moved: Cr Liz Stolwyk****Seconded: Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith**

1. That the report *Waikato Regional Council's submission on the Proposed Plan Change 4 – Urban Growth to the South Waikato District Plan*. (Submissions Subcommittee, 2 September 2026) be received.
2. That the Submissions Subcommittee approves for lodgement the proposed Waikato Regional Council's submission on the Proposed Plan Change 4 – Urban Growth to the South Waikato District Plan.

CARRIED**7 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA**

Item commenced in recording 1, at 38 minutes 51 seconds.

The Committee Chair (Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith) closed the meeting with a karakia.

1.52pm – The meeting closed.

6 GENERAL ITEMS

6.1 WAIKATO REGIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

Rā Date:	20 August 2026
Kaituhi Author:	Judy van Rossem, Specialist Policy Advisor
Kaituku Authoriser:	Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	Council has delegated authority to make the recommended decision

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To provide the Committee with the final version of the *Te Mauri o te Taiao*: Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy for adoption.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 17 September 2026) be received.

2. That the Strategy and Policy Committee endorse the Biodiversity Strategy, subject to amendments presented and further identified during discussion at the committee meeting.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

8. Protecting and restoring the region's natural resources including the native plants and animals and the ecosystems they live in is one of the Council's strategic priority areas under [Te Pae Tawhiti – Strategic Direction 2026-2036](#). The Council has statutory responsibilities under the Resource Management Act 1991 to maintain indigenous biodiversity, and under Policy 16 of the NPS-IB to prepare a regional biodiversity strategy to guide landscape-scale biodiversity protection and restoration for the region.
9. In 2024, the Council approved the [Waikato Biodiversity Accord](#), a high-level agreement between the Council, territorial authorities, iwi partners, the Department of Conservation, QEII National Trust and the Ministry for Primary Industries. The Accord established a shared commitment and set of principles for working together to develop and implement a regional biodiversity strategy, and provides the collaborative foundation on which the strategy has been built.
10. In March 2025, the Council approved the project plan, scope, engagement approach and timeline for development of the regional biodiversity strategy. Later in 2025, the Council resolved to accelerate the project so the strategy would be sufficiently advanced to inform business case development for the Long Term Plan 2027–2037.
11. The draft strategy has been informed by a comprehensive engagement programme undertaken during late 2025, including workshops with representatives from territorial authorities, iwi, central government agencies, NGOs, industry groups and community organisations (Phase 1).
12. This engagement tested aspirations, challenges, opportunities and priorities for biodiversity restoration across the region and demonstrated strong support for a coordinated regional approach. Engagement insights were complemented by analysis of iwi environmental management plans, existing strategies, state of environment information and national direction.
13. Council workshops and progress reports during strategy development have provided updates on the project timeline, engagement approach, emerging themes and draft content and contributed to the final version presented today.
14. Public consultation on the draft strategy (Phase 2) from 29 May to 15 July 2026¹ was in the form of a survey of 28 questions structured around the five outcomes and four pou. The survey combined quantitative questions measuring levels of support with open-ended questions inviting detailed feedback.
15. A total of 187 responses were received, comprising 180 online survey responses and seven emailed submissions. Although responses were anonymous, a number of respondents identified themselves including representatives from iwi/hapū, environmental groups (such as Forest and Bird and Go Eco), councils, industry organisations (such as Beef and Lamb NZ), landowners and other stakeholders.

¹ <https://yourvoicematters.waikatoregion.govt.nz/waikato-biodiversity-strategy>

16. An engagement report was prepared which presents a summary of the feedback received and explains how that feedback has informed recommended changes to the draft biodiversity strategy (see **Attachment 1**).

TE TAKE | ISSUE

17. Despite substantial effort by councils, iwi, landowners, agencies and communities, biodiversity restoration in the Waikato region is often fragmented and resource-constrained, and state of the environment monitoring shows that biodiversity is declining in many areas. A shared regional framework will make better use of opportunities for collaboration and coordinated investment, and better address biodiversity decline.
18. The NPS-IB requires a regional biodiversity strategy that sets shared priorities and guides collective action. The draft strategy responds to this requirement by providing a cohesive regional framework that aligns national direction, iwi aspirations, council responsibilities and community action.
19. Council endorsement is now sought to approve the final strategy now that public consultation has concluded and has been considered.

THE STRATEGY

20. The draft strategy provides a high-level framework (vision, guiding principles, outcomes, foundational pillars (pou) and strategic focus areas) and establishes a pathway for the development of detailed actions, responsibilities, timeframes and resourcing in a companion implementation plan, enabling flexibility and adaptation as science, mātauranga, and policy settings evolve.
21. The strategy recommends a shift to a single, coordinated regional approach to halt and reverse biodiversity decline by 2050, and is split into three parts:
 - (a) **Part 1: Setting the Scene** - provides an overview of the Waikato region's biodiversity, the statutory context and rationale for a biodiversity strategy.
 - (b) **Part 2: The Strategy Framework** – describes the vision, outcomes, foundational pillars/pou and strategic focus areas. Guiding principles ("how we'll work") follow the Waikato Biodiversity Accord principles.
 - (c) **Part 3: Strategy Implementation and Monitoring** - describes the strategy to implementation pathway, and monitoring/review of the strategy.
22. The strategy is included as **Attachment 2** to this report.
23. Four pou define the major domains where effort must occur and these provide the structural backbone of the strategy. They organise activity without describing detailed work. Each of the four pou contribute to all five of the strategy's long term biodiversity outcomes:
 - Pou 1 – Protecting and restoring what matters**
 - Pou 2 – Empowering landowners and communities**
 - Pou 3 – Partnering with tangata whenua**
 - Pou 4 – Strengthening data, policy and investment**

PHASE 2 ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

24. The Phase 2 engagement demonstrated a high level of support for the direction of the draft strategy. Respondents generally supported the proposed outcomes and pou, and many described the strategy as an important step towards improving biodiversity across the Waikato region. There was particularly strong support for ecological connectivity, landscape-scale restoration, community involvement, better biodiversity information, and recognising biodiversity as essential natural infrastructure.
25. Respondents also identified several ways the strategy could be strengthened. The most consistent message was the need to turn long-term ambition into clearer and more measurable action. Submitters wanted stronger baseline information, targets, indicators, milestones and reporting, as well as greater urgency in responding to biodiversity decline. While most supported a long-term vision, many felt action needs to begin or continue now, supported by clearer short- and medium-term priorities.
26. Other recurring themes included:
 - the need to better balance restoration of threatened ecosystems with protection and maintenance of existing biodiversity;
 - provide clearer pathways for investment and incentives;
 - recognise and practically support community groups, iwi/hapū, volunteers and landowners already doing biodiversity work;
 - give greater emphasis to pest and especially weed management and its importance to biodiversity recovery;
 - highlight ecological connectivity across urban, rural, freshwater, coastal and marine environments;
 - ensure that the strategy remains adaptable and effective in the face of future legislative and policy change.
27. Feedback on Māori leadership, mātauranga Māori, kaitiakitanga and Treaty partnerships reflected a wider range of views. While some respondents strongly supported this focus, others preferred a stronger emphasis on biodiversity restoration as a shared regional responsibility. Across these perspectives, there was support for greater clarity about roles, terminology and the complementary use of mātauranga Māori, ecological science, local knowledge and practical experience.

AMENDMENTS TO THE REGIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

28. The draft strategy has been amended in response to feedback during Phase 2 engagement, while retaining its role as a high-level regional framework. The principal changes are summarised below in Table 2.

Table 2 What changed following consultation

Feedback received	Changes made to the strategy
Stronger monitoring, targets and reporting were sought	Outcome 4 and Part 3 were amended to strengthen references to measurable recovery, indicators, monitoring, reporting and review.
Greater urgency and clearer pathways to action were requested.	Part 3 was revised to confirm implementation will commence following adoption, supported by an implementation plan to 2030.

Greater emphasis was sought on protecting existing biodiversity alongside restoration.	Outcome 1 and relevant Strategic Focus Areas under Pou 1 were amended to better recognise protection, maintenance and enhancement of existing biodiversity values.
A stronger focus on biodiversity recovery and improvement was requested.	Outcomes 1 and 2 were revised to place greater emphasis on ecosystem recovery, resilience and improved biodiversity outcomes.
Greater recognition of the contribution of iwi/hapū, communities and landowners was sought.	Outcome 3 and Strategic Focus Areas under Pou 2 were amended to strengthen recognition of stewardship, partnership and existing restoration efforts.
Pest and weed management was identified as a higher priority.	Relevant Strategic Focus Areas under Pou 1 were strengthened to give greater prominence to pest animal and weed management as drivers of biodiversity recovery.
Stronger recognition of ecological connectivity was requested.	Outcome 2 and associated Strategic Focus Areas were amended to strengthen references to ecological corridors, habitat connectivity, climate refugia and land-freshwater-coastal linkages.
Greater clarity was sought regarding Māori leadership, mātauranga Māori and shared responsibility.	Outcome 4, Pou 3 and supporting text were refined to clarify roles and relationships while reinforcing that biodiversity restoration is a shared responsibility.
Concern was expressed about future legislative and policy change.	References to the new resource management bills and concepts around environmental limits and no net loss etc. were reviewed and/or removed throughout the strategy to improve flexibility and ensure ongoing relevance as policy and legislative settings evolve.
Greater clarity was sought on implementation and delivery.	Part 3 was expanded to better describe implementation planning, governance, funding, monitoring and review arrangements.
Stronger links between biodiversity and spatial planning were sought.	Strategic Focus Areas under Pou 4 were strengthened to include regional biodiversity mapping, spatial planning and protection of biodiversity strongholds and ecological corridors.

ĒTAHI ATU TAKE | OTHER MATTERS

29. Following adoption, the Strategy will move into an implementation phase. A regional implementation group will be established to help guide delivery and support collaboration between tangata whenua, councils, government agencies and other partner organisations.
30. An implementation plan will be prepared, setting out what actions will be taken, who will be involved, how progress will be measured and how delivery will be supported. The first implementation plan will cover the period to 2030 and focus on putting the key building blocks in place for successful long-term delivery. Future implementation plans will be developed every five years to align with Strategy reviews.
31. Progress will be tracked through monitoring and reporting, using agreed indicators and existing biodiversity monitoring programmes. Monitoring and reporting will be a shared responsibility as follows:
 - **Implementation Group:** responsible for reviewing progress, sharing information, identifying implementation issues and providing strategic advice.

- **Lead Organisations:** responsible for collecting and supplying information related to the actions they lead.
- **Waikato Regional Council:** responsible for coordinating regional reporting, producing consolidated progress reports and maintaining overall oversight of the strategy.

32. The Strategy will be reviewed in 2030 and then every five years to ensure it remains relevant, reflects new information and responds to changing environmental, legislative and regional circumstances (Table 3).

Table 3 Strategy review and implementation plan timeline

2026	<i>Te Mauri o te Taiao</i> Strategy completed
2027-2030	• First Implementation Plan • Long Term Plan • Review of Regional Pest Management Plan and Waikato Biosecurity Strategy
2030	• NZ Biodiversity Strategy – Action for Nature Plan review completed • <i>Te Mauri o te Taiao</i> Strategy review • New Implementation Plan 2030-2035
2035	• <i>Te Mauri o te Taiao</i> Strategy review • New Implementation Plan 2035-2040
2040	• <i>Te Mauri o te Taiao</i> Strategy review • New Implementation Plan 2040-2045
2045	• <i>Te Mauri o te Taiao</i> Strategy review • New Implementation Plan 2045-2050
2050	• <i>Te Mauri o te Taio</i> Strategy full review

TE URUTAI KI TE HURIHANGA ĀHUARANGI | ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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

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

34. The preparation and implementation of a regional biodiversity strategy may contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
35. The strategy sets out a pathway for greenhouse gas emission reduction by prioritising nature-based solutions – such as restoring wetlands, forests and coastal ecosystems – that sequester carbon while reducing emissions from degraded ecosystems.

TE HAUTŪ ĀHUARANGI | CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

36. There is an opportunity for the Council to demonstrate climate leadership through adoption of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy and its long-term, future-focused approach. The Strategy recognises ecosystem protection and restoration as key responses to climate change and promotes the use of nature-based solutions to support adaptation, resilience and community wellbeing. By taking a coordinated regional approach, the Council can demonstrate leadership in integrating biodiversity, climate resilience and sustainable development.

TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

37. Although the subject matter is critical to the ongoing development of the natural character, resilience and prosperity of the Waikato region, having regard to the decision-making provisions in the Local Government Act (LGA) 2002 and the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, a decision in accordance with the recommendations is not considered to have a high degree of significance. Staff are of the opinion that the content and recommendations in this report are consistent with the decision-making requirements contained in Part Six of the LGA and that the decision-making requirements of the LGA have been met.

TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

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

NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHERE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

41. The strategy is underpinned by the Council's 2026-2036 strategic direction: *Sustaining natural resources* strategic priority.
42. To the best of the writer's knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by the Council or any plan required by the LGA or any other enactment.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

43. This decision will not impact the Council's obligations under the Treaty.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

44. The Committee is asked to adopt the Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy. The strategy provides a shared long-term direction for protecting, restoring and enhancing indigenous biodiversity, while supporting coordinated action across tangata whenua, communities, landowners, councils and other partners to achieve healthier ecosystems, resilient species and thriving communities.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

- Reference 1: [Te Mana o te Taiao: Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020](#)
- Reference 2: [National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023](#)
- Reference 3: [Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy – Feedback Summary: Phase 1 workshops and stakeholder meetings October to December 2025](#)

ĀPITIHINGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Attachment 1 - PS26-14 - Engagement Report - Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy - Phase 2 (Doc # 37823137)** [↓](#)
2. **Attachment 2 - Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy - FINAL DRAFT AUGUST 2026 - Tracked Changes Version (Doc # 38093984)** [↓](#)
3. **Attachment 3 - Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy - FINAL DRAFT AUGUST 2026 - Clean Version (Doc # 38569966)** [↓](#)

Waikato Regional Council Policy Series 2026/14



Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy

Phase 2 Engagement Feedback

May to July 2026

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waikatoregion.govt.nz

	Name	Date
Approving Manager	Lisette Balsom, Manager Strategic Policy Implementation	7 September 2026

Prepared by	Judy van Rossem (Waikato Regional Council) & Angus McKenzie (Place Group Limited)
For	Waikato Regional Council Private Bag 3038 Waikato Mail Centre HAMILTON 3240
Publication date	August 2026
Document ID	37823137

Disclaimer

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Acknowledgement

Waikato Regional Council is grateful to everyone who gave their time to join discussions and meetings, raise questions, and provide feedback on the draft regional biodiversity strategy through Phase 1 and 2.

The engagement and responses have been constructive and valuable. A wide range of perspectives ranging from tangata whenua, local councils, industry, conservation interests and statutory organisations contributed to this strategy.

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Executive summary

Phase 2 engagement on the draft Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy was undertaken from 29 May to 20 July 2026. A total of 187 responses were received, comprising 180 online survey responses and seven written submissions. Overall, respondents expressed strong support for the direction of the strategy, particularly its focus on ecological connectivity, landscape-scale restoration, community involvement and biodiversity as essential natural infrastructure. Feedback was generally constructive and focused on strengthening the strategy rather than changing its overall direction.

Analysis of the feedback identified ten recurring themes:

- **Clearer measures of success are needed**, including baseline information, measurable targets, interim milestones, monitoring and reporting.
- **Action needs to happen sooner**, with stronger short- and medium-term priorities and earlier implementation of key biodiversity actions.
- **Restoration should be balanced with protection and maintenance**, ensuring healthy ecosystems and existing biodiversity values are not overlooked.
- **The strategy should aspire to biodiversity recovery and gain**, rather than relying solely on concepts such as “no net loss”.
- **More funding, incentives and long-term investment are needed** to support biodiversity outcomes.
- **Existing community groups, volunteers, iwi/hapū and landowners should be better supported and recognised** for the work already being undertaken.
- **Pest plants, pest animals and biosecurity threats require stronger emphasis**, particularly environmental weeds, predators and pathway management.
- **Landscape-scale restoration and ecological connectivity should remain central**, including greater recognition of urban, coastal, freshwater and smaller habitat areas.
- **Views differed on Māori leadership, Treaty partnerships, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga**, although many respondents supported bringing together different knowledge systems and perspectives.
- **The strategy should remain flexible and durable** in the face of legislative reform, policy change and potential local government restructuring.

In response, a range of amendments have been made to strengthen monitoring and accountability, increase the emphasis on early action, improve the balance between protection and restoration, strengthen the focus on biodiversity recovery and gain, improve support for community-led action, increase the prominence of pest and weed management, reinforce ecological connectivity, refine references to Māori partnerships and mātauranga Māori, and clarify implementation and governance arrangements. Together, these changes strengthen the strategy while retaining its role as a high-level, long-term framework for biodiversity across the Waikato region.

1 Background

Biodiversity is the variety of life that supports the health and resilience of the Waikato region. It includes indigenous plants, animals and ecosystems, and the connections between them. Healthy ecosystems provide benefits that people depend on, including clean water, productive soils, climate resilience and cultural wellbeing. In te ao Māori, biodiversity is closely connected to *whakapapa*, reflecting the relationship between people and the natural world and the responsibility to care for *te taiao* for future generations.

Indigenous biodiversity in the Waikato region is under significant pressure. Native habitats and ecosystems have been reduced and modified over time, particularly in lowland environments, while many indigenous species are now Threatened or At Risk. Remaining forests, wetlands, rivers, estuaries and coastal ecosystems continue to face pressures from land-use change, invasive pests and weeds, habitat fragmentation and climate impacts. These challenges highlight the need for coordinated action to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity across the region.

WRC led the development of a Waikato Biodiversity Accord in 2024, to bring together organisations with the common goal of creating and putting into action a regional biodiversity strategy that seeks to protect and restore our unique native plants and animals and the ecosystems in which they live.

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 Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and align with community aspirations and tangata whenua values, in support of thriving biodiversity across the region.

In September 2025 a discussion document, *Te reo o te taiao - A call from nature: Developing a biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region*, was prepared and released to key stakeholders, iwi and community organisations. This signalled the start of Phase 1 engagement for the strategy. A comprehensive engagement programme was undertaken during October and November 2025, including workshops and meetings with representatives from territorial authorities, iwi, central government agencies, NGOs, industry groups and community organisations. This engagement used the discussion document as a basis to test aspirations, challenges, opportunities and priorities for biodiversity restoration across the region. Engagement insights were complemented by analysis of iwi environmental management plans, existing strategies, state of the environment information and national direction. Phase 1 concluded with the preparation of a draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy.

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of document

Phase 2 engagement comprised public consultation on the draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy.

This report presents a summary of the feedback received in Phase 2, and the recommended changes to the draft biodiversity strategy resulting from the feedback received.

The updated strategy and supporting documents can be accessed online at the Waikato Regional Council's [website](#).

2.2 How to read the report

This report summarises the feedback received through Phase 2 engagement on the draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy and explains how that feedback has informed recommended changes to the strategy.

The report is structured in two main parts.

The first part – What we heard – summarises feedback received through the consultation survey and emailed submissions. Feedback is presented according to the structure of the draft strategy:

- **Questions 1–15 – Outcomes:** summarises the level of support for each of the five proposed outcomes and the main matters raised by respondents.
- **Questions 16–27 – Pou:** summarises feedback on the four pou and their associated strategic focus areas.
- **Question 28 – General comments:** brings together additional matters raised through the open-ended survey question, including issues that cut across multiple parts of the Strategy.

The charts in these sections show the responses to the relevant survey questions. The accompanying text summarises the substantive matters raised in written feedback. As respondents could choose which questions to answer, the number of responses varies between questions.

The second part – Key feedback themes and implications for strategy amendments – draws together the most common and recurring themes identified across the engagement.

For each theme, the report sets out:

- **What we heard** – the key issues, concerns and suggestions raised through engagement.
- **WRC response** – Waikato Regional Council's consideration of the feedback and how it relates to the intended role and scope of the strategy.
- **Recommended changes to the strategy** – amendments or areas for refinement arising from the feedback.

The content in this report is intended to represent the main matters raised across the engagement rather than every individual comment or the views of any single respondent or organisation. Where respondents expressed differing perspectives, these have been identified so that the range of views received is appropriately reflected.

This report should therefore be read as both a record of the Phase 2 engagement and an explanation of how the feedback has been considered in refining the Regional Biodiversity Strategy.

3 Engagement Method

3.1 Phase 2 consultation process

The Phase 2 engagement for the draft biodiversity strategy ran for six weeks from 29 May to 20 July 2026. The draft strategy, supporting documents and a consultation survey were made available to the public on the [Waikato Regional Council website](#) through an Engagement HQ platform. Supporting documents included:

- Te reo o te taiao - A call from nature: Developing a biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region (Phase 1 discussion document)
- Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy Feedback Summary Phase 1 workshops PS26-05
- [National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023](#)

An email was sent on 29 May 2026 to 200 individuals (representing 107 organisations) on the strategy engagement database list, inviting them to submit their views using the survey available on Council's strategy webpage. A follow-up email was sent on 6 July 2026.

Respondents also had the opportunity to write a freeform response and email them to the consultation inbox. These responses therefore did not necessarily follow the structured questions posed in the discussion document and were not anonymous.

The draft strategy and survey link were promoted through Council's social media channels, including Facebook, LinkedIn and Antenna platforms.

3.2 Survey structure and responses

Respondents using the online survey could respond to a total of 28 questions, with the option of answering all or some of the questions. The survey was structured around the Outcomes, Pou and Strategic Focus Areas in the draft strategy, with an open-ended question at the end. Respondents could add written feedback or provide additional supporting information. All survey responses were anonymous, although some respondents did identify themselves in their feedback.

Many respondents provided detailed and considered feedback, often commenting on multiple sections of the strategy and suggesting specific changes to outcomes, strategic focus areas and implementation approaches. The quality and depth of many of the responses demonstrates a high level of interest in biodiversity issues across the region and a strong commitment to helping shape a practical and effective strategy.

In total 187 responses were received, with 180 via the webpage survey and 7 emailed responses.

3.3 Approach to analysis

All responses received were compiled into a database, to enable analysis of over 300 individual points of feedback provided by respondents.

The response points were reviewed and grouped according to the relevant survey questions. Responses were then further analysed to identify common matters emerging under each question. These matters are set out in the "what we heard" sections of this report.

Where responses related to the content of the Strategy, WRC staff considered and documented a response, including any resulting refinements to the strategy where appropriate. These responses and the associated changes are set out in "strategy amendments section" of this report.

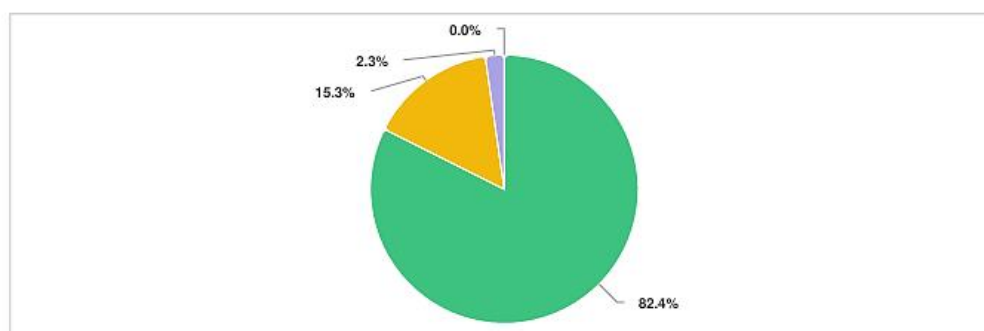
4 What we heard for Questions 1-15 - Outcomes

The first 15 questions in the survey asked respondents about each of the strategy's five outcomes in relation to:

- Whether the outcome should be included in the strategy - and if not, why not
- Suggestions on how the outcome should be rewritten.

Overall, there was a high level of support for the five Outcomes in the draft strategy. The feedback can be distilled into the following substantive matters under each outcome as follows:

Outcome 1: Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	145	82.4
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	27	15.3
Prefer not to answer	4	2.3
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	0	0.0

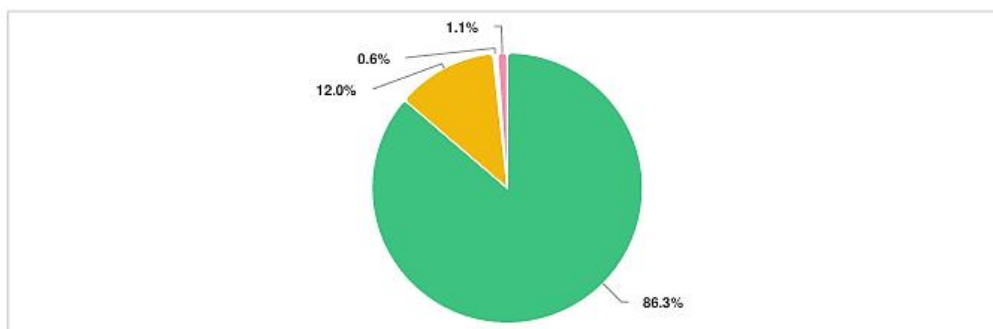
Optional question - 176 responses - 4 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Support prioritisation, but not at the expense of other ecosystems:** While respondents generally supported prioritising rare, threatened and highly depleted ecosystems, many were concerned that healthy ecosystems, smaller remnants, roadside habitats and areas outside priority sites could be overlooked. There was a strong message that restoration should occur alongside protection and maintenance of existing biodiversity values.
- **Need for measurable outcomes and accountability:** Many respondents felt Outcome 1 was too aspirational and wanted clear baselines, quantified targets, indicators, milestones and regular reporting to demonstrate improvements in ecosystem extent, condition and connectivity.
- **Greater recognition of climate change and ecosystem resilience:** Respondents wanted a clearer description of what a healthy ecosystem looks like in a changing climate, including resilience, adaptive capacity and the ability to continue functioning despite climate-related pressures.
- **Maintain genetic diversity and ecological connectivity:** There was strong support for ecological corridors, protection of smaller habitat fragments, marine ecosystems and genetic diversity, with concerns that a focus on a "representative range" of ecosystems may not adequately protect the full gene pool of indigenous species.

- **Act sooner, not just by 2050:** A recurring theme was that 2050 is too distant and that biodiversity loss is occurring now, requiring earlier restoration efforts, interim milestones and more urgent action.

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



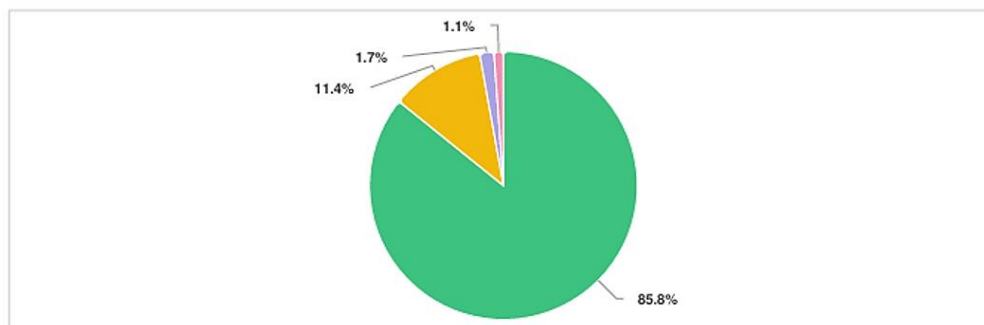
Question options	responses	%
● Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	151	86.3
● Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	21	12.0
● No - No version of this outcome should be included.	1	0.6
● Prefer not to answer	2	1.1

Optional question - 175 responses - 5 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Move beyond recovery towards preventing further loss:** Many responses wanted explicit commitments to no further species extinctions, no further decline of indigenous species, and active improvement in the status of Threatened and At-Risk species across the region.
- **Need measurable species-recovery targets:** There were numerous calls for the inclusion of measurable indicators such as population trends, threat-status improvements, habitat quality measures, fish passage targets and ecological connectivity indicators rather than relying on broad aspirational statements.
- **Connectivity is critical to species recovery:** Respondents strongly supported migration pathways, ecological corridors, habitat connectivity and landscape-scale restoration as essential to sustaining populations, maintaining genetic diversity and helping species adapt to environmental change.
- **Focus on pest management:** Many respondents highlighted the need for a more explicit commitment to controlling predators and pests, including rodents, stoats, possums and cats, as a key requirement for successful species recovery.
- **Species recovery needs to be more ambitious:** A recurring theme was that the wording "are recovering" lacks ambition and should instead reflect self-sustaining, increasing and resilient populations by 2050.

Outcome 3: Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion biodiversity



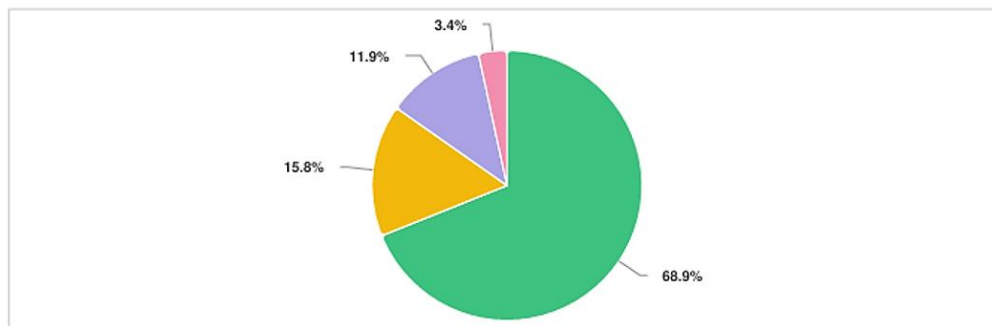
Question options	responses	%
● Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	151	85.8
● Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	20	11.4
● No - No version of this outcome should be included.	3	1.7
● Prefer not to answer	2	1.1

Optional question - 176 responses - 4 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Communities need practical support, not just encouragement:** Respondents strongly supported the outcome but argued that success will depend on funding, technical support, incentives, volunteer coordination, training and practical assistance rather than education and awareness alone.
- **Support existing community networks and volunteers:** There was strong recognition that many community groups, catchment groups, landowners and volunteers are already actively restoring biodiversity, and these existing networks should be strengthened rather than replaced by new structures.
- **Concerns about funding and reliance on goodwill:** Many felt the strategy asks communities to deliver biodiversity outcomes without clearly identifying long-term funding sources, support mechanisms or incentives. Several respondents warned against relying solely on goodwill to achieve outcomes.
- **Outcome should focus on the desired future state:** Some respondents considered parts of the outcome too focused on implementation mechanisms (e.g. funding and resources) and suggested focusing instead on what successful biodiversity stewardship will look like by 2050.
- **Need for earlier action:** Many respondents felt communities are already active and should not have to wait until 2050 to be informed, supported and motivated.

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



Question options	responses	%
● Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	122	68.9
● Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	28	15.8
● No - No version of this outcome should be included.	21	11.9
● Prefer not to answer	6	3.4

Optional question - 177 responses - 3 skipped

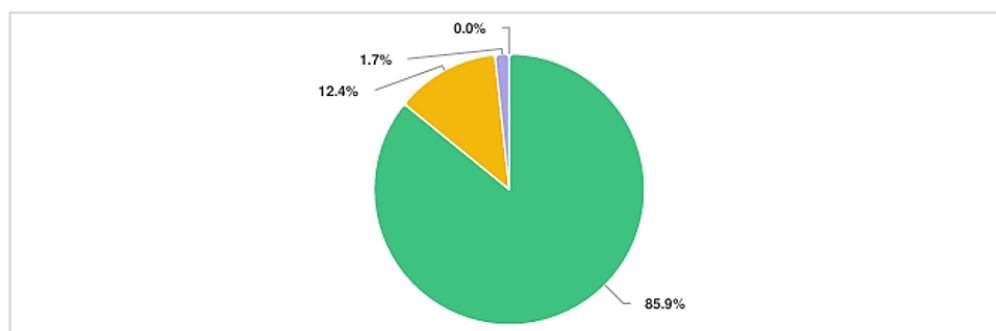
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Support for integrating multiple knowledge systems:** Even among differing views, many respondents supported combining mātauranga Māori with ecological science, monitoring, conservation biology and local environmental knowledge to strengthen biodiversity decision-making.
- **Need for greater clarity and inclusiveness:** Respondents sought clearer explanations of concepts such as customary practices, Māori-led monitoring, Māori land and kaitiakitanga, and wanted reassurance that all communities can participate in biodiversity restoration.
- **Recognition of Māori landowners and Māori organisations:** Some respondents sought stronger acknowledgement of Māori private landowners and their role in biodiversity protection, restoration and partnership arrangements.
- **Customary practices should support biodiversity outcomes:** Many responses focused on ensuring customary practices are interpreted and applied in ways that support biodiversity restoration and species recovery.
- **Divided views on Māori leadership:** This outcome attracted a wide range of views across the responses. Some respondents strongly supported Treaty partnerships, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga, while many others considered biodiversity restoration should be framed more as a shared community responsibility.

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

Q13. Do you agree that Outcome #5 should be included in the strategy?



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	152	85.9
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	22	12.4
Prefer not to answer	3	1.7
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	0	0.0

Optional question - 177 responses - 3 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Strong support for biodiversity as natural infrastructure:** Respondents widely supported the concept that biodiversity and healthy ecosystems underpin community wellbeing, resilience, productivity and economic prosperity. Many described this as one of the strongest components of the strategy.
- **Need stronger recognition of productive landscapes and food production:** Several respondents wanted greater acknowledgement of the role that farming, food production and productive landscapes play alongside biodiversity outcomes.
- **Funding and investment need to match ambition:** Numerous responses questioned how biodiversity can be treated as "essential infrastructure" without a dedicated funding approach comparable to other forms of infrastructure.
- **Need for measurable success indicators:** Responses noted the need for clearer indicators, targets and reporting mechanisms to demonstrate whether biodiversity, resilience and prosperity are improving over time.
- **Broader view of ecosystem health:** Many respondents argued that roadsides, waterways, small habitat fragments, soil health and ecological processes should be recognised alongside larger and more visible ecosystems when defining prosperity and resilience.

5 What we heard for Questions 16 to 27 - Pou

The next 12 questions in the survey asked respondents about each of the strategy's four pou and associated strategic focus areas:

- Whether the pou and associated strategic focus areas should be included in the strategy - and if not, why not;
- Suggestions on how the pou and its strategic focus areas should be rewritten.

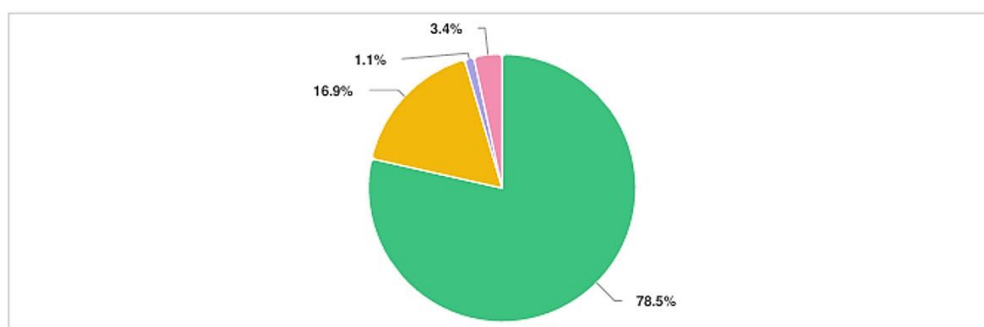
The feedback can be distilled into the following substantive themes under each pou.

Pou #1: Protecting and restoring what matters

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

Strategic Focus Areas

- Prioritise restoration of the region's most threatened, rare and vulnerable ecosystems
- Reconnect ecosystems through ecological corridors and buffers – ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea)
- Protect and restore wetlands, peatlands, floodplains, riparian margins and coastal systems as frontline nature-based solutions for climate and ecosystem resilience
- Scale up coordinated landscape-scale pest control operations including marine pests with specific targets



Question options	responses	%
● Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	139	78.5
● Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	30	16.9
● No - No version of this outcome should be included.	2	1.1
● Prefer not to answer	6	3.4

Optional question · 177 responses · 3 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Priority ecosystems versus broader biodiversity protection:** While there was strong support for prioritising rare, threatened and highly depleted ecosystems, many respondents were concerned that healthy, declining and more common ecosystems could be overlooked. Feedback consistently called for greater recognition of

maintaining existing biodiversity values, protecting small habitat remnants, roadside vegetation and preventing ecosystems from becoming threatened in the first place.

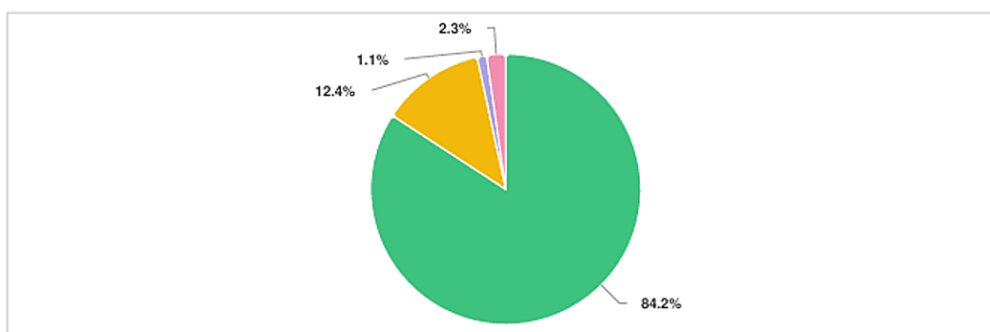
- **Maintenance before expansion:** A recurring theme was that ecosystem maintenance and protection should receive at least equal emphasis to restoration and expansion, with concerns that gains in one area should not come at the expense of existing high-value ecosystems elsewhere.
- **Species recovery needs greater prominence:** Many respondents felt Pou 1 focused too heavily on ecosystems while under-emphasising threatened species recovery. Suggestions included dedicated threatened species recovery programmes, threat status improvement targets, commitments to avoid further extinctions, and stronger recognition that ecosystem restoration alone may not recover all species.
- **Stronger pest and weed management:** Pest plants and pest animals were consistently identified as one of the most significant biodiversity threats. Respondents wanted greater emphasis on environmental weeds (particularly woolly nightshade and privet), predator control, pathway management, feral cats, and stronger alignment with Predator Free 2050, the Regional Pest Management Plan and Waikato Biosecurity Strategy.
- **Landscape-scale ecological connectivity:** Respondents strongly supported ecological corridors and landscape-scale restoration but wanted greater emphasis on reconnecting fragmented habitats, linking mountains to sea, supporting species movement, and improving connectivity across public and private land.
- **Urban, marine and roadside biodiversity:** Many respondents felt Pou 1 focuses too strongly on terrestrial and freshwater environments and should better recognise urban biodiversity, marine ecosystems, roadside ecology, streams and small habitat fragments that contribute to regional ecological networks.
- **Protecting genetic diversity:** Respondents sought stronger recognition of genetic diversity, including the role of isolated populations, small remnants and less common habitat patches in maintaining regional resilience and species recovery.
- **Clearer targets and urgency:** Respondents repeatedly sought measurable biodiversity gains, earlier implementation of key actions, stronger restoration targets and more urgency in protecting vulnerable ecosystems and species.

Pou #2: Empowering landowners and communities

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

Strategic Focus Areas

- **Maintain a network of regional biodiversity support hubs for community groups, landowners and local iwi/hapū**
- **Facilitate long-term, coordinated and accessible funding to enable secure long investment in biodiversity restoration**
- **Grow public awareness, participation and storytelling about biodiversity across the region**
- **Build capacity and capability for locally led action**



Question options	responses	%
● Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	149	84.2
● Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	22	12.4
● No - No version of this outcome should be included.	2	1.1
● Prefer not to answer	4	2.3

Optional question - 177 responses - 3 skipped
 Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

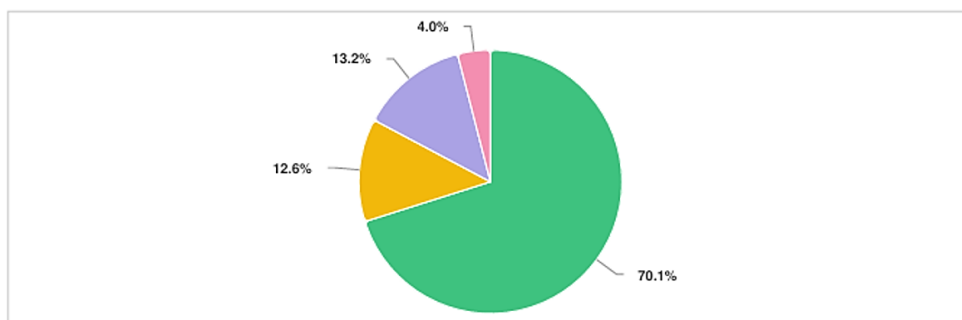
- **Practical support over awareness alone:** Responses raised various concerns that advocacy, education and awareness by themselves will not deliver biodiversity outcomes. Respondents wanted practical support including technical advice, biodiversity planning, training, equipment, volunteer coordination and hands-on assistance.
- **More funding and incentives:** Respondents consistently argued that communities and landowners are being asked to deliver outcomes without sufficient support. Suggestions included grants, fencing and planting subsidies, rates relief, biodiversity incentives, catchment funding and more accessible long-term support.
- **Support existing groups and networks:** Many respondents emphasised that established community groups, predator-free programmes, catchment groups and biodiversity hubs are already delivering results and should receive ongoing funding and support rather than being replaced by new structures.
- **Community hubs and coordination are important:** Respondents strongly supported biodiversity support hubs, improved collaboration between groups, regional coordination and practical support systems that connect communities with expertise, funding and resources.
- **Need for outcome-focused indicators:** Several submissions argued that indicators such as awareness and participation only measure activity and do not show whether biodiversity is improving. Many wanted monitoring linked directly to biodiversity outcomes.
- **Private landowners need recognition:** There was repeated feedback that private landowners, particularly farmers, are already investing significant effort and resources in biodiversity and should be recognised, supported and rewarded rather than simply relied upon.
- **Balance support and regulation:** Some respondents felt voluntary participation alone would be insufficient and suggested a stronger balance between incentives, support mechanisms and regulatory approaches where necessary.

Pou #3: Partnering with tangata whenua

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

Strategic Focus Areas

- Embed iwi aspirations, te ao Māori values, and mātauranga Māori into all biodiversity planning and delivery
- Establish long-term, equitable funding pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau-led biodiversity action
- Co-design and implement Māori-led monitoring and kaitiaki development programmes
- Create co-designed partnership models for ecosystem restoration on shared Māori land
- Restore culturally significant biodiversity sites and revitalise customary practices.



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	122	70.1
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	22	12.6
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	23	13.2
Prefer not to answer	7	4.0

Optional question - 174 responses - 6 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Differing views on Māori leadership:** Many respondents preferred biodiversity restoration to be framed as a shared community responsibility and questioned the prominence given to Māori leadership, while others supported Treaty partnerships, rangatiratanga, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga.
- **Recognition of Māori landowners and Māori interests:** Several respondents wanted clearer recognition of Māori private landowners, Māori-owned land, Māori organisations and place-based Māori leadership in biodiversity restoration.
- **Science and mātauranga Māori together:** A significant theme was support for integrating mātauranga Māori alongside ecological science, monitoring, research and local knowledge, rather than treating these as competing approaches.
- **Clarification of customary practices:** Many respondents wanted clearer explanations of customary practices and assurance that revitalisation of these practices would support, rather than undermine, biodiversity outcomes.

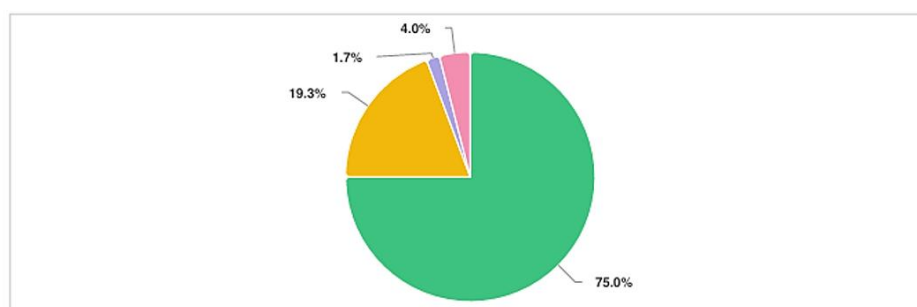
- **Need for clearer language:** Respondents often sought clearer explanations of concepts such as kaitiakitanga, Māori-led monitoring, shared Māori land and the role of mātauranga Māori in biodiversity management.
- **Partnership rather than exclusive leadership:** Even among respondents supportive of Māori involvement, there was a recurring desire to emphasise partnership and collaboration across iwi, communities, scientists, landowners and agencies.
- **Protecting culturally significant places and species:** Feedback supported protecting wāhi tapu, culturally significant sites, customary practices and taonga species as important biodiversity and cultural outcomes.

Pou #4: Strengthening data, policy and investment

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

Strategic Focus Areas

- Strengthen policy consistency and alignment across councils and central government
- Develop a clear biodiversity spatial framework for the region
- Set and implement regional environmental limits for biodiversity
- Deliver “no net loss of indigenous biodiversity” through clear policy and strong rules
- Develop and implement targeted incentives to reverse ongoing ecosystem degradation and drive biodiversity gains beyond “no net loss”
- Build shared understanding and better knowledge through targeted research, consistent biodiversity monitoring and clear, accessible information



Question options	responses	%
● Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	132	75.0
● Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	34	19.3
● No - No version of this outcome should be included.	3	1.7
● Prefer not to answer	7	4.0

Optional question - 176 responses - 4 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Measurable targets, baselines and accountability:** This was one of the most commented areas overall. Respondents wanted clear baselines, quantified targets, measurable indicators, transparent reporting and interim milestones to demonstrate whether biodiversity is actually improving.

- **Move beyond 'no net loss':** Many respondents considered no net loss too weak for a strategy extending to 2050. There were repeated calls for explicit biodiversity gains, ecosystem recovery, improving species status and stronger restoration outcomes.
- **Earlier action and stronger incentives:** Respondents argued that restoration incentives, funding mechanisms and policy alignment are scheduled too late in the implementation pathway and should be prioritised earlier.
- **More investment and economic support:** The responses included significant support for biodiversity funds, rates remission, biodiversity credits, transferable development rights, subsidies and long-term funding arrangements to support restoration and stewardship on private land.
- **Policy certainty and legislative reform:** Respondents highlighted concerns about local government reform, resource management reform, environmental limits and future national policy changes, seeking greater clarity, flexibility and alignment.
- **Better biodiversity data and monitoring:** Many submissions sought stronger monitoring frameworks, regional threat status assessments, improved biodiversity mapping, clearer ecological indicators and greater scientific rigour in measuring outcomes.
- **Data sovereignty and trust:** Some respondents emphasised the need for Māori data sovereignty, protection of mātauranga Māori, and clear rules governing the collection, use and ownership of biodiversity information.
- **Recognising private land stewardship:** A significant theme from farming and rural stakeholders was that biodiversity data, policy and investment frameworks should recognise existing stewardship, avoid creating disincentives for conservation, and build trust with landowners.
- **Broader indicators of success:** Several responses suggested monitoring should include social, cultural and community measures alongside ecological indicators, recognising the importance of capability, partnerships, participation and long-term stewardship.

6 What we heard for Question 28 – General comments

Respondents were asked an open-ended question at the end of the survey to provide additional feedback on the strategy.

The general comments reveal a number of highly consistent themes that cut across individual topics and stakeholder groups.

Stronger Pest Plant and Pest Animal Management

This was one of the most consistent themes throughout the additional comments.

- Respondents repeatedly identified **woolly nightshade, privet, climbing asparagus, giant privet and other invasive weeds** as major threats that are not receiving enough attention.
- There were calls for a stronger focus on **weed control**, better alignment with the Regional Pest Management Plan, more support for community weed control groups, and greater emphasis on **prevention and enforcement**.
- Many respondents also highlighted the need for stronger management of **feral and domestic cats**, predator control and landscape-scale pest management.
- Several respondents argued that biodiversity goals would not be achieved if "the elephants in the room" such as privet and woolly nightshade continue to spread unchecked.

Illustrative comments:

"Weed control is the first and most important step in reducing biodiversity decline."

"You cannot achieve your goals of landscape scale restoration if you ignore the elephants in the room - the Privet, Woolly Nightshade, Climbing Asparagus and so on."

More Funding, Incentives and Practical Support

A very strong theme was concern that the strategy's aspirations may not be achievable without significant investment.

- Respondents sought **funding certainty**, rates relief, grants, biodiversity investment funds, fencing support, riparian planting assistance and practical incentives.
- Many landowners and community groups felt they are already carrying much of the burden of biodiversity restoration without adequate support.
- There were repeated calls for funded biodiversity coordinators, technical advisors, support hubs and long-term funding arrangements rather than short-term project grants.

Illustrative comments:

"The community is being asked to do more without the Council committing the resources or incentives needed to facilitate that action."

"I am concerned with what the flow-on effect of reprioritisation or reallocation of existing funds would have on current recipients of funding support."

Supporting Existing Community Groups and Volunteers

Many submissions recognised the important role of volunteers and existing community groups.

- Feedback consistently argued that existing predator-free groups, catchment groups, biodiversity trusts and restoration groups should be supported rather than creating new programmes.
- Respondents wanted support for coordination, volunteer recruitment, training, equipment, monitoring and administration.
- Several respondents described community groups as being "at the coal face" of biodiversity restoration and requiring greater support.

Illustrative comments:

"Help us to help you."

"Community engagement needs to be treated as core infrastructure, not an optional extra."

Implementation, Accountability and Delivery

A recurring concern was that the strategy is ambitious but lacks sufficient detail about how it will be delivered.

- Respondents frequently sought a funded implementation plan, clear responsibilities, accountability mechanisms and practical delivery pathways.
- Many responses questioned whether the strategy relies too heavily on goodwill and aspiration.
- Several respondents wanted measurable outcomes, timeframes, monitoring frameworks and clearer reporting.

Illustrative comments:

"I sincerely hope this strategy is backed by a robust, fully funded implementation plan. I look forward to seeing the details of that plan and the timeline for its rollout."

"The test will be in the implementation plan and how this is approached."

Balancing Priority Ecosystems with Broader Biodiversity Protection

A number of submissions were concerned about focusing too heavily on priority ecosystems.

- Respondents generally supported prioritisation but warned against only funding the "most threatened" areas.
- There was strong support for maintaining healthy ecosystems, protecting smaller fragments, roadsides and waterways, and taking opportunities where willing landowners are ready to act.
- Several respondents described a "squeaky wheel" approach that only responds to crisis situations.

Illustrative comments:

"Cannot rely on a glass case collection of all the best prettiest bits."

"The roadside ecology and small patches of nature are often the vital links that can join mountains to sea."

Recognition of Māori and Treaty Partnerships

Additional feedback reinforced themes seen elsewhere in the survey.

- Some respondents strongly supported kaitiakitanga, Te Tiriti and Māori-led restoration approaches.
- Others felt the strategy gave too much prominence to Māori-specific leadership and wanted biodiversity framed as a shared responsibility across all communities.
- Several submissions sought a greater emphasis on partnership rather than leadership.

Illustrative comments:

"Work with iwi as part of going forward. But only as one of a number of stakeholders."

"I really like the focus on kaitiakitanga and Māori-led solutions."

Policy, Legislative Reform and Future Governance

Many respondents expressed concern about policy uncertainty.

- Respondents frequently referenced local government reform, RMA reform, Conservation Amendment proposals and changes to government priorities.
- There was concern about maintaining momentum if institutional arrangements change.
- Several respondents sought a strategy that is flexible enough to remain relevant despite future legislative reform.

Illustrative comments:

"There is a lot of uncertainty at the moment with regional council restructuring."

"Who will have the responsibility of following and owning the strategy document, and developing the implementation plan once a local government amalgamation proposal for the Waikato region has been confirmed?"

Better Monitoring, Data and Measurable Outcomes

Many respondents wanted better biodiversity information and measurement.

- Calls were made for baseline assessments, regional threat status assessments, biodiversity mapping and project-level reporting.
- Several respondents wanted community and landowner actions to be recorded and recognised in monitoring systems.
- There were requests for improved data tools, reporting platforms and spatial prioritisation.

Illustrative comments:

"How is biodiversity being measured and recorded?"

"Many landowners are already trapping, baiting, planting or restoring habitat, but their efforts are often invisible in regional reporting."

Urban Biodiversity, Waterways and Local Nature

A number of comments focused on enabling biodiversity maintenance and restoration closer to where people live.

- Respondents wanted more emphasis on stream restoration, urban habitats, roadside biodiversity, street trees and restoration within towns.
- There was strong support for improving ecological connectivity within urban environments and restoring riparian margins.

Illustrative comments:

"There is plenty of opportunities to improve habitat within town."

"Opportunities to connect with nature close to everyday environments are vital."

Broad Support for the Overall Strategy

Despite numerous suggestions for improvement, many respondents expressed strong support for the strategy overall.

- Many described it as comprehensive, ambitious, well-structured and an important step forward.
- Several organisations explicitly endorsed the overall direction and biodiversity vision.
- Common praise included recognition of ecological connectivity, landscape-scale restoration, community involvement and biodiversity as essential infrastructure.

Illustrative comments:

"This strategy provides a strong foundation for biodiversity restoration across the Waikato region."

"We strongly support the Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy."

"Well done. I certainly approve of this strategy."

7 Key feedback themes and implications for strategy amendments

The themes outlined below represent the most common and recurring matters raised through the engagement process. While individual submissions often focused on specific outcomes, pou or strategic focus areas, these themes emerged consistently across the feedback and provide insight into the areas where respondents would like to see the strategy strengthened, clarified or prioritised.

The themes are intended to help identify the key messages arising from the engagement and provide a high-level summary of the matters most frequently raised by respondents, rather than reflect the views of any single submitter or organisation.

Waikato Regional Council (WRC) responses, alongside the recommended changes to the strategy resulting from the responses received are set out below each theme.

Theme 1: Measurable Targets, Monitoring and Accountability

This was one of the most prominent themes across the engagement.

While respondents generally supported the vision and direction of the strategy, many felt **Outcomes 1, 2 and 5**, as well as elements of **Pou 4**, lacked sufficient specificity around what success would actually look like, how progress would be measured, and who would be accountable for delivery.

Respondents repeatedly called for quantified targets, baseline assessments, interim milestones, clear indicators and regular public reporting. Broad statements such as "*ecosystems flourish and expand*", "*species are recovering*" and "*people and nature prosper together*" were seen as difficult to assess without measurable outcomes and timelines. Feedback was **particularly** strong in relation to **Outcome 1**, **Outcome 2** and **Strategic Focus Area 19**.

A second recurring concern was that monitoring should demonstrate real biodiversity outcomes rather than activities or participation.

Respondents questioned whether measures within this theme would actually demonstrate biodiversity improvement (i.e. numbers of biodiversity hubs, awareness campaigns, volunteer groups or participation rates). There were repeated calls for monitoring ecosystem condition, species abundance, habitat extent, connectivity, fish passage, threat status and biodiversity gains.

Several respondents also supported regional biodiversity baselines, regional threat status assessments and improved biodiversity mapping and reporting.

WRC response

Agree in principle. Clearer measures of success will strengthen the Strategy and provide greater transparency and accountability for progress towards the outcomes. However, the Strategy is intended to provide long-term regional direction and should remain high level.

Detailed targets, measures, milestones and reporting arrangements will be developed through implementation planning, informed by available baseline information and existing monitoring programmes. Development of regional measures should also involve Waikato Biodiversity Accord partners and other relevant partners, recognising that delivery of the Strategy is a shared regional responsibility.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Include linkages within the strategy to existing monitoring and reporting programmes including State of the Environment reporting and other relevant regional monitoring. Acknowledge the need to develop measures of success against the Strategy.

- Clarify the relationship between the Strategy and implementation plan to include further detail on that targets, interim milestones, monitoring methods and reporting arrangements will be considered and developed through implementation planning in partnership with Accord partners and other relevant organisations.
- Include an infographic or other supporting graphic showing existing regional biodiversity monitoring and initiatives and how the strategy fits wider biodiversity monitoring framework.

Theme 2: Acting Sooner and Increasing Urgency

Many respondents supported the **2050 vision** but were concerned that biodiversity decline is occurring now and cannot wait until mid-century.

Across **Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 5**, respondents repeatedly described 2050 as too distant and argued that threatened species and ecosystems may be lost before that timeframe is reached. Several respondents suggested milestone years such as 2030 or 2040, while others advocated for formal 5-year and 10-year checkpoints.

This concern extended into implementation sequencing. Numerous respondents questioned why biodiversity restoration, pest control, policy alignment and incentive programmes appeared as medium- or long-term priorities in **Table 2**. Many specifically argued that restoration of threatened ecosystems (**SFA1**), pest management (**SFA4**) and restoration incentives (**SFA18**) should be brought forward into short-term implementation.

WRC response

Agree in principle. The 2050 timeframe provides an appropriate long-term horizon for the strategy; it was not intended to imply that action is deferred until 2050. Biodiversity decline and pressures on threatened ecosystems and species require ongoing and, in some areas, immediate action.

The strategy should therefore provide clearer signals about near- and medium-term progress while retaining 2050 as the long-term vision. Detailed sequencing and delivery timeframes should be established through implementation planning also recognising existing programmes and activities already underway.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Retain 2050 as the long-term strategic horizon but make the need for earlier action more explicit in the introductory and implementation sections.
- Revisit the review cycle in the strategy (section 3.3) and ensure that this is aligned with other relevant strategy and funding cycles, for example the Waikato Biosecurity Strategy and Long-Term Plan.
- Review the implementation sequencing of priority actions, particularly restoration of threatened ecosystems, landscape-scale pest management and incentives, to determine whether these should be signalled as short-term priorities.
- Clarify that implementation begins from adoption of the strategy, rather than suggesting that substantive biodiversity action will occur only in later phases (for instance, consider changing the categories to identify the expected emphasis for delivery and investment over time, rather than when work will commence).
- Where detailed timing depends on funding, partnerships or further work, identify this through the implementation plan rather than creating unfunded commitments within the strategy itself.

Theme 3: Balancing Restoration, Maintenance and Prioritisation

There was broad support for prioritising rare, threatened and highly depleted ecosystems and species; however, many respondents were concerned that the strategy could become overly focused on biodiversity already in crisis.

A recurring concern was that healthy ecosystems, roadside remnants, small habitat fragments and ecosystems that are currently stable may be overlooked until they become threatened. Several respondents described this as a "squeaky wheel" approach. This theme appeared frequently in feedback on **Outcome 1 and Pou 1**, particularly in relation to **SFA1**.

A strong message emerging from the feedback was that biodiversity maintenance should sit alongside restoration. Respondents argued that protecting existing wetlands, forests, ecological corridors and remnant habitats may deliver more durable outcomes than allowing sites to decline and then restoring them later.

There were also repeated calls to recognise and support existing biodiversity stewardship occurring on private land and through community-led restoration projects.

WRC response

Agree. Prioritisation is necessary to focus resources where needs and potential benefits are greatest. However, this should not be interpreted as limiting biodiversity action to ecosystems already in serious decline. Preventing further degradation and maintaining existing biodiversity values can be more effective and cost-efficient than restoring them after they have been lost or degraded. The strategy needs to provide for a balanced approach encompassing protection, maintenance, restoration and expansion.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Strengthen Outcome 1 and Pou 1 wording so that maintaining and protecting existing biodiversity values is clearly expressed alongside restoration and expansion.
- Clarify the purpose of prioritisation is to optimise resource use. Priority ecosystems and species receive particular focus, noting that this does not exclude action in healthy ecosystems, smaller remnants or other areas with important biodiversity values.
- Recognise prevention of biodiversity decline as an explicit component of the strategy, alongside restoration of already degraded systems.
- Recognise existing stewardship on private land and community-led restoration, including the value of maintaining biodiversity gains already achieved.
- Recognise the role of smaller habitat fragments, roadside vegetation, waterways and ecological stepping stones where these contribute to wider ecosystem function and connectivity.

Theme 4: Moving Beyond "No Net Loss"

One of the clearest strategic themes concerned dissatisfaction with the concept of "no net loss", particularly within **Outcome 1 and Pou 4**.

Many respondents argued that no net loss is insufficient in a region where significant biodiversity decline has already occurred and does not represent an ambitious enough goal for a 25-year strategy. Several respondents explicitly called for the strategy to pursue biodiversity gain rather than simply maintaining a depleted baseline.

Many respondents advocated explicitly for biodiversity gain, ecological recovery and positive improvement in species and ecosystem condition. Suggestions included commitments to no further species extinctions, delivering measurable biodiversity gains, improved threat status for all Threatened and At-Risk species, strengthening restoration incentives to achieve outcomes beyond no net loss and increasing ecosystem extent and connectivity. Feedback on **SFA17** and **SFA18** was particularly strong in this area.

Several respondents also questioned whether no-net-loss approaches elsewhere have been successful and argued that biodiversity offsetting should not become a substitute for protection and restoration.

WRC response

Agree in principle. The Strategy should clearly aspire to biodiversity recovery and gain. It is acknowledged that "no net loss" has a role as a policy concept for avoiding further biodiversity loss, but on its own it does not

adequately describe the long-term ambition of a regional biodiversity strategy to 2050. The Strategy should distinguish between preventing further loss and achieving positive biodiversity outcomes. References in the strategy should not predetermine the outcome of statutory policy or regulatory approaches under the Resource Management Act reform and other planning processes.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Review references to “no net loss”, particularly within Pou 4, so that it is not presented as the ultimate biodiversity outcome of the Strategy.
- Strengthen the strategic direction toward biodiversity gain, recovery and improvement in ecosystem extent, condition, connectivity and species status.
- Clarify that avoiding further loss is a minimum foundation, while the Strategy seeks longer-term restoration and biodiversity gains.
- Avoid wording that could imply biodiversity offsetting is a substitute for avoiding, protecting or restoring biodiversity, noting that detailed regulatory provisions sit outside the Strategy.
- Consider whether SFA17 and SFA18 should be reframed to clearly differentiate loss-prevention mechanisms from initiatives designed to generate positive biodiversity gains.

Theme 5: Funding, Incentives and Long-Term Investment

Funding emerged as one of the most frequently discussed issues throughout the engagement process.

Respondents repeatedly questioned how the strategy's ambitions could be achieved without clearer funding commitments, particularly given the statement in **Section 3.1** that no new funding is assumed. Several respondents also questioned how biodiversity outcomes would be achieved using existing funding alone, particularly where delivery relies on iwi, hapū, whānau, volunteers and community groups already experiencing capacity and resourcing constraints.

Respondents frequently noted the tension between positioning biodiversity as essential natural infrastructure while not identifying comparable long-term funding arrangements. This theme featured strongly in **Outcome 3, Outcome 5, Pou 2, Pou 4 and general comments**.

There was strong support for practical funding mechanisms and incentives. Suggestions included grants, rates relief, fencing subsidies, riparian planting support, biodiversity funds, biodiversity credits, transferable development rights, restoration incentives and long-term maintenance funding.

Many respondents stressed that biodiversity outcomes provide public benefits and therefore landowners, volunteers and community groups should not be expected to bear a disproportionate share of the costs associated with biodiversity protection and restoration.

WRC response

Agree. Sustainable investment is fundamental to implementation. The strategy cannot itself commit WRC, Biodiversity Accord partners or future organisations to expenditure that has not been approved through their respective funding processes. However, it can provide a stronger strategic commitment to identifying, coordinating and enabling long-term investment and incentives.

Funding should be viewed as a shared regional challenge involving central and local government, iwi, philanthropic organisations, landowners, business and communities rather than as a WRC responsibility alone.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Strengthen references to long-term investment and funding pathways, while making clear that specific funding decisions remain subject to Long Term Plans, Annual Plans and the decision-making processes of partner organisations.
- Retain and strengthen the focus on coordinated and accessible funding mechanisms for biodiversity action.

- Identify investigation of incentives as an implementation priority, potentially including grants, rates mechanisms and other approaches raised through engagement, without committing the strategy to specific mechanisms before they have been assessed.
- Recognise the contribution already made by landowners, volunteers, iwi/hapū and community organisations, and the public benefits arising from their biodiversity stewardship.
- Review wording suggesting that “no new funding is assumed” so it does not unintentionally imply that the Strategy can be implemented without additional or reprioritised investment.

Theme 6: Supporting Existing Community Groups, Volunteers and Landowners

Respondents consistently recognised that biodiversity outcomes will depend heavily on community groups, volunteers, catchment groups, iwi organisations, predator-free initiatives and private landowners.

There was strong appreciation for the work already being undertaken across the region and repeated calls for the strategy to recognise and strengthen those efforts. This theme was most evident in feedback on **Outcome 3, Pou 2 and Question 28**.

A common concern was that many existing groups are already stretched and require support and practical assistance rather than additional obligations.

Suggestions included biodiversity advisory services, volunteer coordinators, support hubs, grant-writing assistance, technical expertise, training, equipment, long-term administration funding and practical support for biodiversity work on private land. A common message was that implementation should build on existing capability rather than create new layers of bureaucracy.

WRC response

Agree. Existing community groups, landowners, iwi/hapū organisations, catchment groups and other local initiatives provide significant capability/experience and should form an important foundation for implementation. The strategy needs to support, connect and strengthen existing networks rather than assume that new organisational structures are always required. Support needs will vary across the region and may include advice, coordination, capability development, access to funding, equipment and technical expertise.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Review references to establishing biodiversity support hubs so that these could involve strengthening or connecting existing networks and services, rather than necessarily creating new entities.
- Strengthen the emphasis on practical support, including technical advice, capability building, coordination and assistance to access funding.
- Recognise private landowners and community organisations as existing biodiversity stewards and delivery partners, rather than describing them primarily as audiences to be encouraged to participate.

Theme 7: Pest Plants, Pest Animals and Biosecurity

Pest management was one of the most strongly supported areas for action throughout the consultation.

Across **outcomes, pou and general comments**, respondents repeatedly identified invasive weeds and pest animals as major barriers to biodiversity recovery. Particular concern was expressed about woolly nightshade, privet, climbing asparagus, giant privet, possums, stoats, rats and feral cats. Feedback on **Pou 1 - SFA4 and many of the general comments** reinforced this theme.

Many respondents argued that weed control and predator control should be treated as core biodiversity activities rather than secondary actions.

There were repeated calls for stronger pathway management to prevent new incursions, earlier pest-control implementation, landscape-scale pest programmes, greater emphasis on environmental weeds and improved alignment with the Regional Pest Management Plan and Predator Free 2050.

Several respondents argued that restoration efforts will continue to struggle unless pest pressures are addressed more comprehensively and urgently.

WRC response

Agree. Effective management of pest plants, pest animals and emerging biosecurity threats is fundamental to maintaining and restoring biodiversity. The Strategy should provide clearer recognition of this relationship while avoiding duplication of the statutory and operational functions of the Regional Pest Management Plan and other biosecurity programmes. Biodiversity and biosecurity implementation should be mutually reinforcing and coordinated at appropriate landscape scales.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Strengthen Pou 1 and associated strategic focus areas to explicitly recognise both pest plants and pest animals as pressures on indigenous biodiversity.
- Strengthen alignment with the Regional Pest Management Plan, Waikato Biosecurity Strategy and relevant national initiatives, while retaining the distinct role of the biodiversity strategy.
- Review implementation sequencing so that priority landscape-scale pest management is clearly treated as an early and ongoing component of biodiversity recovery, where appropriate.

Theme 8: Landscape-Scale Restoration, Connectivity and Spatial Planning

Many respondents strongly supported the *ki uta ki tai* concept and viewed ecological connectivity as a core component of biodiversity recovery.

Feedback consistently emphasised the importance of terrestrial and freshwater corridors, stepping stones, fish passage, riparian restoration, urban habitat linkages and connectivity between fragmented ecosystems. This theme appeared strongly in **Outcome 1, Outcome 2 and Pou 1**.

There was also strong support for broadening the strategy's spatial focus.

Respondents wanted greater recognition of urban biodiversity, marine ecosystems, roadsides, streams, wetlands, floodplains and ecological connections across public and private land i.e. beyond priority sites.

Several respondents also called for biodiversity priorities to be integrated into regional spatial planning processes and corridor mapping exercises.

WRC response

Agree. Ecological connectivity is fundamental to resilient ecosystems and species recovery, particularly in a highly fragmented landscape and in a changing climate. The strategy should continue to support a *ki uta ki tai* and landscape-scale approach while making clearer that connectivity can be provided through a range of ecosystem types, corridors, stepping stones and smaller habitat areas across public and private land. Regional spatial information can help guide coordinated investment and restoration, although site-specific regulatory decisions remain within statutory planning processes.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Strengthen references to ecological connectivity throughout Outcomes 1 and 2 and Pou 1, including corridors, stepping stones and linkages between fragmented habitats.
- Broaden examples of biodiversity environments to where appropriate recognise urban biodiversity, streams, roadsides, marine and coastal environments, wetlands, riparian margins and smaller habitat remnants.

- Retain and strengthen the proposed regional biodiversity spatial framework, with its purpose clearly described as supporting prioritisation, coordination, connectivity and investment.
- Recognise that connectivity occurs across multiple land tenures and ownership arrangements, requiring voluntary collaboration and partnership with landowners, councils, iwi/hapū and other organisations.

Theme 9: Recognition of Māori, Treaty Partnerships and Mātauranga Māori

Feedback revealed differing views about the prominence given to Māori leadership, Treaty partnerships, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga.

Many respondents were of the view that biodiversity restoration should be framed primarily as a shared community responsibility rather than a Māori-led activity. Some viewed **Outcome 4 and Pou 3** as placing too much emphasis on ethnicity and leadership roles.

However, there was also strong support from other respondents for maintaining or strengthening the Māori partnership focus.

Supportive submissions highlighted the importance of Treaty partnerships, Māori landowners, cultural values, taonga species, customary practices and mātauranga Māori.

Across both supportive and critical comments, a common theme emerged that biodiversity outcomes will be strongest when mātauranga Māori, ecological science, local knowledge and practical experience are brought together through genuine partnership approaches. Some respondents also highlighted the need to recognise the diversity of iwi perspectives across the region, including differences in cultural indicators, aspirations and participation in implementation.

WRC response

Acknowledge the range of views received. The Strategy should continue to recognise the distinct roles, relationships and interests of iwi and hapū, including mātauranga Māori, kaitiakitanga, Māori land and taonga species, while also making clear that biodiversity restoration is a shared regional endeavour involving many communities, landowners, agencies and knowledge systems. Greater clarity of terminology and intended roles may address some of the concerns expressed without removing the partnership foundations of the Strategy.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Retain Outcome 4 and Pou 3, while refining the wording to clarify that biodiversity restoration relies on broad community participation and, where appropriate, place-based Māori leadership through Te Tiriti-based partnerships.
- Retain the recognition of iwi/hapū partnerships, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga, while reviewing language to make the respective roles of tangata whenua, Accord partners, landowners, communities and agencies clearer.
- Clarify that regional biodiversity restoration is a shared responsibility, alongside recognition of the relationships, responsibilities and interests of tangata whenua.
- Strengthen wording recognising the complementary use of mātauranga Māori, ecological science, local knowledge and practical experience in decision-making and monitoring.
- Recognise Māori landowners and Māori organisations more explicitly where landowner or community stewardship is discussed.
- Where customary practices are referenced, clarify that their treatment within the strategy is in the context of achieving biodiversity and cultural outcomes.

Theme 10: Legislative Reform, Governance and Future Policy Direction

Many respondents raised concerns about uncertainty created by ongoing local government reform, resource management reform and changing environmental policy settings.

People questioned how the strategy would remain relevant if regional governance structures change or national biodiversity policy evolves. Respondents frequently sought confidence that biodiversity outcomes would continue to be prioritised regardless of future institutional arrangements. Greater clarity was also sought about long-term ownership of the strategy and responsibility for implementation if future local government structures change.

A second strand of this feedback related to the role of the strategy itself.

Some respondents argued that the strategy should remain a high-level document focused on vision, outcomes and broad direction, with detailed policy settings, limits and regulatory mechanisms considered through future statutory planning processes.

Others argued that stronger policy direction, environmental bottom lines and regulatory tools are required if biodiversity outcomes are to be achieved.

This tension was particularly evident in feedback on **Pou 4**, with the environmental limits and no-net-loss provisions.

WRC response

Agree. The Strategy should be sufficiently durable and adaptable to remain useful through future legislative and institutional change. Its primary role should be to establish a long-term regional biodiversity vision, outcomes and strategic direction rather than predetermine detailed statutory provisions. Where regulatory tools or environmental limits may contribute to achieving biodiversity outcomes, these should be considered through the appropriate statutory processes.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Review wording that could be interpreted as predetermining future statutory policy, particularly references to environmental limits, rules or specific regulatory approaches.
- Retain clear strategic direction on the outcomes sought while stating that specific regulatory mechanisms will be determined through relevant statutory planning and decision-making processes.
- Frame delivery as a regional and partnership-based endeavour so that the Strategy's long-term direction is not unnecessarily dependent on the continuation of any single institutional structure.

8 Conclusion

The 187 responses received through Phase 2 show broad support for the draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy, but also a clear expectation that it be strengthened before it is finalised. Respondents supported the 2050 vision, *ki uta ki tai* approach, ecological connectivity, community involvement and the recognition of biodiversity as essential natural infrastructure. At the same time, they asked for a stronger bridge between that long-term direction and what needs to happen in practice: clearer measures of success, earlier action, better pest plant and pest animal management, stronger protection and maintenance of existing biodiversity, improved funding and incentives, and practical support for the landowners, iwi/hapū, community groups and volunteers already doing biodiversity work across the region.

The recommended amendments respond to the main points raised in the feedback while keeping the strategy as a long-term regional framework. They include clearer links to monitoring and reporting, a stronger signal that implementation starts from adoption, review points aligned with future planning and funding cycles, earlier consideration of restoration, pest management and incentives, and wording that treats “no net loss” as a minimum rather than the overall ambition. The feedback also shows where the final strategy needs to carefully reflect different perspectives, including the balance between voluntary, incentive-based and regulatory approaches, the role of Māori leadership and partnership, and the need for the strategy to remain useful through future legislative and institutional change.

Finalising the strategy is therefore only the next step. Detailed targets, delivery responsibilities, monitoring arrangements, investment priorities and sequencing will need to be developed through implementation planning with iwi/hapū, councils, landowners, community organisations, central government, industry and other regional partners. The engagement provides a solid basis for that work: it confirms support for the strategy’s direction, identifies the changes needed to make it more practical and accountable, and helps shift the focus from strategy development to coordinated regional action.

Te Mauri o te Taiao

A Biodiversity Strategy for the Waikato Region 2026-2050

DRAFT (May August 2026)

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

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

Chairperson's fForeword | He kupu Wwhakapuakitanga

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

This biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region (the strategy) sets a clear, shared direction ~~to 2050 for the next 25 years~~ to stop further loss, reverse decline, and invest where the return for communities and nature is highest. This includes integrating biodiversity restoration with catchment management and recognising nature as essential infrastructure that protects communities and supports long-term economic wellbeing. It aims to turn many good projects into one coordinated programme of action across land, freshwater, coastal and marine environments.

At a time of resource management and local government reform, maintaining a coherent, long-term vision and shared regional direction is especially important. While legislation, institutions and delivery models may evolve, healthy biodiversity remains fundamental to a resilient, productive and prosperous Waikato region.

This strategy is guided by the Waikato Biodiversity Accord¹ and shaped by iwi, individuals, community groups, industry representatives, environmental organisations and central government agencies. This strategy builds on the ideas, aspirations and practical solutions shared by hundreds of people and organisations across the Waikato region. The strategy It focuses effort where it counts most: restoring rare and depleted ecosystems, reconnecting habitats mountains to sea *ki uta ki tai*, building consistent policy frameworks, improving data and monitoring, and supporting locally led action with practical tools and incentives. It is intentionally concise, future-focused and designed to adapt as science, indigenous knowledge/mātauranga and national direction evolve.

We would like to sincerely thank the many individuals and organisations who have contributed their time, knowledge and expertise to the development of this strategy. Their insights have helped shape a practical and enduring direction for biodiversity in the Waikato region.

Achieving the strategy's vision will require ongoing collaboration, shared leadership and coordinated investment, recognising that no single organisation can deliver the outcomes alone. We are committed to turning this strategy into action through a collaborative implementation planning process supported by a regional implementation group. By bringing together the strengths, knowledge and resources of many organisations and communities, we can make meaningful progress towards our shared vision for biodiversity in the Waikato region.

Warren Maher

Chairman: Waikato Regional Council

¹ Waikato Biodiversity Accord | Waikato Regional Council

Strategy on a Page | He Whakarāpopototanga rautaki

Vision Te mauri o te taiao, he taiao mauri ora Biodiversity in the Waikato region: thriving, connected, resilient	
Outcome 1	Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai (mountains to the sea)
Outcome 2	Populations of indigenous/taonga species, and their habitats and ecological connections are recovering resilient and increasing
Outcome 3	Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion the Waikato region's biodiversity
Outcome 4	Māori leadership, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga guide biodiversity restoration Tangata whenua exercise rangatiratanga as kaitiaki, applying mātauranga Māori to protect, sustain and enhance indigenous biodiversity
Outcome 5	People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region
Pou	Strategic Focus Areas
Pou 1 Protecting and restoring what matters <i>Protecting and restoring native species, habitats and the ecological functioning of ecosystems by addressing climate, biosecurity and other threats while preserving the values that connect people to the environment.</i>	1. Prioritise restoration of the region's most threatened, rare and vulnerable ecosystems <u>while maintaining and enhancing biodiversity across the landscape</u> 2. Reconnect ecosystems through ecological corridors, linkages and buffers – ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea) 3. Protect and restore wetlands, peatlands, floodplains, riparian margins and coastal systems as frontline nature-based solutions for climate and ecosystem resilience 4. <u>Scale up coordinated landscape-scale pest control operations with specific targets as a core biodiversity and biosecurity delivery mechanism</u> Support species recovery and ecosystem restoration through invasive species management
Pou 2 Empowering landowners and communities <i>Empowering landowners and local communities through advocacy, education and practical support while building community capacity and capability to actively participate in biodiversity efforts. Supporting landowners and local communities with the knowledge, skills, resources and connections they need to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity.</i>	5. Maintain <u>and strengthen network of</u> regional biodiversity support <u>networks hubs</u> for community groups, landowners and local iwi/hapū 6. Facilitate long-term, <u>coordinated and accessible funding investment and incentives to enable secure investment in</u> for biodiversity restoration <u>and management</u> 7. Grow public awareness, participation and <u>storytelling understanding</u> about biodiversity across the region 8. Build <u>capacity and capability the skills, knowledge and support</u> for locally led action
Pou 3 Partnering with tangata whenua <i>Working alongside iwi and hapū tangata whenua to embed mātauranga Māori and guide engagement, leadership and delivery in biodiversity management, while upholding the principles of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi.</i>	9. <u>Embed iwi aspirations, te ao Māori values, integrate iwi, hapū and whānau aspirations, place-based knowledge and mātauranga Māori into all biodiversity planning and delivery</u> 10. <u>Establish long-term, equitable funding</u> Strengthen education and investment pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau-led biodiversity action 11. <u>Go design and implement Māori led monitoring and kaitiaki development programmes</u> Embed mātauranga Māori into environmental monitoring and reporting processes 12. <u>Create co-designed Implement collaborative</u> partnership models/projects for ecosystem restoration <u>throughout the Waikato region on shared Māori land</u> 13. Restore culturally significant biodiversity sites <u>to enhance continued and revitalise</u> customary practices

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Pou 4 Strengthening data, policy, and investment <i>Building the quality—data, information, policy and investment funding settings needed to prioritise the right places for biodiversity restoration, measure progressimpact and support guide action restoration across the Waikato region.</i>	14. Strengthen Improve alignment and coordination of biodiversity policy consistency and alignment across councils and central government 15. Develop a clear biodiversity spatial and maintain a regional biodiversity mapping and spatial planning framework for the region 16. Set and implement regional environmental limits for biodiversity 17. Deliver “no net loss of indigenous biodiversity” through clear policy and strong rules 16. Prevent further biodiversity loss while supporting measurable biodiversity recovery and gain 18. 17. Develop and implement targeted incentives to reverse ongoing ecosystem degradation and drive biodiversity gains beyond “no net loss” 19. 18. Build shared understanding and improve biodiversity better knowledge through targeted research, consistent biodiversity monitoring and clear accessible information reporting
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Executive Summary | He kōrero whakataki

The Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy provides a shared long-term direction for protecting, restoring and enhancing indigenous biodiversity, bringing together tangata whenua, communities, landowners and agencies to halt biodiversity decline, recover ecosystems and species, and support a resilient and prosperous future.

The Waikato is home to a remarkable range of forests, wetlands, rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastlines and marine environments. These natural areas support indigenous species, sustain cultural values and provide many of the services people rely on every day, including clean water, fertile soils, flood protection and climate resilience. However, biodiversity continues to decline as a result of habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and climate change.

Through Phase 1 engagement, participants consistently called for stronger collaboration, practical support for communities and landowners, better biodiversity information, clearer priorities, stronger partnerships with tangata whenua, sustainable funding and a greater focus on implementation. These themes have directly shaped the outcomes, pou and strategic focus areas presented in this strategy.

This strategy sets a shared vision for biodiversity to be **thriving, connected and resilient**. It focuses on five outcomes: healthier and better-connected ecosystems; resilient and increasing indigenous species populations; communities actively involved in protecting and restoring nature; tangata whenua exercising rangatiratanga as kaitiaki; and biodiversity being recognised as essential to wellbeing, resilience and prosperity. The strategy promotes a *ki uta ki tai* (mountains to sea) approach, recognising that biodiversity is connected across land, freshwater, coastal and marine environments.

The strategy is organised around four pou: focusing action to maintain and enhance biodiversity, empowering landowners and communities, partnering with tangata whenua, and strengthening data, policy and investment. Together, these provide a coordinated framework for action, with a focus on ecosystem restoration, species recovery, ecological connectivity, invasive species management, community stewardship, biodiversity investment and better information to support decision-making.

Implementation will occur through a collaborative implementation plan developed after the strategy is adopted. Progress will be monitored, reported and reviewed over time to ensure actions remain effective and responsive to new information and changing circumstances. By building on the work already underway and improving coordination across the biodiversity system, the strategy aims to leave future generations with a richer, healthier and more resilient natural environment.

1 Setting the scene | Te whakarite kaupapa

1.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

1.2 What is biodiversity and why is it important?

In this strategy, **“biodiversity” means indigenous biodiversity** - the native plants, animals, fungi and other living organisms that occur naturally in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the ecosystems, habitats and ecological processes that support them. It includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems, consistent with the Resource Management Act 1991² (RMA) and the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023³ (NPS-IB).

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

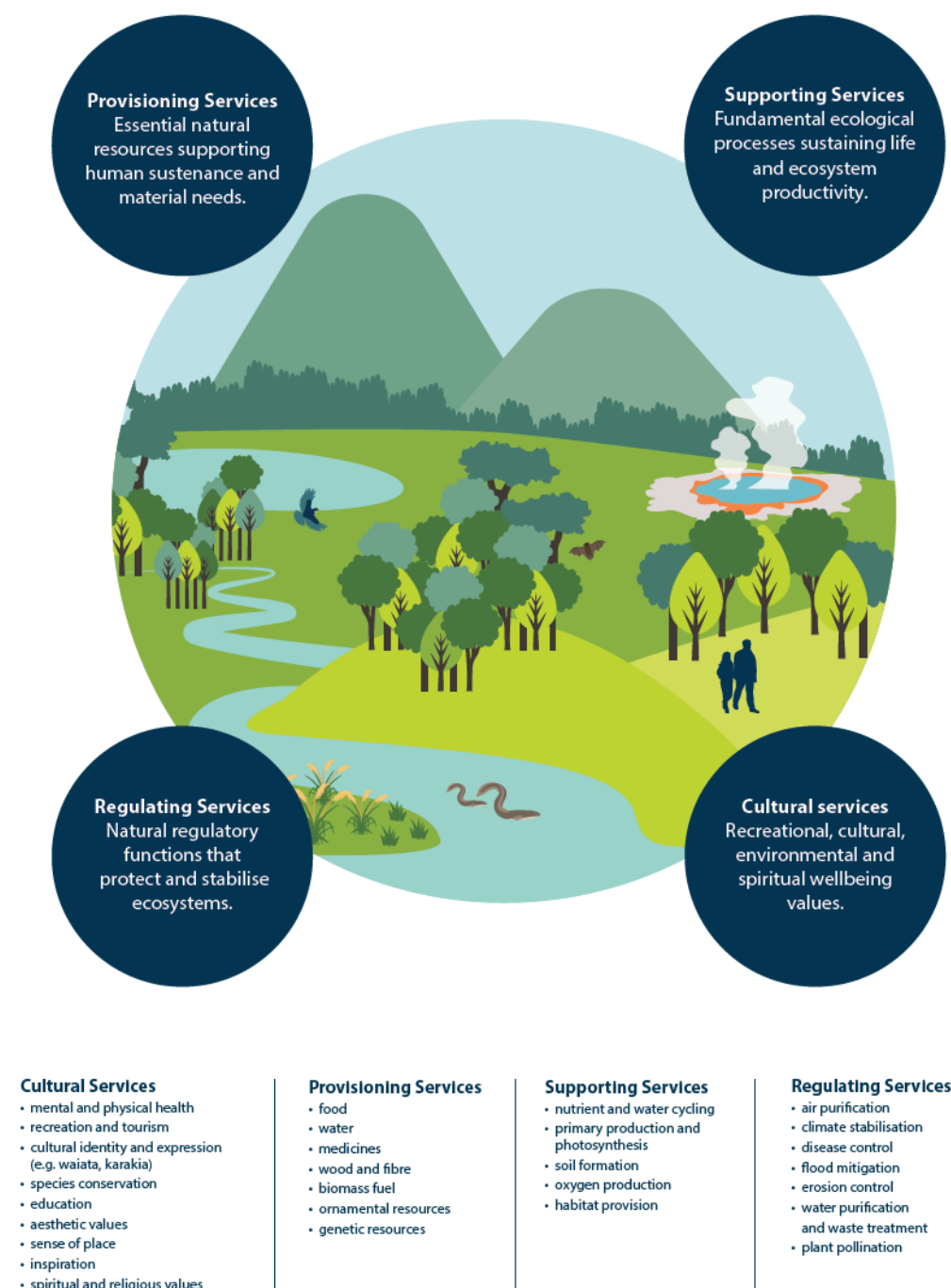
Healthy biodiversity underpins the natural systems that support our daily lives. It helps to keep water clean, form soil, recycle nutrients, store carbon, and buffer the impacts of floods, erosion, storms and droughts. Diverse, functioning ecosystems are also more resilient to climate change, pests,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

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

² Resource Management Act 1991 No 69 (as at 17 December 2025)

³ National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 | Ministry for the Environment

Figure 1 Ecosystem services (adapted from Hauraki District Council Biodiversity Strategy, March 2025⁴)



⁴ [Biodiversity Strategy - Hauraki District Council](#)

1.3 Biodiversity in the Waikato region

The Waikato region is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most ecologically varied regions, spanning alpine areas, geothermal fields, extensive river systems, wetlands and lakes, conifer-broadleaved forests, dunes, estuaries and coastal habitats⁵. These diverse landscapes support many endemic species and ecosystem types found nowhere else in the country⁶.

Freshwater systems are a defining feature, with more than 16,000 km of rivers and streams and approximately 200 lakes^{7,8,9}. These waterways support migratory native fish such as tuna (eel) and whitebait (īnanga and kōkopu), diverse invertebrates, aquatic plants and nationally important waterbirds.

The coastline extends approximately 1,150 km across the exposed west coast, the Firth of Thames/Tikapa Moana and the Coromandel Peninsula. The Firth of Thames is internationally recognised for its importance to aquaculture and migratory shorebirds¹⁰. Coastal waters support fish and shellfish; rocky reefs host rich marine habitat with macroalgae forests, horse mussel beds, sea grass meadows, tubeworm beds, sponge gardens, anemones, sea pens and corals¹¹. Near Port Waikato, the critically threatened Māui still occurs¹².

Despite significant land modification, over 7,500 native forest fragments under 25 hectares remain, including kahikatea stands that support high beetle diversity and offer refuge in the pastoral landscape. Moehau and the Coromandel Peninsula host distinctive fauna such as the Coromandel striped gecko, Moehau stag beetle, brown kiwi and Archey's frog, and native birds like the North Island robin/toutouwai, kākā and kererū¹³.

The region also contains 70 percent of New Zealand's geothermal ecosystems, home to globally unique plants, animals, and micro-organisms. Peatlands are another defining feature - Kopuatai Peat Dome, the country's largest intact restiad bog, is internationally significant for its unique vegetation and carbon storage capacity. The internationally recognised Whangamarino Wetland supports threatened species including the swamp helmet orchid, the giant wire rush with its native moth, "Fred the thread" and the Australasian bittern (the latter two species also occur at Kopuatai). Karst landscapes extend from Port Waikato to Mōkau, including glow worm caves, Awaroa koromiko (*Hebe scopulorum*), cave spleenwort (*Asplenium cimmeriorum*), eyeless cave beetles and cave wētā^{14,15}. Urban areas also host important biodiversity - at least 31 threatened and at-risk species have been recorded within Hamilton City¹⁶ including a rare urban population of pekapeka-tou-ra, native long-tailed bats. Coastal towns, such as Whaingaroa/Raglan, include numerous significant biodiversity areas intertwined with residential properties¹⁷.

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

⁵ The Waikato region extends to 12 nautical miles offshore.

⁶ [Ecosystems of the Waikato region - Indigenous and exotic, terrestrial and wetland PS202601.pdf](#)

⁷ [Waikato region shallow lakes management plan Volume 1 TR201458.pdf](#)

⁸ [Waikato region shallow lakes management plan: Volume 2 | Waikato Regional Council](#)

⁹ [Experts highlight challenges and priorities for restoring Waikato lakes : University of Waikato](#)

¹⁰ [DOC & Ramsar Convention Secretariat \(2004\) OLDDM-289132 - Ramsar RIS Firth of Thames](#)

¹¹ [Biodiversity data extraction for the Waikato area of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park TR202508.](#)

¹² [Marine and Estuarine - Waikato Biodiversity Forum](#)

¹³ [Consulting on the protection of native species in Moehau](#)

¹⁴ [Karst \(Limestone\) - Waikato Biodiversity Forum](#)

¹⁵ [Mapping Significant Natural Areas of the Waikato region: the physical basis for the identification of karst ecosystem sites \(updated methodology report\) | Waikato Regional Council](#)

¹⁶ [Hamilton City Council \(2022\) Proposed Plan Change 9: Appendix-12-Significant-Natural-Areas.pdf](#)

¹⁷ [van der Zwan, W. & Kessels, G. \(2017\) Significant Natural Areas of the Waikato District TR201736.pdf](#)

1.4 Pressures and their impacts on biodiversity in the Waikato region

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

Freshwater ecosystems face significant pressure. Intensified land use has increased sediment, nutrients and other contaminants entering into rivers, lakes and estuaries¹⁸. Nearly half of monitored river sites now fall below national sediment standards¹⁹. Native fish such as tuna and whitebait are declining due to poor water quality, habitat loss and barriers that block their migration.

Estuaries, as receiving environments, are especially vulnerable. Sediment build-up, nutrient enrichment and low oxygen conditions are degrading habitats including seagrass beds, shellfish reefs and sponge gardens. Around 2000km² – about one fifth of the Waikato coastal marine area – is disturbed each year by bottom contact fishing²⁰.

Habitat loss on land remains a major driver of decline. Only 27% of the region retains native vegetation, and around 75% of peat wetlands have been drained. These long-term pressures contribute to more than 300 native species now threatened or at risk of extinction²¹.

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

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

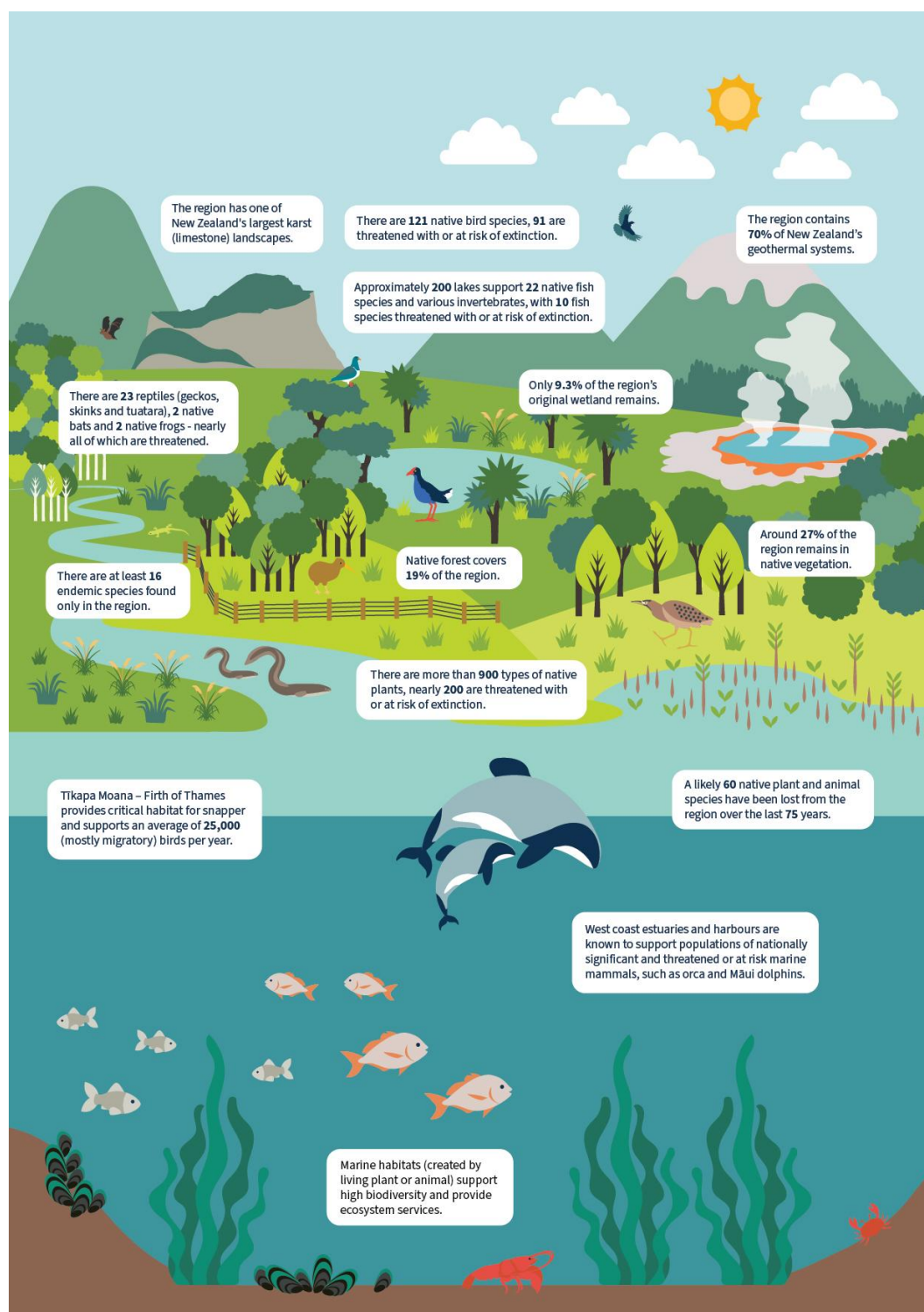
Together, habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution and water quality degradation, invasive species and climate change all have a compounding effect. Despite these challenges, halting and reversing biodiversity decline is possible, but only with greater and more coordinated action.

¹⁸ [Te oranga o te taiao | Waikato State of the Environment 2022](#)

¹⁹ [State of the environment monitoring river water quality](#)

²⁰ [Impacts of seabed disturbance in the Waikato region TR202304](#)

²¹ [Nationally threatened and regionally uncommon species of the Waikato region TR201928.pdf](#)

Figure 2 Biodiversity in the Waikato region

1.5 The current biodiversity management system

Indigenous biodiversity spans land, air, freshwater, coastal and marine boundaries, crossing the jurisdictions of local, regional and national agencies. It is guided by a wider framework of obligations including the RMA, NPS-IB and also Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2050²². For the region, the Waikato Regional Policy Statement 2016 (WRPS)²³ provides overarching policy direction, alongside iwi environmental management plans²⁴ and Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato (Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River) ²⁵, the [Te Tiriti](#)-based frameworks for restoring the Waikato River.

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

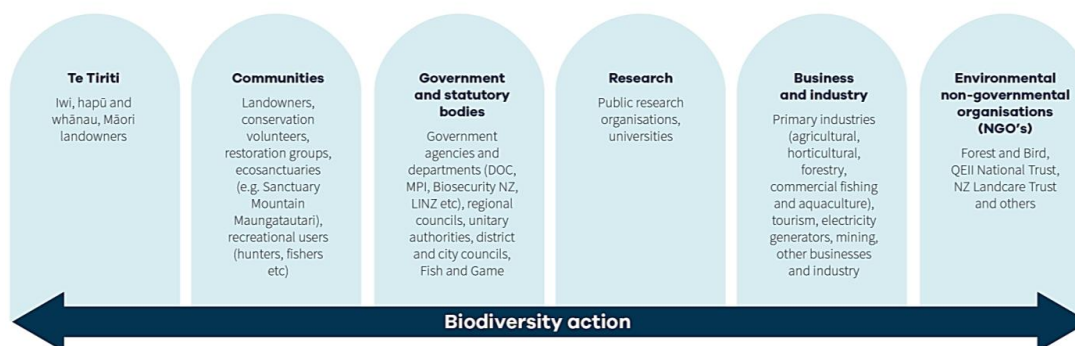
The region's 11 territorial authorities have key roles through district plans and local biodiversity strategies, such as Hamilton City Council's *Nature in the City Strategy*²⁵, Hauraki District Council's biodiversity strategy³⁴ and Waikato District Council's *Taiao in the Waikato strategy*²⁶.

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

Private landowners, businesses and industry groups play a crucial role through [pest-controlling invasive species](#), native planting, fencing waterways and investing in restoration. Community groups, trusts and catchment collectives also deliver significant on-the-ground work/mahi alongside mana whenua and councils - much of it on private land where many threatened ecosystems remain²⁸.

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

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



²² [Te Mana o te Taiao - Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020](#)

²³ [Waikato Regional Policy Statement 2016 | Waikato Regional Council](#)

²⁴ [Iwi management plans | Waikato Regional Council](#)

²⁵ [HCC-Nature-in-the-City-Strategy-2020 December-2020.pdf](#)

²⁶ [Taiao-\(nature\)-in-the-waikato-strategy-document.pdf](#)

²⁷ [Convention on Biological Diversity: DOC's international role](#)

²⁸ [New Zealand's latest National Report under the Convention on Biological Diversity](#)

1.6 Why do we need a regional biodiversity strategy?

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

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

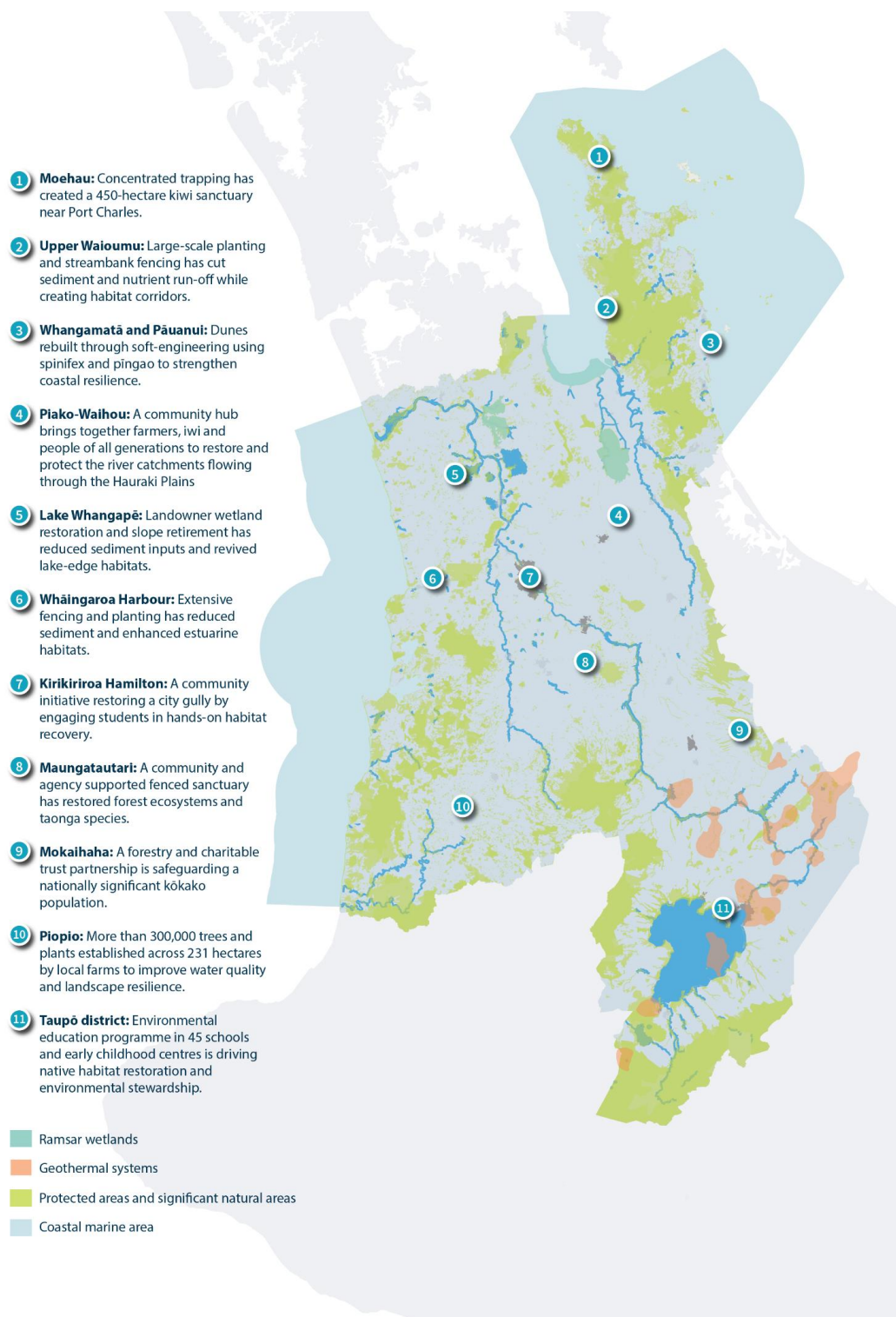
This approach lets us adapt as science evolves, pressures change, or national requirements are updated. The strategy is a starting point and will be refined over time alongside the implementation plan.

~~The statutory landscape is shifting with resource management reform. The Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill⁽²⁹⁾ propose a single combined plan per region, nationally consistent biodiversity rules, “no net loss” goals, ecosystem health limits and clearer spatial planning for development and protection. Incentives and other tools are also signalled to balance public benefits with impacts on individual landowners. The resource management system is undergoing significant reform with the replacement of the RMA, which is expected to reshape the statutory framework for environmental protection, biodiversity management and spatial planning. The strategy will need to remain flexible and responsive to these changes, while providing enduring regional direction for biodiversity outcomes³⁰.~~

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

²⁹ [Resource management reforms | Ministry for the Environment](#)

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

Figure 4 Restoring biodiversity in the Waikato Region – project examples

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

[Through engagement on the regional biodiversity strategy, participants consistently highlighted the following priorities:](#)

- [stronger collaboration and coordination;](#)
- [practical support for communities and landowners;](#)
- [stronger partnerships with tangata whenua;](#)
- [sustainable funding and investment;](#)
- [better information, monitoring and reporting;](#)
- [action that protects what remains while restoring what has been lost.](#)

[These themes have directly informed the development of the vision, outcomes and strategic focus areas.](#)

2.1 Vision

Te mauri o te taiao, he taiao mauri ora

Biodiversity in the Waikato region: thriving, connected, resilient

2.2 Guiding Principles

How we'll work

The Waikato Biodiversity Accord³⁺ provided a foundation for the development of this strategy. The Accord is a regional agreement that brings together organisations with the common goal of creating and putting the strategy into action.

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

2.3 Outcomes

What we are aiming to achieve by 2050 or earlier

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

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

The last outcome highlights that the Waikato region's long term economic wellbeing and resilience rely on healthy ecosystems that support regional prosperity and economic productivity.

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

³⁺ [Waikato Biodiversity Accord | Waikato Regional Council](#)

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

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

By 2050, indigenous ecosystems across the Waikato region are healthier, larger and better connected, from the mountains to the sea. While maintaining and protecting the region's existing biodiversity, restoration efforts are focused on rare, threatened and highly depleted ecosystem types (including examples such as wetlands and dunes) where investment can deliver the greatest ecological gains. Together, these efforts will support a network of resilient, self-sustaining ecosystems that support biodiversity, maintain genetic diversity and are able to better adapt to changing environmental conditions. Progress is measured and regularly reported through agreed ecological indicators against established baseline information on ecosystem extent, condition and connectivity.

Outcome 2 Populations of indigenous/taonga species, and their habitats and ecological connections are resilient and increasing recovering

INTENT: *By 2050, indigenous species threat status has improved in the region, with secure habitats and restored migration pathways (e.g. fish passage, corridors) supporting self-sustaining populations. By 2050, indigenous and taonga species are increasing in abundance and distribution across the region. No further local extinctions occur, and the threat status of indigenous species is improving. Secure habitats, ecological corridors and restored migration pathways support resilient populations with improving long-term viability. Progress is tracked through measurable indicators of species status and habitat condition.*

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

INTENT: *By 2050, people, landowners, tangata whenua and the community are informed, supported and motivated to act as be active stewards of indigenous biodiversity. ~~They~~ have the knowledge, resources, funding and partnerships they need to take meaningful action, with barriers reduced and opportunities made easy to access, so that caring for nature becomes a shared part of everyday life, local identity and community pride. Caring for nature is a visible and valued part of everyday life, community identity and decision-making, with people actively contributing to the protection, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity across the Waikato region.*

Outcome 4 Māori leadership, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga guide biodiversity restoration Tangata whenua exercise rangatiratanga as kaitiaki, applying mātauranga Māori to protect, sustain and enhance indigenous biodiversity through enduring partnerships.

INTENT: *By 2050, Treaty-based partnership approaches enable whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori organisations to exercise their roles as rangatira and kaitiaki, leading and partnering in the delivery of biodiversity restoration and in shared decision-making. Mātauranga Māori indicators are reported alongside biophysical measures, and culturally significant sites*

~~and taonga species show clear gains. By 2050, tangata whenua exercise rangatiratanga as kaitiaki, working in partnership with communities, landowners, agencies, and scientists, and applying mātauranga Māori alongside other knowledge systems. The mauri of culturally significant sites, taonga species and mahinga kai areas are strengthened and measurable recovery is evident. Success is demonstrated through jointly developed cultural and ecological indicators, reflecting shared responsibility, stewardship and partnership.~~

Outcome 5 People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region

INTENT:

By 2050, people and nature prosper together because ~~biodiversity and healthy ecosystems~~ health are improving alongside economic prosperity and community wellbeing. Thriving ecosystems support productive soils and landscapes, underpin the region's economy, protect resilient communities from climate impacts, and support sustainable land and water use. Biodiversity ~~and ecosystem function are~~ recognised as essential natural infrastructure – strengthening productivity, resilience and wellbeing across the Waikato region.

2.4 Strategic Focus Areas

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

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

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

Pou 1 Protecting and restoring what matters

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

Strategic Focus Areas

1	Prioritise restoration of the region's most threatened, rare and vulnerable ecosystems while maintaining and enhancing biodiversity across the landscape
	What this means: Focus restoration effort <u>Focus priority investment</u> first on ecosystems at greatest risk - such as lowland forests, wetlands/peatlands, dunes and other under-represented habitat types, <u>where action can deliver the greatest biodiversity gains</u>. This prioritisation recognises that resources are finite; however, ongoing maintenance and enhancement of existing biodiversity across the wider landscape remains essential to prevent further decline and support long-term biodiversity outcomes. <u>Ensure these ecosystems are identified, mapped and embedded in planning, prioritisation and investment decisions</u> to ensure their long-term representation across the region.
	Why this is a priority: - These ecosystems hold exceptional biodiversity and other values but are heavily depleted, <u>fragmented</u> or close to ecological tipping points. - Actively managing the most threatened areas <u>can deliver significant biodiversity gains</u> by addressing <u>key</u> threats and improving ecological condition <u>yields the most meaningful ecological gains</u>. - Prioritisation helps to ensure representation of all ecosystem types and aligns local action with DOC's national ecosystem-based management approach. <u>Protecting the rarest ecosystems strengthens the region's overall ecological resilience and supports the recovery of</u> secures a viable future for species dependent on them (especially threatened species). <u>This approach also complements efforts to maintain and enhance biodiversity across the wider landscape, recognising that biodiversity gains can be achieved through both targeted investment, locally led and landowner-led protection and restoration initiatives.</u>
2	Reconnect ecosystems through ecological corridors, linkages and buffers – ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea)
	What this means: Identify, protect and enhance ecological connectivity across terrestrial, freshwater, coastal/marine, <u>urban</u> and aerial environments to reduce habitat fragmentation and support species movement from mountains to sea. This includes buffering existing habitats, creating habitat "stepping stones" along catchment riparian zones and incorporating these areas into the Regional Spatial Plan <u>spatial planning</u> and into related plans and consenting decisions <u>(Figure 5)</u>.
	Why this is a priority: - Habitat fragmentation (e.g. clearing a continuous indigenous vegetation sequence into two or more fragments, or losing freshwater passage for species through culverts or dams) is a major barrier to species movement and ecosystem resilience. - Enhancing, buffering and linking habitats <u>can deliver significant and measurable greater</u> biodiversity gains <u>within relatively short timeframes compared with many other restoration interventionsthan isolated restoration sites.</u> - Functional connectivity enables species to move, migrate and shift ranges as conditions change, improving resilience to climate change and disturbance.

- Improved connectivity in upper catchments directly benefits downstream ecosystems and coastal receiving environments.

3	Protect and restore wetlands, peatlands, floodplains, riparian margins and coastal systems as frontline nature-based solutions for climate and ecosystem resilience
What this means: Prioritise the protection, restoration, and re-establishment of natural flood- and climate-buffering systems across the region: wetlands, floodplains, riparian margins, steep upper catchments and hillsides, and coastal dunes and estuaries. Efforts can be focused in high-risk areas such as the lower Waikato, Hauraki Plains and Coromandel. Methods such as re-wetting peatlands, expanding riparian buffers, restoring dunes and estuarine margins, and creating “room for the river” to improve natural water storage, sediment retention and coastal resilience.	
Why this is a priority: • The Waikato region has lost over 90% of its wetlands, removing natural flood storage and increasing sedimentation and carbon emissions. • Nature-based solutions³² reduce flood peaks, buffer drought, slow runoff protect against coastal inundation, and promote ecosystem health³³ - particularly in vulnerable areas like eastern Coromandel and the Firth of Thames which are increasingly exposed to sea level rise, storm surge and marine heatwaves. • These interventions also directly support regional flood protection objectives and can reduce long term reliance on engineered solutions. • High quality nature-based solutions can be cost-effective, deliver co-benefits of biodiversity habitat and cultural values, and are endorsed in national adaptation plans and climate change policies.	

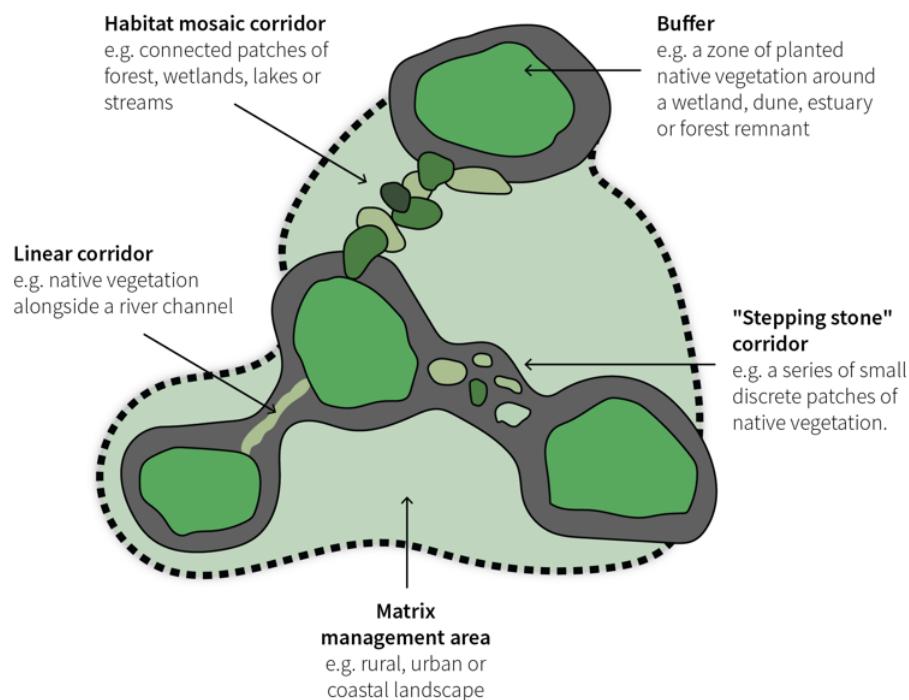
4	Scale up coordinated landscape-scale pest control operations with specific targets as a core biodiversity and biosecurity delivery mechanism. Support species recovery and ecosystem restoration through invasive species management
What this means: Coordinate WRC, DOC, iwi, territorial authorities and community groups to deliver region-wide and coastal/marine pest control programmes that manage invasive species with measurable targets. This includes terrestrial invasive species for key animal pests (e.g. goats, deer, pigs, possums, feral/stray cats, mustelids and rats), freshwater invasive species, environmental weeds pest plants and marine biosecurity threats pests. Align control methods, timing and monitoring across land tenures, improve pathway management control (e.g. vessels and equipment) and incorporate new technologies (e.g. remote sensing, AI-assisted monitoring) to increase efficiency. Use both result and outcome monitoring to track biodiversity gains and guide decisions. This strategic focus area will be delivered in alignment with the Waikato Biosecurity Strategy, and the Regional Pest Management Plan, Predator Free 2050 initiatives and other agency programmes, ensuring biodiversity priorities directly inform pest control investment and operations invasive species management and investment decisions.	
Why this is a priority:	

³² Nature-based solutions for climate adaptation - Roadmap for scaling use in Aotearoa New Zealand (December 2024)

³³ Nature-based solutions for flood management - Literature review. NIWA Client report June 2024

- Stakeholders identified coordinated management of invasive species ~~animal, plant and marine pest control~~ with measurable targets as the most cost-effective way to restore biodiversity at scale and reduce reinvasion.
- A warming climate is expanding pest ranges on land, in freshwater and at sea, increasing pressures on forests, wetlands, coastal ecosystems and other vulnerable biodiversity areas.
- Preventing the introduction and spread of new invasive species is typically more cost-effective than controlling established populations.
- Joined-up delivery, pathway management and innovative tools improve efficiency, reduce duplication, limit reinvasion risk and deliver better biodiversity outcomes in priority catchments and coastal waters.

Figure 5 Diagram of a terrestrial ecological network, with “stepping stones” and linear landscape corridors linking core areas



Pou 2 Empowering landowners and communities

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

Supporting landowners and local communities with the knowledge, skills, resources and connections they need to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity.

Strategic Focus Areas

5	Maintain and strengthen network of regional biodiversity support networks hubs for community groups, landowners and local iwi/hapū
What this means: Scale up a coordinated support structure linking local hubs, iwi, community groups, landowners, coastal communities, councils and agencies to improve collaboration. This includes cutting duplication and making work visible—including cross-district and catchment to coast partnerships.	
Why this is a priority: - Biodiversity restoration across the Waikato region is delivered through a combination of relies on both agency-led programmes (including DoC and regional councils) and locally led action by the efforts of communities, landowners, environmental groups and iwi. But they require consistent Continued recognition, collaboration and practical support are needed to maximise their collective impact. - Many community groups and volunteer networks operate in isolation and are stretched for resources, missing opportunities to work together. - Volunteer fatigue and organisational vulnerability threaten long term biodiversity outcomes if not supported by stable partnerships, technical assistance and sustained funding. Community feedback has emphasised the need for better connection and collaboration to maximise collective impact. Regional coordination helps funding go further. By purchasing equipment in bulk, sharing resources and providing consistent reporting and accountability, hubs improve value for money and give funders confidence that investment is producing measurable outcomes.	
6	Facilitate long-term, coordinated and accessible funding to enable secure investment in long-term investment and incentives for biodiversity restoration and management
What this means: Create a coordinated regional funding framework that makes it easier for iwi/hapū, landowners, community groups and local hubs to access sustained, longer-term support for biodiversity restoration. This includes exploring new and innovative funding tools such as philanthropic partnerships and biodiversity credits and aligning funding decisions with regional biodiversity priorities.	
Why this is a priority: - Many groups face short-term, uncertain funding and high competition for grants. - The government's Jobs for Nature programme demonstrated that consistent, long-term investment unlocks action at scale, builds capacity and strengthens partnerships. Stakeholders-The regional community wants coordinated, fair (transparent) and accessible funding, reduced administrative burden, and new funding tools such as private sector partnerships to broaden investment opportunities and reduce pressure on rates.	

- [Local communities often know their landscapes best and should also be supported through practical assistance and technical advice.](#)

7	Grow public awareness, participation and understanding storytelling about biodiversity across the region
What this means: Deliver a region-wide, co-designed education and communications programme that celebrates local success, promotes pride in biodiversity restoration, uses engaging visual tools and clearly shows people how they can get involved. Tailored resources will support communities and groups such as schools, landowners and industry partners.	
Why this is a priority: • Success stories and progress are not widely shared. • Low awareness of biodiversity's value remains a major barrier. • Communities want accessible maps, inspiring case studies and plain language content. • People need clear information about roles, responsibilities and where to find support.	

8	Build the skills, knowledge and support capacity and capability for locally led action
What this means: Develop a regionwide programme that strengthens local leadership, skills and practical capability by providing training, tools and support for community leaders, landowners, community nurseries and pest control contractors. This includes working with education providers to also grow a strong pipeline of skilled graduates - ensuring the region has the ecological, technical and cultural expertise needed for long-term restoration and kaitiaki roles.	
Why this is a priority: • Communities are ready to lead but need support and clear pathways to act. • Limited volunteer and governance capacity is holding back restoration. • Strong demand exists for skills in nursery management, pest invasive species control and restoration methods. • Shared training and monitoring improve data quality and supports better decisions. • Long-term workforce development - including tertiary training - will ensure appropriately skilled and experienced people continue to enter the field.	

Pou 3 Partnering with tangata whenua

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

Strategic Focus Areas

9	Embed iwi aspirations, te ao Māori values, and mātauranga Māori into all biodiversity planning and delivery. Integrate iwi, hapū and whānau aspirations, placed based knowledge, and mātauranga Māori into biodiversity planning and delivery.
What this means: Integrate iwi environmental management plans (IEMPs), Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements, mātauranga Māori, and relevant legislation (including Te Ture Whaimana) across all pou and priority areas, and support community groups to build effective relationships with iwi and hapū.	
Why this is a priority: • IEMPs set clear biodiversity aspirations that should guide strategy implementation. • Mātauranga Māori and western science both inform effective, culturally grounded outcomes. • Current legislation and resource management reform require alignment with iwi-specific legislation, partnerships with Māori and better integration of Māori values in planning. • Embedding iwi perspectives strengthens trust, legitimacy and Treaty-aligned relationships.	
10	Establish long-term, equitable funding pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau-led biodiversity action. Strengthen investment and education pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau-led biodiversity action.
What this means: Establish tailored incentives to enable Māori-led restoration projects, monitoring and governance on shared Māori land/whenua, aligned with Te Tiriti and settlement arrangements and coordinated through the implementation plan. "Equitable" funding should recognise that there are different starting points, influences that may be associated with land tenure and capacity amongst iwi and hapū.	
Why this is a priority: • In the Waikato region, 44% of Māori freehold land contains indigenous vegetation, offering significant biodiversity restoration opportunities while respecting landowner aspirations. • Many iwi face funding and capacity constraints that limit long-term, Māori-led action on their whenua. • Feedback highlighted the need for practical incentives specifically for shared Māori land/whenua. • Sustained, Māori-led biodiversity restoration needs long-term, multi-partner funding.	
11	Go-design and implement Māori-led monitoring and kaitiaki development programmes. Embed mātauranga Māori into environmental monitoring and reporting processes.
What this means: Work with mana whenua to deliver Māori-led monitoring that integrates mātauranga Māori, tracks taonga species and ecosystem health, builds guardian/kaitiaki capability, and follows agreed iwi and hapū data stewardship protocols.	

Why this is a priority:

- Iwi seek to monitor taonga species so that their values and priorities shape decisions.
- Mana whenua often detect environmental changes early through close connection with whenua and wai.
- Cultural indicators are largely absent from current biodiversity monitoring.
- Youth/rangatahi training and joint monitoring strengthen kaitiakitanga and trust between partners.

12	Create co-designed partnership models for ecosystem restoration on shared Māori land Implement collaborative partnership models/projects for ecosystem restoration throughout the Waikato region.
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What this means:

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

Why this is a priority:

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

13	Restore culturally significant biodiversity sites to enhance and revitalise continued customary practices
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What this means:

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

Why this is a priority:

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

Pou 4 Strengthening data, policy, and investment

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

Strategic Focus Areas

14	Strengthen policy consistency and Improve alignment and coordination of biodiversity policy across councils and central government
What this means: Work with territorial authorities and DOC to clarify roles and align biodiversity strategies, plans and rules across government, ensuring they are consistent, practical and support delivery of this strategy policy approaches across the region. Support clear and consistent biodiversity protections, ecosystem health outcomes and restoration priorities through future planning and policy frameworks.	
Why this is a priority: - Fragmented policies and differing council approaches to biodiversity management create confusion and reduce effectiveness. - Local biodiversity strategies need regional backing to deliver district-scale action. - Integrating biodiversity actions with climate, catchment and biosecurity planning enables more joined-up, place-based solutions that support healthier and more resilient ecosystems. Fit-for-purpose and regionally consistent plans and policies are important tools to help avoid ongoing biodiversity decline, providing greater certainty for communities, landowners and decision-makers.	
15	Develop a clear and maintain a regional biodiversity mapping and spatial planning framework for the region
What this means: Ensure that the Regional Spatial Plan (required by the new Planning Bill) regional spatial planning identifies and protects ecological corridors, climate refugia, significant natural areas indigenous biodiversity strongholds and key land-freshwater-coastal linkages and reflects these in zoning and land use controls. The objective becomes protecting ecological function across landscapes, not just individual sites.	
Why this is a priority: - Regional Spatial Plans spatial planning provides a unique opportunity to integrate land use, infrastructure, and environmental limits in one strategic document outcomes in a single strategic framework, enabling biodiversity priorities to be identified and reflected in future planning and investment decisions. — a unique opportunity to map and secure biodiversity priorities spatially. - A spatial stocktake focuses effort on high impact places (e.g. corridors, refugia) rather than spreading resources too thinly. - A corridor-based, landscape approach supports connectivity and resilience across terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems. Quantitative targets help focus restoration effort and guide long-term biodiversity management. They can be developed through local indigenous biodiversity strategies, and embedded into regional spatial planning.	
16	Set and implement regional environmental limits for biodiversity

What this means:
Define and apply regional ecosystem health limits (such as minimum indigenous vegetation cover and habitat requirements) and embed them into the new regional planning framework and related strategies.

Why this is a priority:

- The Natural Environment Bill will require councils to implement environmental limits for air, water, soils and indigenous biodiversity.
- Limits provide clear boundaries for development and ensure ecosystems do not fall below minimum health thresholds amid rapid land use change.
- Quantitative targets help focus restoration effort and guide long-term biodiversity management. They can be developed through local indigenous biodiversity strategies at the territorial authority level, and embedded into the regional spatial plan

17 Deliver “no net loss of indigenous biodiversity” through clear policy and strong rules

What this means:

Embed a “no net loss of indigenous biodiversity” requirement into the regional planning framework, all planning decisions, consent processes and restoration programmes.

Why this is a priority:

- High value but fragmented ecosystems in the Waikato region continue to decline under land use pressure and climate change.
- The Waikato Regional Policy Statement mandates a no net loss approach to indigenous biodiversity, aiming for long term maintenance and enhancement.
- The NPS-IB and Natural Environment Bill both require no net loss of indigenous biodiversity, with regions responsible for defining practicable pathways to achieve this in consultation with their communities.
- Stakeholder and particularly iwi engagement highlighted the need for clear, enforceable bottom lines to reverse incremental biodiversity loss.

1647 Prevent further biodiversity loss while supporting measurable biodiversity recovery and gain

What this means:

Protect indigenous biodiversity from further decline by developing policy that supports actions to maintain and enhance ecosystem extent, condition, connectivity and species populations across the region. This includes recognising the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity as a minimum (as captured in the Waikato Regional Policy Statement and the NPS-IB), while pursuing longer-term restoration, species recovery and biodiversity gains through coordinated action, stewardship and investment.

Why this is a priority:

- Biodiversity across the Waikato region has experienced significant historical loss and continues to face pressure from habitat fragmentation, invasive species, land-use change and climate change.
- Preventing further loss is an essential foundation for biodiversity recovery, but maintaining the status quo alone will not reverse past declines.
- Long-term biodiversity gains will require restoration, enhancement and sustained investment alongside measures that avoid further degradation.

- [A clear distinction between avoiding loss and achieving recovery helps provide direction without pre-empting future statutory policy, regulatory or planning approaches.](#)

1748 Develop and implement targeted incentives to reverse ongoing ecosystem degradation and drive biodiversity gains ~~beyond “no net loss”~~

What this means:

Practical, tailored incentives will encourage restoration and help address long-standing pressures on ecosystems (such as historical land use change, pests and habitat loss), and support landowners and communities who want to enhance biodiversity alongside productive uses. Tools may include biodiversity credits, covenant support, [environmental bonus lots](#), [transferable development rights](#), streamlined consenting for restoration, [technical support](#), [private investment](#), [philanthropic partnerships](#) and recognition programmes for committed land stewards.

Why this is a priority:

- [Achieving biodiversity recovery at the scale required will depend on attracting and coordinating investment from public, private, philanthropic and community sources.](#)
- Many priority biodiversity areas are on private or ~~shared~~ Māori land and need practical support.
- ~~Community feedback emphasised that whilst “no net loss” is a good starting point, m~~ Many biodiversity areas need restoration and protection to secure their long-term sustainability.
- Incentives lower cost barriers, support voluntary action and encourage landowners to go beyond compliance.
- Tailored support helps address the specific challenges of ~~shared~~ Māori land.
- Rewarding active enhancement builds long-term stewardship and ecological resilience.

1849 Build shared understanding and ~~better~~[improve biodiversity](#) knowledge through targeted research, consistent biodiversity monitoring and clear, accessible ~~information~~[reporting](#)

What this means:

Promote consistent monitoring methods and shared indicators (including mātauranga Māori and cultural measures) to track biodiversity across ecosystems and land tenures. [Establish and maintain baseline information to help measure change over time.](#) Provide clear, accessible reporting tools such as maps, dashboards and visual summaries so that people easily understand where biodiversity is located, how it is changing, and where action will have the greatest impact. ~~Promote standardisation of data collection and storage.~~

Why this is a priority:

- ~~There is a strong desire from those involved in biodiversity restoration to be able to demonstrate measurable progress in order to justify investment. Reliable baseline information and regular reporting are needed to demonstrate whether biodiversity outcomes are improving over time.~~
- Patchy and inconsistent monitoring limits our ability to assess trends or understand regional change; scaling it up will give a clearer picture of ecosystem health and restoration effectiveness.
- People want simple, reliable information to guide action and avoid duplication.
- Cultural and social indicators ensure tangata whenua values and community perspectives inform biodiversity decisions.
- Clear, visible reporting supports transparency, collaboration and more effective, evidence-based decisions.

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

3.1 Implementation

Indigenous biodiversity in the Waikato region is in decline, and delay will lock in higher costs, greater risk, and fewer future choices. This strategy sets a regional direction towards stopping further biodiversity loss, reverse decline where it matters most, and ~~invest where the return for communities and nature is highest~~ support the recovery, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity across the region. It seeks to focus effort and investment where it can deliver the greatest benefit for nature and communities.

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

Success depends on a number of shifts including moving from:

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

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

Strategy to Implementation Pathway

This strategy defines outcomes, pou and strategic focus areas (Table 1). A full suite of indicators and measures will be developed as part of the implementation phase (some examples are provided in Table ~~32~~).

Table 1 Strategy hierarchy overview

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

Table 2 shows a strategy to implementation pathway, ~~organised around the four pou based on the pou structure~~. The purpose is to ~~identify the strategic focus areas, begin to identify broad timeframes,~~ possible lead ~~organisations/agencies~~ and ~~potential indicators or measures of success,~~ and the expected focus for delivery over time. This pathway is designed to provide a clear line of sight from the strategy to the ~~full~~ implementation plan and help guide the sequencing of effort, investment and collaboration.

Each strategic focus area below has a suggested timeframe for commencement: short term (<2 years); medium term (<5 years) and long term (>5 years). Timeframes for commencement consider existing progress, reliance on multiple entities, national priorities, complexity of issues and working within available resourcing. Many strategic focus areas build on work that is already underway across the Waikato region. Rather than indicating when work will commence, the implementation status identifies the expected focus for delivery and investment over time. The categories are: Immediate Priority, Sustain and Strengthen, Building Capacity, and Longer-term Development. These categories reflect factors such as existing progress, urgency, reliance on multiple organisations, national priorities, complexity, and resourcing requirements (Table 2). Investment may involve improved coordination, reprioritisation of existing resources, new partnerships and future funding opportunities identified through the implementation plan.

Table 2 Strategy hierarchy overview

Status categories	Explanation
Immediate Priority	Areas requiring early focus through planning, coordination and delivery.
Sustain and Strengthen	Existing programmes and activities that require continued effort, coordination and improvement.
Building Capacity	Areas where capability, information, partnerships, funding mechanisms or systems need to be developed.
Longer-term Development	Areas likely to mature over a longer timeframe or depend on broader system change.

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

Table 32 Strategy to Implementation Pathway

Outcomes				Pou	Strategic Focus Area	Timeframe Status	Responsibility (Lead*)	Examples of Potential Indicators to Measure Progress
1. Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai (mountains to the sea) 2. Populations of indigenous/taonga species, and their habitats and ecological connections are resilient and increasing 3. Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion the Waikato region's biodiversity 4. Māori leadership; Tangata whenua are exercising rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga alongside communities to restore and sustain mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga guide biodiversity 5. People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region	POU 1 Protecting and restoring what matters	1. Prioritise restorationFocus on the most threatened ecosystems while maintaining and enhancing biodiversity	LONGIMMEDIATE PRIORITY	WRC in collaboration with other entities	- Ecosystem health indicators - Habitat extent and connectivity - Threatened species status - Taonga species trends - Pest population trends			
		2. Landscape connectivity	LONGIMMEDIATE PRIORITY	WRC in collaboration with other entities				
		3. Nature-based solutions	LONGBUILDING CAPACITY	WRC* in collaboration with other entities				
		4. Coordinated control of invasive speciespest animal/plant control	MEDIUMSUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	WRC*, DOC*, MPI				
	POU 2 Empowering landowners and communities	5. Regional Biodiversity networks/hubs	SHORTSUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	WRC* and DOC* in collaboration with other entities	- Restoration funding levels / investment leveraged from partners - Participation in restoration programmes - Number of active community hubs - Community engagement indicators - Restoration project coverage - Biodiversity awareness indicators - Trends in biodiversity condition and indicator species within community-led restoration areas			
		6. Funding frameworksFacilitate long term investment	MEDIUMBUILD CAPACITY	All entities				
		7. Grow public awareness and understandingCommunity education	SHORTSUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	All entities				
		8. Capacity development	MEDIUMBUILD CAPACITY	All entities including education providers				
	POU 3 Partnering with tangata whenua	9. IntegrateEmbed te ao Māori into planning	MEDIUMSUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	WRC* and iwi	- Mātauranga Māori monitoring indicators - Number of Māori-led restoration programmes - Cultural engagement indicators - Trends in taonga species			
		10. Sustainable fundingInvestment pathways for Māori-led restorationand incentives	MEDIUMBUILD CAPACITY	WRC*, DOC* in collaboration with other entities				
		11. Mātauranga Māori-led monitoring	MEDIUMBUILD CAPACITY	Iwi*, WRC , DOC				
		12. Co-design and partnership approaches	SHORTIMMEDIATE PRIORITY	Iwi*, WRC, DOC				
		13. Restore culturally significant sitesRestoration on shared Māori land	MEDIUMBUILD CAPACITY	Iwi* in collaboration with other entities				
	POU 4 Strengthening data, policy,	14. Policy alignment	LONGLONGER-TERM DEVELOPMENT	WRC* and territorial authorities* in collaboration with DOC	- Policy alignment indicators across councils - Biodiversity datasets and monitoring coverage across ecosystems			
		15. Biodiversity spatial planning	SHORTBUILD CAPACITY	WRC*, DOC				

						and investment	16. Environmental limit Policies for maintenance and enhancement	SHORT SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	WRC*	• Accessibility and use of regional biodiversity datasets • Consistency of biodiversity reporting
							17. No net loss policy	MEDIUM	WRC*, territorial authorities	
							18.17. Restoration incentives	MEDIUM BUILD CAPACITY	WRC*, DOC, territorial authorities and other entities	
							19.18. Accessible monitoring information	SHORT IMMEDIATE PRIORITY	WRC*, DOC*	

Oversight of Implementation

To support collaboration and implementation of the strategy, the regional council will establish a core implementation group with membership that includes tangata whenua, territorial authorities, Department of Conservation, QEII National Trust and other entities and organisations as required. This group will [share information](#), guide collective work programmes, [identify implementation issues](#) and maintain focus on long-term outcomes. [The implementation process will seek to provide opportunities for participation by iwi across the region, recognising different aspirations, priorities and capacity.](#)

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

The regional council will maintain the overall responsibility and will prepare a detailed implementation plan, [coordinate monitoring and reporting and review progress against the strategy outcomes. This will be](#) in collaboration with the core implementation group and others as required.

Implementation Plan

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

The implementation plan will be developed soon after the final strategy is adopted. [It-and will operationalise/translate the outcomes, pou and strategic focus areas through a funded delivery programme into a practical programme of work, setting out the actions to be taken, when they will occur, how partners will contribute, and how progress will be monitored and reported with sequenced, funded actions with confirmed responsibilities, timeframes, partnership alignment and monitoring/reporting expectations.](#) It will outline:

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

The initial implementation plan will be developed to cover the first phase until 2030, focusing on setting the [foundations needed systems in place](#) to deliver the strategy's, [especially the short to medium term priorities. This shorter timeframe provides an opportunity to review the plan after significant local government and resource management reform processes and in line with council long term planning cycles.](#) A [three-five-year review and implementation cycle](#) will follow this initial phase, [in line with agency long-term planning cycles.](#) This will allow the strategy to accommodate our understanding of the best methods and approaches to meet the outcomes as new knowledge and tools become available.

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

3.2 Monitoring and reporting

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

Table 32 shows some potential indicators that could be used to track progress. Existing state of the environment monitoring for the region (Figure 6) provides some baseline and trend information but gaps remain across ecosystems, species assemblages and emerging pressures, meaning important changes can go unnoticed. Developing a more comprehensive suite of indicators is one of the strategic focus areas in this strategy and this will be an important part of the implementation process.

Figure 6 Biodiversity monitoring in the Waikato region as at 2026 (NB: PLACE HOLDER INFOGRAPHIC)



Monitoring will align with existing reporting systems across different organisations and incorporate mātauranga Māori indicators through partnership with tangata whenua, recognising that cultural indicators may vary between iwi and hāpu. Monitoring information will be provided by lead organisations and implementation partners and coordinated through the regional implementation group. Reporting on biodiversity indicators will occur at the end of each implementation cycle to allow that monitoring to inform the development of the next implementation plan.

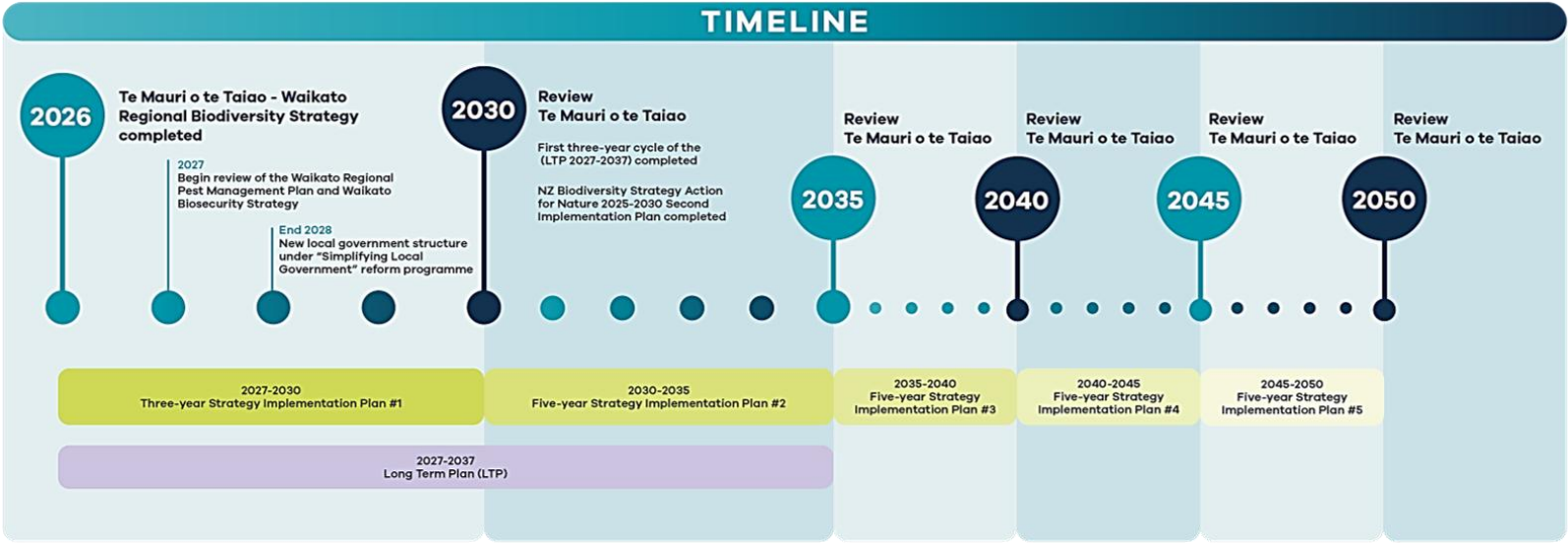
The regional council will be responsible for preparing consolidated progress reports against the strategy outcomes, on behalf of the strategy partners. Progress reports will be reviewed by the implementation group and made publicly available. Reporting will track progress against the strategy outcomes, implementation plan actions and agreed indicators, helping to identify achievements, emerging issues and priorities for future action.

3.3 Review

The Strategy will be formally reviewed every 3–5 years, aligned where possible with Long-Term Plan cycles, the review of the Regional Pest Management Plan and Waikato Biosecurity Strategy and national biodiversity strategy timing (Figure 7). Earlier review may occur if significant policy or system changes arise.

The next formal [strategy](#) review is planned for 2030, [followed by five-yearly reviews thereafter. Earlier reviews may be triggered if significant policy or system changes arise.](#)

Figure 7 Regional biodiversity strategy review and implementation planning timeline



Glossary | Ngā kupu whakamārama

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

³⁴ New Zealand Threat Classification System

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

Term	Definition
No net loss	Ensuring there is not a measurable net reduction in indigenous biodiversity — including the diversity of species, their population sizes and long-term viability, their natural range, and the extent and ecological health of native habitats and ecosystems.
Offset / biodiversity offset	A measurable conservation outcome (result in a net gain in the type, amount, and condition of indigenous biodiversity compared to that lost) that replaces residual adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity, after avoidance, minimisation and remediation have been applied.
Pest	Any introduced plant, animal or living organism that causes significant harm to native biodiversity, the environment, human health or the economy.
Private land	Land owned by individuals or entities (not managed by the Department of Conservation or any other public body).
Protected area	Land or water protected primarily for nature conservation purposes.
Public conservation land	Land administered by the Department of Conservation for whatever purpose.
Pou	A carved wooden post, pillar, or upright support used in traditional architecture.
Resilience	The ability of an ecosystem to recover from and absorb disturbances, and its capacity to reorganise into similar ecosystems.
Restoration	Active work to improve or reinstate degraded ecosystems or habitats so that they regain their natural character, ecological processes, and cultural or visual qualities. Restoration may also include enhancement.
Rohe	Territory or region.
Significant natural area	An area identified in a council plan as an area of significant indigenous vegetation or significant habitat of indigenous fauna.
Taiao	The natural world.
Tangata whenua	The people of the land.
Taonga	In the context of the strategy, are plants and animals treasured by tangata whenua.
Te ao Māori	The Māori world; A Māori perspective / world view.
Threatened species	A species facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild and includes nationally critical, nationally endangered and nationally vulnerable species as identified in the New Zealand Threat Classification System lists.
Wai	Water.
Wetland	Includes permanently or intermittently wet areas, shallow water, and land water margins that support a natural ecosystem of plants and animals that are adapted to wet conditions.
Whakapapa	Genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent.
Whenua	Land.

Appendix 1 Organisations and agencies involved in the biodiversity system

Organisation	Roles and Responsibilities
Regional councils	WRC is responsible for maintaining indigenous biodiversity across the region under the RMA 1991, which requires regional councils to establish, implement and review objectives, policies and methods for maintaining indigenous biological diversity. This includes managing the effects of land use on freshwater, coastal and terrestrial ecosystems, protecting significant native vegetation and habitats, and supporting pest management under the Biosecurity Act 1993. The council also leads regional-scale monitoring, catchment management, and policy development to ensure biodiversity is safeguarded across all land tenures—public, private, and Māori. The council's role is further guided by national direction, including the NPS-IB, which requires councils to identify and manage significant natural areas, work in partnership with tangata whenua, and maintain indigenous biodiversity through clear policies and monitoring.
Territorial authorities	Under the RMA, territorial authorities have the role of controlling the effects of the use, development and protection of land, including for the purpose of the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity. Territorial authorities (city and district councils) share significant responsibilities for biodiversity management under the RMA 1991. They are required to control the effects of land use and subdivision to maintain indigenous biodiversity, and to protect significant natural areas and significant habitats of indigenous fauna through their district plans. Under the NPS-IB, territorial authorities must identify and map SNAs and manage the effects of new activities on these areas, and update district plans to give effect to national and regional requirements. Territorial authorities also play a practical, on-the-ground role by managing biodiversity on council-owned land such as parks, reserves and road corridors, supporting local restoration groups, and aligning district-level biodiversity strategies with regional priorities.
Department of Conservation (DOC)	Responsible for conserving the natural and historic heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand on behalf of and for the benefit of present and future New Zealanders. DOC is funded and empowered to manage the public conservation estate, including on land and in marine protected areas. In the Waikato region, DOC owns or administers 347,053 hectares of protected terrestrial indigenous cover, representing 89% of all protected natural land cover in the region. DOC also directly manages 800 hectares of marine reserve - while this is the primary "no-take" area owned/managed by DOC, the region has broader marine protection coverage across the east coast (Hauraki Gulf Marine Park) and west coast (West Coast North Island marine mammal sanctuary). DOC works with private landowners, councils and other agencies to manage biodiversity in these areas.
Ministry for the Cities, Environment,	A mega-ministry launched on 1 July 2026. Responsible for advising the Government on policies and issues affecting cities, transport, housing, regional development and the environment, and for developing and

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

Appendix 2 Key legislation and policy documents for biodiversity management

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

	Legislation / Policy Document	Summary
NATIONAL	Marine Reserves Act 1971	Marine reserves provide the highest level of marine protection in New Zealand. This act provides for the establishment of fully protected marine reserves where all extraction and disturbance are prohibited. Reserves safeguard entire marine ecosystems from the surface to the seafloor, allowing species and habitats to recover. They serve as reference areas for scientific research and long-term monitoring and contribute to wider marine biodiversity outcomes.
NATIONAL	Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana Protection Act 2025	Strengthens the legislative framework for protecting the Hauraki Gulf, building on the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 and the <i>Sea Change</i> spatial plan. It supports integrated management across agencies, iwi, and stakeholders; introduces enhanced marine protection tools; and enables implementation of an ecosystem-based fisheries plan. Measures include restricting bottom trawling to a few specific corridors and improving environmental outcomes for the Gulf.
NATIONAL	Biosecurity Act 1993	New Zealand's core legal framework for managing pests and diseases that threaten the environment, economy, and human health. It provides regional councils with powers to detect, control, and eradicate unwanted organisms and supports border biosecurity, surveillance, and incursion response. For Waikato Regional Council, implementation occurs through the Regional Pest Management Plan and wider biosecurity programmes.
NATIONAL	New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (amended 2025)	The NZCPS requires councils to protect coastal biodiversity, preserve natural character, manage coastal hazards, and avoid adverse effects on significant coastal ecosystems. The NZCPS has strong legal force: regional policy statements and coastal plans must give effect to it. Its provisions guide how councils manage coastal development, activities, and resource use.
NATIONAL	Planning Bill (introduced in 2025)	As part of the RMA reform programme, the Planning Bill replaces current regional and district plans with a single combined plan for each region, integrating spatial planning and land-use planning. The purpose of the Planning Bill is to establish a framework for planning and regulating the use, development and enjoyment of land. The Bill embeds environmental limits, encourages urban development within clear environmental boundaries, and provides opportunities to map and protect areas of significant biodiversity value within future planning frameworks.
NATIONAL	Natural Environment Bill (introduced in 2025) (NE Bill)	The purpose of the NE Bill is to establish a framework for the use, protection, and enhancement of the natural environment as a replacement to the RMA. The act requires that environmental limits and targets are prescribed for biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems, and introduces the goal of "no net loss". The NBE bill also requires that "significant biodiversity areas (SBA)" are identified and protected. There is also provision for the identification of "highly vulnerable biodiversity areas (HVBAs)".
NATIONAL	Local Government Act 2002	This Act requires councils to prepare Long Term Plans and Annual Plans to state a community's long-term goals and priorities and key performance targets. Key elements of Long Term/ Annual plans relating to biodiversity include funding local government activities through rates and charging development contributions.

	Legislation / Policy Document	Summary
NATIONAL	Predator Free 2050 strategy	Predator Free NZ Trust and DOC are the key players of the Predator Free strategy with a goal to eradicate rates, stoats, ferrets, weasels and possums in New Zealand by 2050. The movement brings together iwi and hapū, individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, central government, local government, community groups, and landowners.
NATIONAL	Conservation Act 1987	Sets out DOC's core responsibilities for conserving natural and historic heritage, including species protection, freshwater ecosystem management, and the stewardship of public conservation land. DOC works in partnership with councils, iwi, and communities to support biodiversity protection, restoration, and advocacy in environmental decision-making to protect taonga for future generations. The Act is currently undergoing reform to modernise conservation management and planning, and administration of conservation land.
NATIONAL	Wildlife Act 1953	Provides legal protection for most native wildlife and regulates game bird management. It specifies which species are protected, partially protected, or unprotected, and enables the creation of wildlife sanctuaries and refuges. The Act underpins protections for threatened species and guides how people may interact with wildlife. Under this Act, the Crown owns all wildlife, except unprotected species.
REGIONAL	Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato – the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River	Te Ture Whaimana is the primary direction-setting document for the Waikato and Waipā rivers. It has the same effect as a national policy statements and therefore, district and regional plans and regional policy statements must give effect to it. The direction provided in Te Ture Whaimana influences the management of freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity in the Waikato region.
REGIONAL	Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS)	The WRPS is a document required under section 59 of the RMA. The WRPS provides region-wide objectives and policies for managing natural and physical resources. The ECO chapter sets priorities for protecting, maintaining, and enhancing indigenous biodiversity. District and regional plans must give effect to the WRPS, ensuring consistent delivery of biodiversity requirements across the region.
REGIONAL	Waikato Regional Coastal Plan (WRCP)	The WRCP contains policies, methods and rules relating to the management of the coastal environment in the Waikato region. The coastal plan recognises water quality, natural hazards and indigenous biodiversity whilst also managing the use of coastal resources (for example, dredging, sand extraction, aquaculture, and the discharge of contaminants).
REGIONAL	Waikato Biosecurity Strategy 2022-2032	The Waikato Biosecurity Strategy is a non-statutory document that sets out WRC's blueprint for ensuring that the council operates and maintains a comprehensive biosecurity system within the next 10 years. It integrates the non-regulatory and regulatory biosecurity functions including the WRPMP and all other biosecurity activities such as monitoring and surveillance, research, incursion response and collaborative action.
REGIONAL	Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022 – 2032 (WRPMP)	A statutory plan under the Biosecurity Act identifying pests in the region and setting objectives, rules, and methods for their management. The WRPMP supports biodiversity by controlling harmful species, aligning regional pest management with neighbouring regions, and enabling compliance and enforcement where required.

Appendix 3 Waikato Biodiversity Accord: Principles

Waikato Biodiversity Accord: Principles

waikatoregion.govt.nz/biodiversity-accord

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and treaty settlements as a foundation

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

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

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

Collaboration and partnership

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

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

Integrated and coordinated approach

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

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

Honesty, trust and accountability

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

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

Inclusiveness and participation

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

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

Long-term commitment and adaptability

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

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

Te Mauri o te Taiao

A Biodiversity Strategy for the Waikato Region 2026-2050

August 2026

Waikato Regional Council
Private Bag 3038
Waikato Mail Centre
HAMILTON 3240

Chairperson's foreword | He kupu whakapuaki

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

This biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region (the strategy) sets a clear, shared direction to 2050 to stop further loss, reverse decline, and invest where the return for communities and nature is highest. This includes integrating biodiversity restoration with catchment management and recognising nature as essential infrastructure that protects communities and supports long-term economic wellbeing. It aims to turn many good projects into one coordinated programme of action across land, freshwater, coastal and marine environments.

At a time of resource management and local government reform, maintaining a coherent long-term vision and shared regional direction is especially important. While legislation, institutions and delivery models may evolve, healthy biodiversity remains fundamental to a resilient, productive and prosperous Waikato region.

This strategy is guided by the Waikato Biodiversity Accord¹ and shaped by iwi, individuals, community groups, industry representatives, environmental organisations and central government agencies. This strategy builds on the ideas, aspirations and practical solutions shared by hundreds of people and organisations across the Waikato region. It focuses effort where it counts most: restoring rare and depleted ecosystems, reconnecting habitats mountains to sea *ki uta ki tai*, improving data and monitoring, and supporting locally led action with practical tools and incentives. It is intentionally concise, future-focused and designed to adapt as science, indigenous knowledge/mātauranga and national direction evolve.

We would like to sincerely thank the many individuals and organisations who have contributed their time, knowledge and expertise to the development of this strategy. Their insights have helped shape a practical and enduring direction for biodiversity in the Waikato region.

Achieving the strategy's vision will require ongoing collaboration, shared leadership and coordinated investment, recognising that no single organisation can deliver the outcomes alone. We are committed to turning this strategy into action through a collaborative implementation planning process supported by a regional implementation group. By bringing together the strengths, knowledge and resources of many organisations and communities, we can make meaningful progress towards our shared vision for biodiversity in the Waikato region.

Warren Maher

Chairman: Waikato Regional Council

¹ [Waikato Biodiversity Accord](#) | [Waikato Regional Council](#)

Strategy on a Page | He Whakarāpopototanga rautaki

Vision <i>Te mauri o te taiao, he taiao mauri ora</i> Biodiversity in the Waikato region: thriving, connected, resilient	
Outcome 1	Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai (mountains to the sea)
Outcome 2	Populations of indigenous/taonga species, their habitats and ecological connections are resilient and increasing
Outcome 3	Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion the Waikato region's biodiversity
Outcome 4	Tangata whenua exercise rangatiratanga as kaitiaki, applying mātauranga Māori to protect, sustain and enhance indigenous biodiversity
Outcome 5	People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region
Pou	Strategic Focus Areas
Pou 1 Protecting and restoring what matters <i>Protecting and restoring native species, habitats and the ecological functioning of ecosystems by addressing climate, biosecurity and other threats while preserving the values that connect people to the environment.</i>	1. Prioritise restoration of the region's most threatened, rare and vulnerable ecosystems while maintaining and enhancing biodiversity across the landscape 2. Reconnect ecosystems through ecological corridors, linkages and buffers – ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea) 3. Protect and restore wetlands, peatlands, floodplains, riparian margins and coastal systems as frontline nature-based solutions for climate and ecosystem resilience 4. Support species recovery and ecosystem restoration through invasive species management
Pou 2 Empowering landowners and communities <i>Supporting landowners and local communities with the knowledge, skills, resources and connections they need to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity.</i>	5. Maintain and strengthen regional biodiversity support networks for community groups, landowners and local iwi/hapū 6. Facilitate long-term investment and incentives for biodiversity restoration and management 7. Grow public awareness, participation and understanding about biodiversity across the region 8. Build the skills, knowledge and support for locally led action
Pou 3 Partnering with tangata whenua <i>Working alongside tangata whenua to embed mātauranga Māori in biodiversity management, while upholding the principles of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi.</i>	9. Integrate iwi, hapū and whānau aspirations, place-based knowledge and mātauranga Māori into biodiversity planning and delivery 10. Strengthen education and investment pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau-led biodiversity action 11. Embed mātauranga Māori into environmental monitoring and reporting processes 12. Implement collaborative partnership models/projects for ecosystem restoration throughout the Waikato region 13. Restore culturally significant biodiversity sites to enhance continued customary practices
Pou 4 Strengthening data, policy, and investment <i>Building the data, information, policy and investment needed to prioritise the right places for biodiversity restoration, measure progress and support restoration across the Waikato region.</i>	14. Improve alignment and coordination of biodiversity policy across councils and central government 15. Develop and maintain a regional biodiversity mapping and spatial planning framework 16. Prevent further biodiversity loss while supporting measurable biodiversity recovery and gain 17. Develop and implement targeted incentives to reverse ongoing ecosystem degradation and drive biodiversity gains 18. Build shared understanding and improve biodiversity knowledge through targeted research, consistent biodiversity monitoring and clear accessible reporting

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Executive Summary | He kōrero whakataki

The Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy provides a shared long-term direction for protecting, restoring and enhancing indigenous biodiversity, bringing together tangata whenua, communities, landowners and agencies to halt biodiversity decline, recover ecosystems and species, and support a resilient and prosperous future.

The Waikato is home to a remarkable range of forests, wetlands, rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastlines and marine environments. These natural areas support indigenous species, sustain cultural values and provide many of the services people rely on every day, including clean water, fertile soils, flood protection and climate resilience. However, biodiversity continues to decline as a result of habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and climate change.

Through Phase 1 engagement, participants consistently called for stronger collaboration, practical support for communities and landowners, better biodiversity information, clearer priorities, stronger partnerships with tangata whenua, sustainable funding and a greater focus on implementation. These themes have directly shaped the outcomes, pou and strategic focus areas presented in this strategy.

This strategy sets a shared vision for biodiversity to be **thriving, connected and resilient**. It focuses on five outcomes: healthier and better-connected ecosystems; resilient and increasing indigenous species populations; communities actively involved in protecting and restoring nature; tangata whenua exercising rangatiratanga as kaitiaki; and biodiversity being recognised as essential to wellbeing, resilience and prosperity. The strategy promotes a *ki uta ki tai* (mountains to sea) approach, recognising that biodiversity is connected across land, freshwater, coastal and marine environments.

The strategy is organised around four pou: focusing action to maintain and enhance biodiversity, empowering landowners and communities, partnering with tangata whenua, and strengthening data, policy and investment. Together, these provide a coordinated framework for action, with a focus on ecosystem restoration, species recovery, ecological connectivity, invasive species management, community stewardship, biodiversity investment and better information to support decision-making.

Implementation will occur through a collaborative implementation plan developed after the strategy is adopted. Progress will be monitored, reported and reviewed over time to ensure actions remain effective and responsive to new information and changing circumstances. By building on the work already underway and improving coordination across the biodiversity system, the strategy aims to leave future generations with a richer, healthier and more resilient natural environment.

1 Setting the scene | Te whakarite kaupapa

1.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

1.2 What is biodiversity and why is it important?

In this strategy, **“biodiversity” means indigenous biodiversity** - the native plants, animals, fungi and other living organisms that occur naturally in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the ecosystems, habitats and ecological processes that support them. It includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems, consistent with the Resource Management Act 1991² (RMA) and the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023³ (NPS-IB).

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

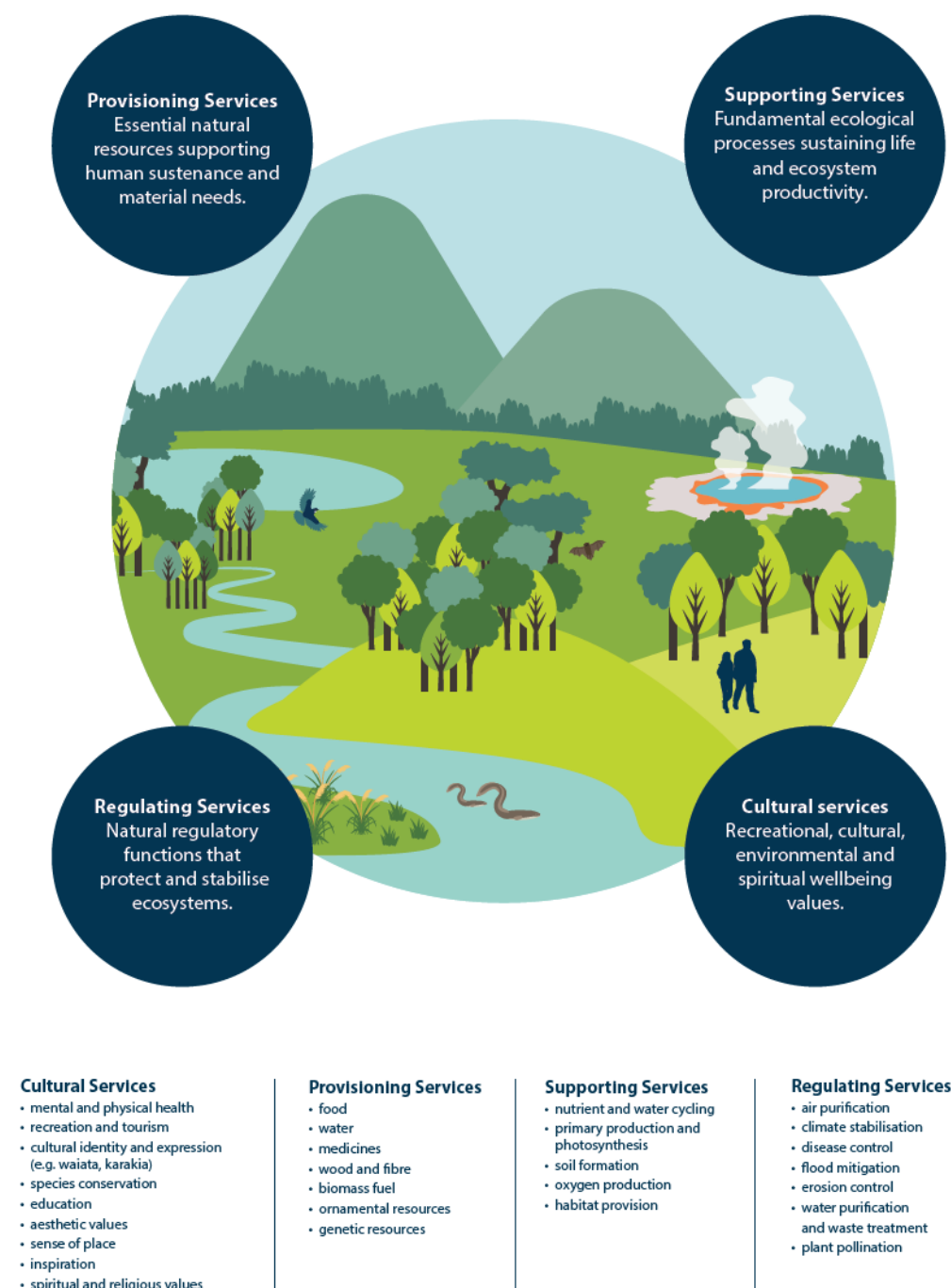
Healthy biodiversity underpins the natural systems that support our daily lives. It helps to keep water clean, form soil, recycle nutrients, store carbon, and buffer the impacts of floods, erosion, storms and droughts. Diverse, functioning ecosystems are also more resilient to climate change, pests,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

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

² Resource Management Act 1991 No 69 (as at 17 December 2025)

³ National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 | Ministry for the Environment

Figure 1 Ecosystem services (adapted from Hauraki District Council Biodiversity Strategy, March 2025⁴)



⁴ [Biodiversity Strategy - Hauraki District Council](#)

1.3 Biodiversity in the Waikato region

The Waikato region is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most ecologically varied regions, spanning alpine areas, geothermal fields, extensive river systems, wetlands and lakes, conifer-broadleaved forests, dunes, estuaries and coastal habitats⁵. These diverse landscapes support many endemic species and ecosystem types found nowhere else in the country⁶.

Freshwater systems are a defining feature, with more than 16,000 km of rivers and streams and approximately 200 lakes^{7,8,9}. These waterways support migratory native fish such as tuna (eel) and whitebait (īnanga and kōkopu), diverse invertebrates, aquatic plants and nationally important waterbirds.

The coastline extends approximately 1,150 km across the exposed west coast, the Firth of Thames/Tikapa Moana and the Coromandel Peninsula. The Firth of Thames is internationally recognised for its importance to aquaculture and migratory shorebirds¹⁰. Coastal waters support fish and shellfish; rocky reefs host rich marine habitat with macroalgae forests, horse mussel beds, sea grass meadows, tubeworm beds, sponge gardens, anemones, sea pens and corals¹¹. Near Port Waikato, the critically threatened Māui still occurs¹².

Despite significant land modification, over 7,500 native forest fragments under 25 hectares remain, including kahikatea stands that support high beetle diversity and offer refuge in the pastoral landscape. Moehau and the Coromandel Peninsula host distinctive fauna such as the Coromandel striped gecko, Moehau stag beetle, brown kiwi and Archey's frog, and native birds like the North Island robin/toutouwai, kākā and kererū¹³.

The region also contains 70 percent of New Zealand's geothermal ecosystems, home to globally unique plants, animals, and micro-organisms. Peatlands are another defining feature - Kopuatai Peat Dome, the country's largest intact restiad bog, is internationally significant for its unique vegetation and carbon storage capacity. The internationally recognised Whangamarino Wetland supports threatened species including the swamp helmet orchid, the giant wire rush with its native moth, "Fred the thread" and the Australasian bittern (the latter two species also occur at Kopuatai). Karst landscapes extend from Port Waikato to Mōkau, including glow worm caves, Awaroa koromiko (*Hebe scopulorum*), cave spleenwort (*Asplenium cimmeriorum*), eyeless cave beetles and cave wētā^{14,15}. Urban areas also host important biodiversity - at least 31 threatened and at-risk species have been recorded within Hamilton City¹⁶ including a rare urban population of pekapeka-tou-ra, native long-tailed bats. Coastal towns, such as Whaingaroa/Raglan, include numerous significant biodiversity areas intertwined with residential properties¹⁷.

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

⁵ The Waikato region extends to 12 nautical miles offshore.

⁶ [Ecosystems of the Waikato region - Indigenous and exotic, terrestrial and wetland PS202601.pdf](#)

⁷ [Waikato region shallow lakes management plan Volume 1 TR201458.pdf](#)

⁸ [Waikato region shallow lakes management plan: Volume 2 | Waikato Regional Council](#)

⁹ [Experts highlight challenges and priorities for restoring Waikato lakes : University of Waikato](#)

¹⁰ [DOC & Ramsar Convention Secretariat \(2004\) OLDDM-289132 - Ramsar RIS Firth of Thames](#)

¹¹ [Biodiversity data extraction for the Waikato area of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park TR202508.](#)

¹² [Marine and Estuarine - Waikato Biodiversity Forum](#)

¹³ [Consulting on the protection of native species in Moehau](#)

¹⁴ [Karst \(Limestone\) - Waikato Biodiversity Forum](#)

¹⁵ [Mapping Significant Natural Areas of the Waikato region: the physical basis for the identification of karst ecosystem sites \(updated methodology report\) | Waikato Regional Council](#)

¹⁶ [Hamilton City Council \(2022\) Proposed Plan Change 9: Appendix-12-Significant-Natural-Areas.pdf](#)

¹⁷ [van der Zwan, W. & Kessels, G. \(2017\) Significant Natural Areas of the Waikato District TR201736.pdf](#)

1.4 Pressures and their impacts on biodiversity in the Waikato region

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

Freshwater ecosystems face significant pressure. Intensified land use has increased sediment, nutrients and other contaminants entering into rivers, lakes and estuaries¹⁸. Nearly half of monitored river sites now fall below national sediment standards¹⁹. Native fish such as tuna and whitebait are declining due to poor water quality, habitat loss and barriers that block their migration.

Estuaries, as receiving environments, are especially vulnerable. Sediment build-up, nutrient enrichment and low oxygen conditions are degrading habitats including seagrass beds, shellfish reefs and sponge gardens. Around 2000km² – about one fifth of the Waikato coastal marine area – is disturbed each year by bottom contact fishing²⁰.

Habitat loss on land remains a major driver of decline. Only 27% of the region retains native vegetation, and around 75% of peat wetlands have been drained. These long-term pressures contribute to more than 300 native species now threatened or at risk of extinction²¹.

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

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

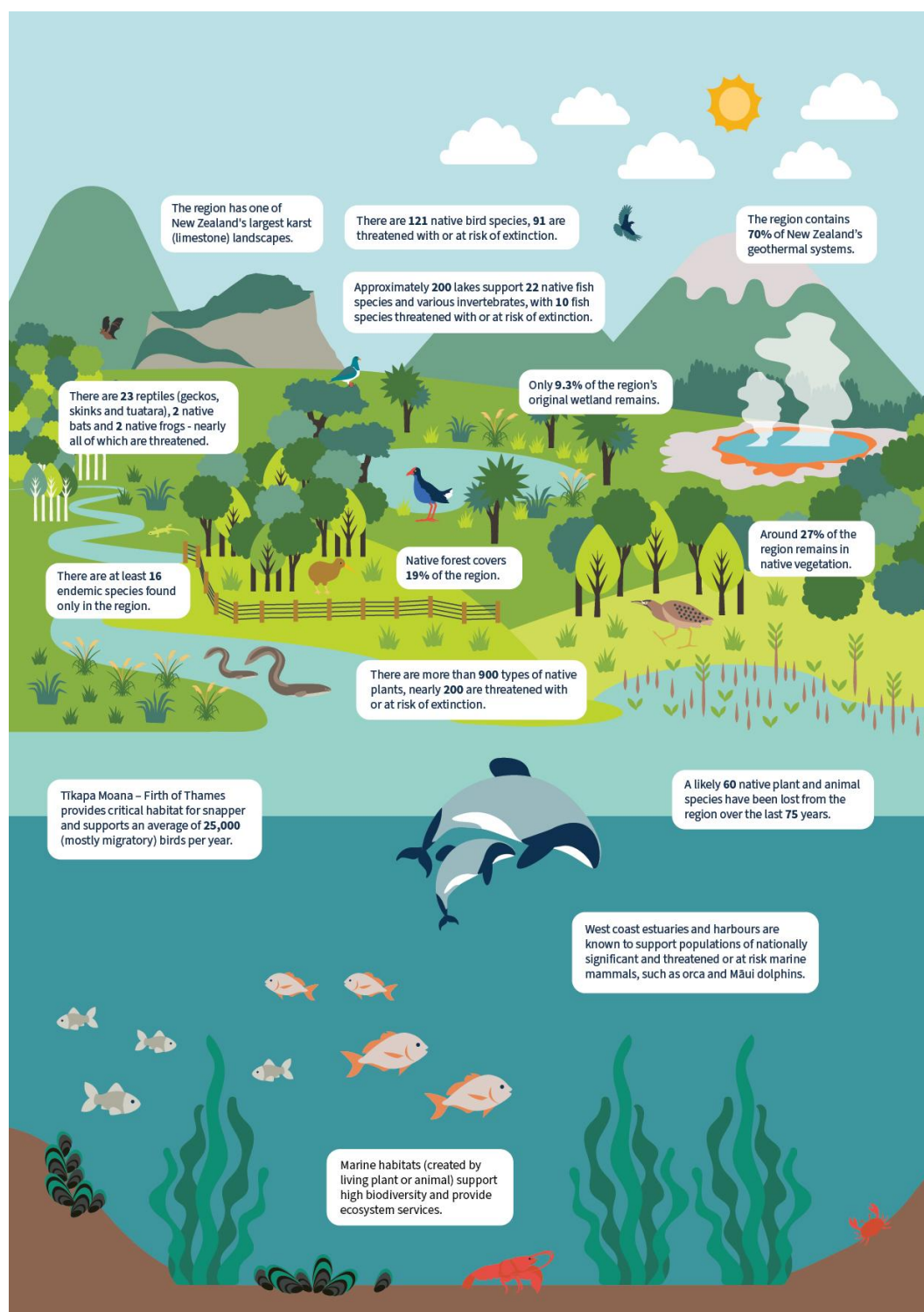
Together, habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution and water quality degradation, invasive species and climate change all have a compounding effect. Despite these challenges, halting and reversing biodiversity decline is possible, but only with greater and more coordinated action.

¹⁸ [Te oranga o te taiao | Waikato State of the Environment 2022](#)

¹⁹ [State of the environment monitoring river water quality](#)

²⁰ [Impacts of seabed disturbance in the Waikato region TR202304](#)

²¹ [Nationally threatened and regionally uncommon species of the Waikato region TR201928.pdf](#)

Figure 2 **Biodiversity in the Waikato region**

1.5 The current biodiversity management system

Indigenous biodiversity spans land, air, freshwater, coastal and marine boundaries, crossing the jurisdictions of local, regional and national agencies. It is guided by a wider framework of obligations including the RMA, NPS-IB and also Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2050²². For the region, the Waikato Regional Policy Statement 2016 (WRPS)²³ provides overarching policy direction, alongside iwi environmental management plans²⁴ and Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato (Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River) ²⁵, the Te Tiriti-based frameworks for restoring the Waikato River.

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

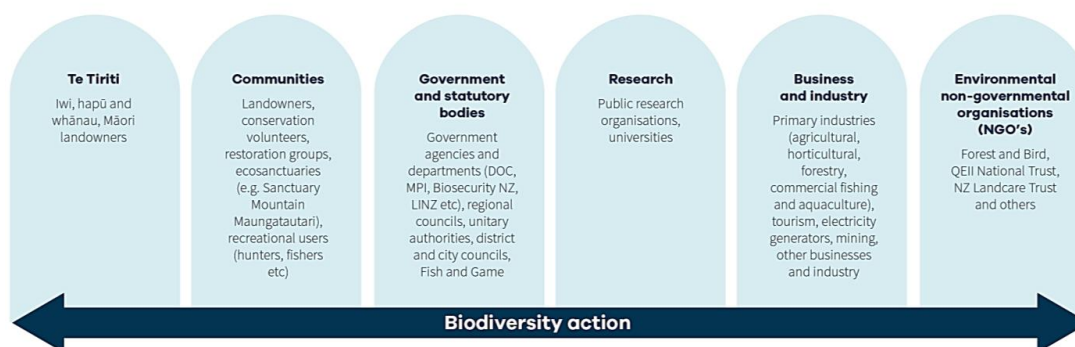
The region's 11 territorial authorities have key roles through district plans and local biodiversity strategies, such as Hamilton City Council's *Nature in the City Strategy*²⁵, Hauraki District Council's biodiversity strategy⁴ and Waikato District Council's *Taiao in the Waikato strategy*²⁶.

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

Private landowners, businesses and industry groups play a crucial role through controlling invasive species, native planting, fencing waterways and investing in restoration. Community groups, trusts and catchment collectives also deliver significant on-the-ground work/mahi alongside mana whenua and councils - much of it on private land where many threatened ecosystems remain²⁸.

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

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



²² [Te Mana o te Taiao - Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020](#)

²³ [Waikato Regional Policy Statement 2016 | Waikato Regional Council](#)

²⁴ [Iwi management plans | Waikato Regional Council](#)

²⁵ [HCC-Nature-in-the-City-Strategy-2020 December-2020.pdf](#)

²⁶ [Taiao-\(nature\)-in-the-waikato-strategy-document.pdf](#)

²⁷ [Convention on Biological Diversity: DOC's international role](#)

²⁸ [New Zealand's latest National Report under the Convention on Biological Diversity](#)

1.6 Why do we need a regional biodiversity strategy?

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

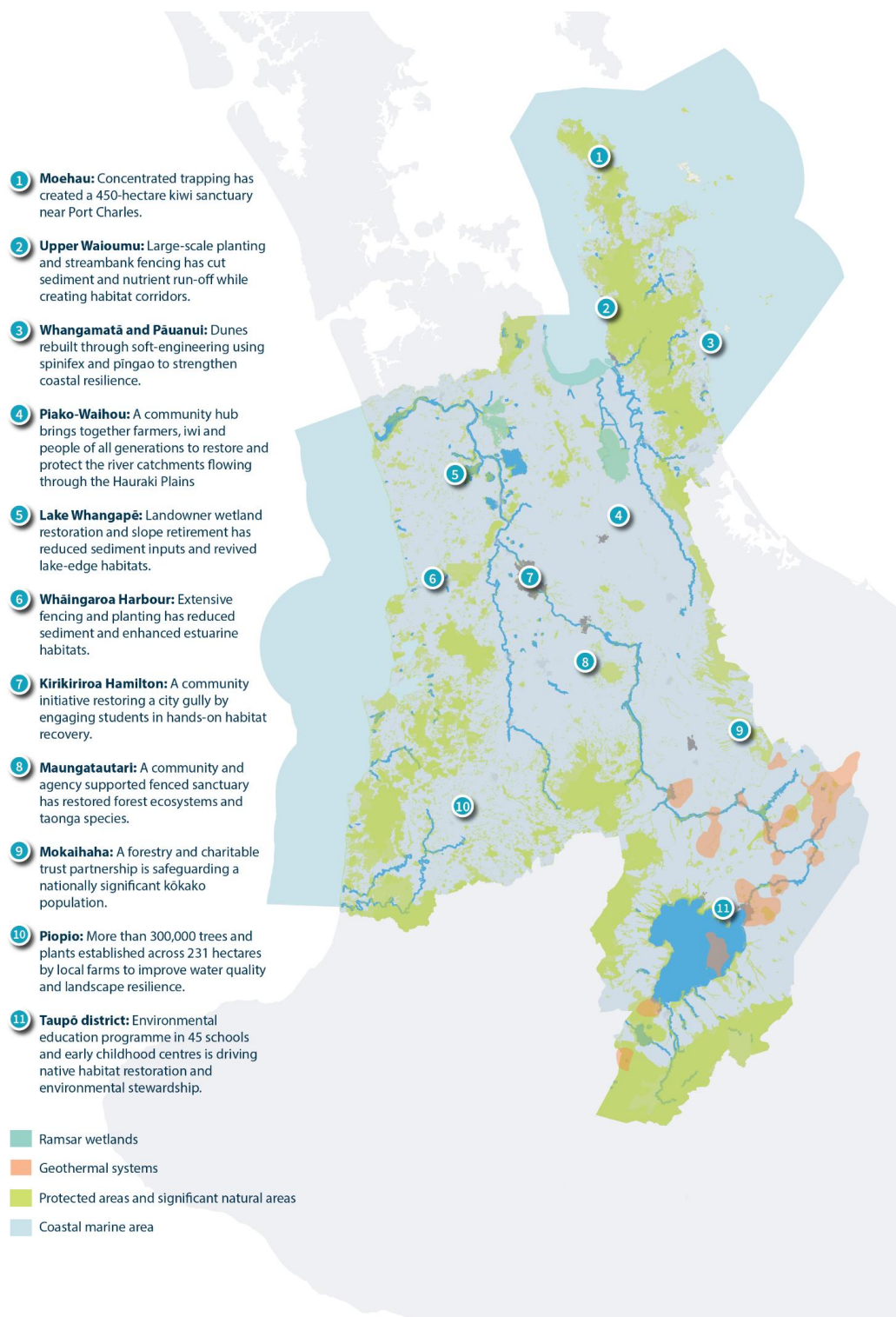
The strategy is intentionally high-level. It sets a vision, outcomes and strategic focus areas under four pou (themes), while detailed actions, methods, milestones and resourcing (as set out in Appendix 5 of the NPS-IB) will be developed through a companion implementation plan.

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

The resource management system is undergoing significant reform with the replacement of the RMA, which is expected to reshape the statutory framework for environmental protection, biodiversity management and spatial planning. The strategy will need to remain flexible and responsive to these changes, while providing enduring regional direction for biodiversity outcomes²⁹.

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

²⁹ [New Planning System: Protecting the environment](#) | Ministry for the Environment

Figure 4 Restoring biodiversity in the Waikato Region – project examples

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

Through engagement on the regional biodiversity strategy, participants consistently highlighted the following priorities:

- stronger collaboration and coordination;
- practical support for communities and landowners;
- stronger partnerships with tangata whenua;
- sustainable funding and investment;
- better information, monitoring and reporting;
- action that protects what remains while restoring what has been lost.

These themes have directly informed the development of the vision, outcomes and strategic focus areas.

2.1 Vision

Te mauri o te taiao, he taiao mauri ora

Biodiversity in the Waikato region: thriving, connected, resilient

2.2 Guiding Principles

How we'll work

The Waikato Biodiversity Accord¹ provided a foundation for the development of this strategy. The Accord is a regional agreement that brings together organisations with the common goal of creating and putting the strategy into action.

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

2.3 Outcomes

What we are aiming to achieve by 2050 or earlier

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

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

The last outcome highlights that the Waikato region's long term economic wellbeing and resilience rely on healthy ecosystems that support regional prosperity and economic productivity.

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

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

INTENT: *By 2050, indigenous ecosystems across the Waikato region are healthier, larger and better connected, from the mountains to the sea. While maintaining and protecting the region's existing biodiversity, restoration efforts are focused on rare, threatened and highly depleted ecosystem types (including examples such as wetlands and dunes) where investment can deliver the greatest ecological gains. Together, these efforts will support a network of resilient, self-sustaining ecosystems that support biodiversity, maintain genetic diversity and are able to better adapt to changing environmental conditions. Progress is measured and regularly reported through agreed ecological indicators against established baseline information on ecosystem extent, condition and connectivity.*

Outcome 2 Populations of indigenous/taonga species, their habitats and ecological connections are resilient and increasing

INTENT: *By 2050, indigenous and taonga species are increasing in abundance and distribution across the region. No further local extinctions occur, and the threat status of indigenous species is improving. Secure habitats, ecological corridors and restored migration pathways support resilient populations with improving long-term viability. Progress is tracked through measurable indicators of species status and habitat condition.*

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

INTENT: *By 2050, people, landowners, tangata whenua and the community are informed, supported and motivated to be active stewards of indigenous biodiversity. Caring for nature is a visible and valued part of everyday life, community identity and decision-making, with people actively contributing to the protection, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity across the Waikato region.*

Outcome 4 Tangata whenua exercise rangatiratanga as kaitiaki, applying mātauranga Māori to protect, sustain and enhance indigenous biodiversity through enduring partnerships.

INTENT: *By 2050, tangata whenua exercise rangatiratanga as kaitiaki, working in partnership with communities, landowners, agencies and scientists, and applying mātauranga Māori alongside other knowledge systems. The mauri of culturally significant sites, taonga species and mahinga kai areas are strengthened and measurable recovery is evident. Success is demonstrated through jointly developed cultural and ecological indicators, reflecting shared responsibility, stewardship and partnership.*

Outcome 5 People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region

INTENT: *By 2050, people and nature prosper together because biodiversity and ecosystem health are improving alongside economic prosperity and community wellbeing. Thriving ecosystems support productive soils and landscapes, resilient communities and sustainable land and water use. Biodiversity and ecosystem function are recognised as essential natural infrastructure – strengthening productivity, resilience and wellbeing across the Waikato region.*

2.4 Strategic Focus Areas

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

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

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

Pou 1 Protecting and restoring what matters

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

Strategic Focus Areas

1	Prioritise restoration of the region's most threatened, rare and vulnerable ecosystems while maintaining and enhancing biodiversity across the landscape
What this means: Focus priority investment first on ecosystems at greatest risk - such as lowland forests, wetlands/peatlands, dunes and other under-represented habitat types, where action can deliver the greatest biodiversity gains. This prioritisation recognises that resources are finite; however, ongoing maintenance and enhancement of existing biodiversity across the wider landscape remains essential to prevent further decline and support long-term biodiversity outcomes.	
Why this is a priority: • These ecosystems hold exceptional biodiversity and other values but are heavily depleted, fragmented or close to ecological tipping points. • Actively managing the most threatened areas can deliver significant biodiversity gains by addressing key threats and improving ecological condition . • Prioritisation helps to ensure representation of all ecosystem types and aligns local action with DOC's national ecosystem-based management approach. • Protecting the rarest ecosystems strengthens the region's overall ecological resilience and supports the recovery of species dependent on them (especially threatened species). • This approach also complements efforts to maintain and enhance biodiversity across the wider landscape, recognising that biodiversity gains can be achieved through both targeted investment, locally led and landowner-led protection and restoration initiatives.	
2	Reconnect ecosystems through ecological corridors, linkages and buffers – ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea)
What this means: Identify, protect and enhance ecological connectivity across terrestrial, freshwater, coastal/marine, urban and aerial environments to reduce habitat fragmentation and support species movement from mountains to sea. This includes buffering existing habitats, creating habitat "stepping stones" along catchment riparian zones and incorporating these areas into the spatial planning and into related plans and consenting decisions (Figure 5).	
Why this is a priority: • Habitat fragmentation (e.g. clearing a continuous indigenous vegetation sequence into two or more fragments, or losing freshwater passage for species through culverts or dams) is a major barrier to species movement and ecosystem resilience. • Enhancing, buffering and linking habitats can deliver significant and measurable biodiversity gains within relatively short timeframes compared with many other restoration interventions. • Functional connectivity enables species to move, migrate and shift ranges as conditions change, improving resilience to climate change and disturbance. • Improved connectivity in upper catchments directly benefits downstream ecosystems and coastal receiving environments.	

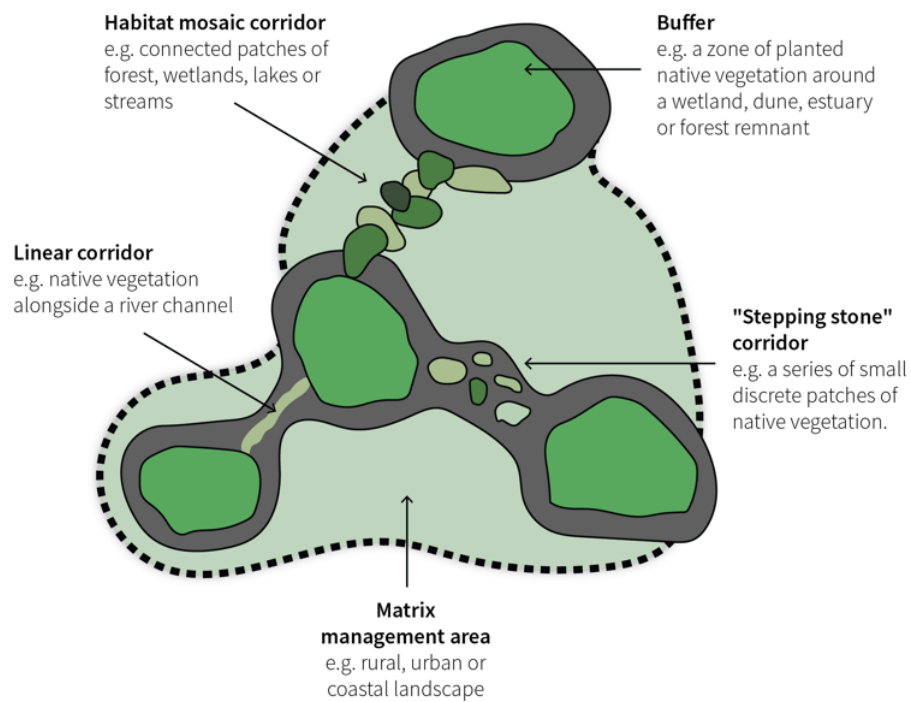
3	Protect and restore wetlands, peatlands, floodplains, riparian margins and coastal systems as frontline nature-based solutions for climate and ecosystem resilience
What this means: Prioritise the protection, restoration, and re-establishment of natural flood- and climate-buffering systems across the region: wetlands, floodplains, riparian margins, steep upper catchments and hillsides, coastal dunes and estuaries. Efforts can be focused in high-risk areas such as the lower Waikato, Hauraki Plains and Coromandel. Methods such as re-wetting peatlands, expanding riparian buffers, restoring dunes and estuarine margins, and creating “room for the river” to improve natural water storage, sediment retention and coastal resilience.	
Why this is a priority: • The Waikato region has lost over 90% of its wetlands, removing natural flood storage and increasing sedimentation and carbon emissions. • Nature-based solutions³⁰ reduce flood peaks, buffer drought, slow runoff protect against coastal inundation, and promote ecosystem health³¹ - particularly in vulnerable areas like eastern Coromandel and the Firth of Thames which are increasingly exposed to sea level rise, storm surge and marine heatwaves. • These interventions also directly support regional flood protection objectives and can reduce long term reliance on engineered solutions. • High quality nature-based solutions can be cost-effective, deliver co-benefits of biodiversity habitat and cultural values, and are endorsed in national adaptation plans and climate change policies.	
4	Support species recovery and ecosystem restoration through invasive species management
What this means: Coordinate WRC, DOC, iwi, territorial authorities and community groups to deliver region-wide programmes that manage invasive species with measurable targets. This includes terrestrial invasive species (e.g. goats, deer, pigs, possums, feral/stray cats, mustelids and rats), freshwater invasive species, environmental weeds and marine biosecurity threats. Align control methods, timing and monitoring across land tenures, improve pathway management (e.g. vessels and equipment) and incorporate new technologies (e.g. remote sensing, AI-assisted monitoring) to increase efficiency. Use both result and outcome monitoring to track biodiversity gains and guide decisions. This strategic focus area will be delivered in alignment with the Waikato Biosecurity Strategy, the Regional Pest Management Plan, Predator Free 2050 initiatives and other agency programmes, ensuring biodiversity priorities directly inform invasive species management and investment decisions.	
Why this is a priority: • Stakeholders identified coordinated management of invasive species with measurable targets as the most cost-effective way to restore biodiversity at scale and reduce reinvasion. • A warming climate is expanding the range and spread of invasive species on land, in freshwater and at sea - increasing pressures on forests, wetlands, coastal ecosystems and other vulnerable biodiversity areas. • Preventing the introduction and spread of new invasive species is typically more cost-effective than controlling established populations.	

³⁰ [Nature-based solutions for climate adaptation - Roadmap for scaling use in Aotearoa New Zealand \(December 2024\)](#)

³¹ [Nature-based solutions for flood management - Literature review. NIWA Client report June 2024](#)

- Joined-up delivery, pathway management and innovative tools improve efficiency, reduce duplication, limit reinvasion risk and deliver better biodiversity outcomes in priority catchments and coastal waters.

Figure 5 **Diagram of a terrestrial ecological network, with “stepping stones” and linear landscape corridors linking core areas**



Pou 2 Empowering landowners and communities

Supporting landowners and local communities with the knowledge, skills, resources and connections they need to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity.

Strategic Focus Areas

5	Maintain and strengthen regional biodiversity support networks for community groups, landowners and local iwi/hapū
What this means:	
Scale up a coordinated support structure linking local hubs, iwi, community groups, landowners, coastal communities, councils and agencies to improve collaboration. This includes cutting duplication and making work visible—including cross-district and catchment to coast partnerships.	
Why this is a priority:	
• Biodiversity restoration across the Waikato region relies on both agency-led programmes (including DoC and regional councils) and the efforts of communities, landowners, environmental groups and iwi. Continued recognition, collaboration and practical support are needed to maximise their collective impact. • Many community groups and volunteer networks operate in isolation and are stretched for resources, missing opportunities to work together. • Volunteer fatigue and organisational vulnerability threaten long term biodiversity outcomes if not supported by stable partnerships, technical assistance and sustained funding. • Community feedback has emphasised the need for better connection and collaboration to maximise collective impact. • Regional coordination helps funding go further. By purchasing equipment in bulk, sharing resources and providing consistent reporting and accountability, hubs improve value for money and give funders confidence that investment is producing measurable outcomes.	
6	Facilitate long-term investment and incentives for biodiversity restoration and management
What this means:	
Create a coordinated regional funding framework that makes it easier for iwi/hapū, landowners, community groups and local hubs to access sustained, longer-term support for biodiversity restoration. This includes exploring new and innovative funding tools such as philanthropic partnerships and biodiversity credits and aligning funding decisions with regional biodiversity priorities.	
Why this is a priority:	
• Many groups face short-term, uncertain funding and high competition for grants. • The government's Jobs for Nature programme demonstrated that consistent, long-term investment unlocks action at scale, builds capacity and strengthens partnerships. • The regional community wants coordinated, fair (transparent) and accessible funding, reduced administrative burden, and new funding tools such as private sector partnerships to broaden investment opportunities and reduce pressure on rates. • Local communities often know their landscapes best and should also be supported through practical assistance and technical advice.	

7	Grow public awareness, participation and understanding about biodiversity across the region
What this means: Deliver a region-wide, co-designed education and communications programme that celebrates local success, promotes pride in biodiversity restoration, uses engaging visual tools and clearly shows people how they can get involved. Tailored resources will support communities and groups such as schools, landowners and industry partners.	
Why this is a priority: • Success stories and progress are not widely shared. • Low awareness of biodiversity's value remains a major barrier. • Communities want accessible maps, inspiring case studies and plain language content. • People need clear information about roles, responsibilities and where to find support.	
8	Build the skills, knowledge and support for locally led action
What this means: Develop a regionwide programme that strengthens local leadership, skills and practical capability by providing training, tools and support for community leaders, landowners, community nurseries and pest control contractors. This includes working with education providers to also grow a strong pipeline of skilled graduates - ensuring the region has the ecological, technical and cultural expertise needed for long-term restoration and kaitiaki roles.	
Why this is a priority: • Communities are ready to lead but need support and clear pathways to act. • Limited volunteer and governance capacity is holding back restoration. • Strong demand exists for skills in nursery management, invasive species control and restoration methods. • Shared training and monitoring improve data quality and supports better decisions. • Long-term workforce development - including tertiary training - will ensure appropriately skilled and experienced people continue to enter the field.	

Pou 3 Partnering with tangata whenua

Working alongside tangata whenua to embed mātauranga Māori in biodiversity management, while upholding the principles of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Strategic Focus Areas

9	Integrate iwi, hapū and whānau aspirations, placed based knowledge, and mātauranga Māori into biodiversity planning and delivery.
What this means: Integrate iwi environmental management plans (IEMPs), Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements, mātauranga Māori, and relevant legislation (including Te Ture Whaimana) across all pou and priority areas, and support community groups to build effective relationships with iwi and hapū.	
Why this is a priority: • IEMPs set clear biodiversity aspirations that should guide strategy implementation. • Mātauranga Māori and western science both inform effective, culturally grounded outcomes. • Current legislation and resource management reform require alignment with iwi-specific legislation, partnerships with Māori and better integration of Māori values in planning. • Embedding iwi perspectives strengthens trust, legitimacy and Te Tiriti-aligned relationships.	
10	Strengthen investment and education pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau-led biodiversity action
What this means: Establish tailored incentives to enable Māori-led restoration projects, monitoring and governance on Māori land, aligned with Te Tiriti and settlement arrangements and coordinated through the implementation plan. Funding should recognise that there are different starting points, influences that may be associated with land tenure and capacity amongst iwi and hapū.	
Why this is a priority: • In the Waikato region, 44% of Māori freehold land contains indigenous vegetation, offering significant biodiversity restoration opportunities while respecting landowner aspirations. • Many iwi face funding and capacity constraints that limit long-term, Māori-led action on their whenua. • Feedback highlighted the need for practical incentives specifically for Māori land. • Sustained, Māori-led biodiversity restoration needs long-term, multi-partner funding.	
11	Embed mātauranga Māori into environmental monitoring and reporting processes
What this means: Work with mana whenua to deliver Māori-led monitoring that integrates mātauranga Māori, tracks taonga species and ecosystem health, builds guardian/kaitiaki capability, and follows agreed iwi and hapū data stewardship protocols.	
Why this is a priority: • Iwi seek to monitor taonga species so that their values and priorities shape decisions. • Mana whenua often detect environmental changes early through close connection with whenua and wai. • Cultural indicators are largely absent from current biodiversity monitoring. • Youth/rangatahi training and joint monitoring strengthen kaitiakitanga and trust between partners.	

12	Implement collaborative partnership models/projects for ecosystem restoration throughout the Waikato region.
What this means: Develop partnership agreements between agencies, community organisations and iwi and hapū to support restoration on Māori land, balancing biodiversity protection with landowner aspirations and recognising existing joint decision-making arrangements.	
Why this is a priority: • Many iwi seek to progress biodiversity restoration in line with settlement commitments and cultural values but require practical support. • Managing significant natural areas (SNAs) on Māori land is sensitive and benefits from partnership approaches. • Tangata whenua have called for genuine, respectful collaboration that upholds cultural practices. • Co-designed biodiversity restoration programmes enable shared planning, decisions and resource use.	

13	Restore culturally significant biodiversity sites to enhance continued customary practices
What this means: Work with iwi and hapū to protect and restore the biodiversity of culturally significant sites and their taonga species, and revitalise practices such as food/kai-gathering, traditional healing/rongoā harvesting, prohibition/rāhui and lunar calendar/maramataka-based management.	
Why this is a priority: • Restoring taonga species supports both ecological resilience and cultural wellbeing, enabling traditional kai to return to marae tables. • Customary practices align care for the environment with natural cycles and support climate resilience and allow ecosystems to recover. • Protecting culturally significant places uplifts authority/mana and deepens Māori identity and connection to place.	

Pou 4 Strengthening data, policy, and investment

Building the data, information, policy and investment needed to prioritise the right places for biodiversity restoration, measure progress and support restoration across the Waikato region.

Strategic Focus Areas

14	Improve alignment and coordination of biodiversity policy across councils and central government
What this means: Work with territorial authorities and DOC to clarify roles and align biodiversity strategies, plans and policy approaches across the region. Support clear and consistent biodiversity protections, ecosystem health outcomes and restoration priorities through future planning and policy frameworks.	
Why this is a priority: • Fragmented policies and differing council approaches to biodiversity management create confusion and reduce effectiveness. • Local biodiversity strategies need regional backing to deliver district-scale action. • Integrating biodiversity actions with climate, catchment and biosecurity planning enables more joined-up, place-based solutions that support healthier and more resilient ecosystems. • Fit-for-purpose and regionally consistent plans and policies are important tools to help avoid ongoing biodiversity decline, providing greater certainty for communities, landowners and decision-makers.	
15	Develop and maintain a regional biodiversity mapping and spatial planning framework
What this means: Ensure that regional spatial planning identifies and protects ecological corridors, climate refugia, indigenous biodiversity strongholds and key land-freshwater-coastal linkages and reflects these in zoning and land use controls. The objective becomes protecting ecological function across landscapes, not just individual sites.	
Why this is a priority: • Regional spatial planning provides a unique opportunity to integrate land use, infrastructure, and environmental outcomes in a single strategic framework, enabling biodiversity priorities to be identified and reflected in future planning and investment decisions. • A spatial stocktake focuses effort on high impact places (e.g. corridors, refugia) rather than spreading resources too thinly. • A corridor-based, landscape approach supports connectivity and resilience across terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems. • Quantitative targets help focus restoration effort and guide long-term biodiversity management. They can be developed through local indigenous biodiversity strategies, and embedded into regional spatial planning.	

16	Prevent further biodiversity loss while supporting measurable biodiversity recovery and gain
What this means: Protect indigenous biodiversity from further decline by developing policy that supports actions to maintain and enhance ecosystem extent, condition, connectivity and species populations across the region. This includes recognising the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity as a minimum (as captured in the Waikato Regional Policy Statement and the NPS-IB), while pursuing longer-term restoration, species recovery and biodiversity gains through coordinated action, stewardship and investment.	
Why this is a priority: • Biodiversity across the Waikato region has experienced significant historical loss and continues to face pressure from habitat fragmentation, invasive species, land-use change and climate change. • Preventing further loss is an essential foundation for biodiversity recovery, but maintaining the status quo alone will not reverse past declines. • Long-term biodiversity gains will require restoration, enhancement and sustained investment alongside measures that avoid further degradation. • A clear distinction between avoiding loss and achieving recovery helps provide direction without pre-empting future statutory policy, regulatory or planning approaches.	
17	Develop and implement targeted incentives to reverse ongoing ecosystem degradation and drive biodiversity gains
What this means: Practical, tailored incentives will encourage restoration and help address long-standing pressures on ecosystems (such as historical land use change, pests and habitat loss), and support landowners and communities who want to enhance biodiversity alongside productive uses. Tools may include biodiversity credits, covenant support, transferable development rights, streamlined consenting for restoration, technical support, private investment, philanthropic partnerships and recognition programmes for committed land stewards.	
Why this is a priority: • Achieving biodiversity recovery at the scale required will depend on attracting and coordinating investment from public, private, philanthropic and community sources. • Many priority biodiversity areas are on private or Māori land and need practical support. • Many biodiversity areas need restoration and protection to secure their long-term sustainability. • Incentives lower cost barriers, support voluntary action and encourage landowners to go beyond compliance. • Tailored support helps address the specific challenges of Māori land. • Rewarding active enhancement builds long-term stewardship and ecological resilience.	

18	Build shared understanding and improve biodiversity knowledge through targeted research, consistent biodiversity monitoring and clear, accessible reporting
What this means: Promote consistent monitoring methods and shared indicators (including mātauranga Māori and cultural measures) to track biodiversity across ecosystems and land tenures. Establish and maintain baseline information to help measure change over time. Provide clear, accessible reporting tools such as maps, dashboards and visual summaries so that people easily understand where biodiversity is located, how it is changing, and where action will have the greatest impact.	
Why this is a priority: • Reliable baseline information and regular reporting are needed to demonstrate whether biodiversity outcomes are improving over time. • Patchy and inconsistent monitoring limits our ability to assess trends or understand regional change; scaling it up will give a clearer picture of ecosystem health and restoration effectiveness. • People want simple, reliable information to guide action and avoid duplication. • Cultural and social indicators ensure tangata whenua values and community perspectives inform biodiversity decisions. • Clear, visible reporting supports transparency, collaboration and more effective, evidence-based decisions.	

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

3.1 Implementation

Indigenous biodiversity in the Waikato region is in decline, and delay will lock in higher costs, greater risk, and fewer future choices. This strategy sets a regional direction towards stopping further biodiversity loss, reverse decline where it matters most, and support the recovery, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity across the region. It seeks to focus effort and investment where it can deliver the greatest benefit for nature and communities.

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

Success depends on a number of shifts including moving from:

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

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

Strategy to Implementation Pathway

This strategy defines outcomes, pou and strategic focus areas (Table 1). A full suite of indicators and measures will be developed as part of the implementation phase (some examples are provided in Table 3).

Table 1 Strategy hierarchy overview

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

Table 2 shows a strategy to implementation pathway, organised around the four pou. The purpose is to identify the strategic focus areas, possible lead organisations and potential indicators success, and the expected focus for delivery over time. This pathway is designed to provide a clear line of sight from the strategy to the implementation plan and help guide the sequencing of effort, investment and collaboration.

Many strategic focus areas build on work that is already underway across the Waikato region. Rather than indicating when work will commence, the implementation status identifies the expected focus for delivery and investment over time. The categories are: Immediate Priority, Sustain and Strengthen, Building

Capacity, and Longer-term Development. These categories reflect factors such as existing progress, urgency, reliance on multiple organisations, national priorities, complexity, and resourcing requirements (Table 2). Investment may involve improved coordination, reprioritisation of existing resources, new partnerships and future funding opportunities identified through the implementation plan.

Table 2 **Strategy hierarchy overview**

Status categories	Explanation
Immediate Priority	Areas requiring early focus through planning, coordination and delivery.
Sustain and Strengthen	Existing programmes and activities that require continued effort, coordination and improvement.
Building Capacity	Areas where capability, information, partnerships, funding mechanisms or systems need to be developed.
Longer-term Development	Areas likely to mature over a longer timeframe or depend on broader system change.

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

Table 3 Strategy to Implementation Pathway

Outcomes					Pou	Strategic Focus Area	Status	Responsibility (Lead*)	Examples of Potential Indicators to Measure Progress
1. Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai (mountains to the sea) 2. Populations of indigenous/taonga species, their habitats and ecological connections are resilient and increasing 3. Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion the Waikato region's biodiversity 4. Tangata whenua are exercising rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga alongside communities to restore and sustain biodiversity restoration 5. People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region	POU 1 Protecting and restoring what matters	1. Prioritise restoration on the most threatened ecosystems while maintaining and enhancing biodiversity	IMMEDIATE PRIORITY	WRC in collaboration with other entities	- Ecosystem health indicators - Habitat extent and connectivity - Threatened species status - Taonga species trends - Pest population trends				
		2. Landscape connectivity	IMMEDIATE PRIORITY	WRC in collaboration with other entities					
		3. Nature-based solutions	BUILDING CAPACITY	WRC* in collaboration with other entities					
		4. Coordinated control of invasive species	SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	WRC*, DOC*, MPI					
	POU 2 Empowering landowners and communities	5. Regional biodiversity networks/hubs	SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	WRC* and DOC* in collaboration with other entities	- Restoration funding levels / investment leveraged from partners - Participation in restoration programmes - Number of active community hubs - Restoration project coverage - Biodiversity awareness indicators - Trends in biodiversity condition and indicator species within community-led restoration areas				
		6. Facilitate long term investment	BUILD CAPACITY	All entities					
		7. Grow public awareness and understanding	SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	All entities					
		8. Capacity development	BUILD CAPACITY	All entities including education providers					
	POU 3 Partnering with tangata whenua	9. Integrate te ao Māori into planning	SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	WRC* and iwi	- Mātauranga Māori monitoring indicators - Number of Māori-led restoration programmes - Cultural engagement indicators - Trends in taonga species				
		10. Investment pathways for Māori-led restoration	BUILD CAPACITY	WRC*, DOC* in collaboration with other entities					
		11. Mātauranga Māori	BUILD CAPACITY	Iwi*, WRC, DOC					
		12. Partnership approaches	IMMEDIATE PRIORITY	Iwi*, WRC, DOC					
		13. Restore culturally significant sites	BUILD CAPACITY	Iwi* in collaboration with other entities					
	POU 4 Strengthening data, policy, and investment	14. Policy alignment	LONGER-TERM DEVELOPMENT	WRC* and territorial authorities* in collaboration with DOC	- Policy alignment indicators across councils - Biodiversity datasets and monitoring coverage across ecosystems - Accessibility and use of regional biodiversity datasets - Consistency of biodiversity reporting				
		15. Biodiversity spatial planning	BUILD CAPACITY	WRC*, DOC					
		16. Policies for maintenance and enhancement	SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN	WRC*					
		17. Restoration incentives	BUILD CAPACITY	WRC*, DOC, territorial authorities and other entities					
		18. Accessible monitoring information	IMMEDIATE PRIORITY	WRC*, DOC*					

Oversight of Implementation

To support collaboration and implementation of the strategy, the regional council will establish a core implementation group with membership that includes tangata whenua, territorial authorities, Department of Conservation, QEII National Trust and other entities and organisations as required. This group will share information, guide collective work programmes, identify implementation issues and maintain focus on long-term outcomes. The implementation process will seek to provide opportunities for participation by iwi across the region, recognising different aspirations, priorities and capacity.

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

The regional council will maintain the overall responsibility and will prepare a detailed implementation plan, coordinate monitoring and reporting and review progress against the strategy outcomes. This will be in collaboration with the core implementation group and others as required.

Implementation Plan

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

The implementation plan will be developed soon after the final strategy is adopted. It will translate the outcomes, pou and strategic focus areas into a practical programme of work, setting out the actions to be taken, when they occur, how partners will contribute, and how progress will be monitored and reported. It will outline:

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

The initial implementation plan will be developed to cover the first phase until 2030, focusing on setting the foundations needed to deliver the strategy's short term priorities. This shorter timeframe provides an opportunity to review the plan after significant local government and resource management reform processes and in line with council long term planning cycles. A five-year review and implementation cycle will follow this initial phase. This will allow the strategy to accommodate our understanding of the best methods and approaches to meet the outcomes as new knowledge and tools become available.

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

3.2 Monitoring and reporting

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

Table 3 shows some potential indicators that could be used to track progress. Existing state of the environment monitoring for the region (Figure 6) provides some baseline and trend information but gaps remain across ecosystems, species assemblages and emerging pressures, meaning important changes can go unnoticed. Developing a more comprehensive suite of indicators is one of the strategic focus areas in this strategy and this will be an important part of the implementation process.

Figure 6 Biodiversity monitoring in the Waikato region as at 2026 (NB: PLACEHOLDER INFOGRAPHIC)



Monitoring will align with existing reporting systems across different organisations and incorporate mātauranga Māori indicators through partnership with tangata whenua, recognising that cultural indicators may vary between iwi and hāpu. Monitoring information will be provided by lead organisations and implementation partners and coordinated through the regional implementation group. Reporting on biodiversity indicators will occur at the end of each implementation cycle to allow that monitoring to inform the development of the next implementation plan.

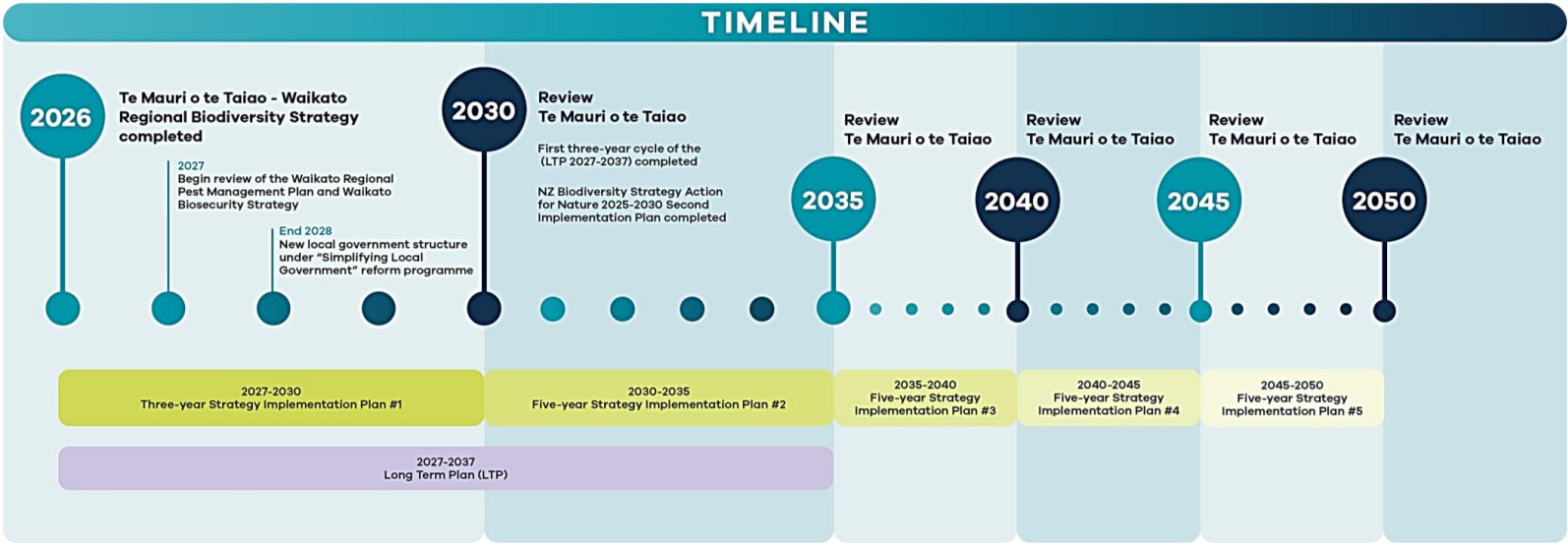
The regional council will be responsible for preparing consolidated progress reports against the strategy outcomes, on behalf of the strategy partners. Progress reports will be reviewed by the implementation group and made publicly available. Reporting will track progress against the strategy outcomes, implementation plan actions and agreed indicators, helping to identify achievements, emerging issues and priorities for future action.

3.3 Review

The Strategy will be formally reviewed every 3–5 years, aligned where possible with the review of the Regional Pest Management Plan and Waikato Biosecurity Strategy and national biodiversity strategy timing (Figure 7).

The next formal strategy review is planned for 2030, followed by five-yearly reviews thereafter. Earlier reviews may be triggered if significant policy or system changes arise.

Figure 7 Regional biodiversity strategy review and implementation planning timeline



Glossary | Ngā kupu whakamārama

Term	Definition
At risk	A species that is not currently threatened, but could quickly become so if their decline continues, or if new threats arise (as identified in the New Zealand Threat Classification System lists ³²).
Biodiversity	Biological diversity or the variability among living organisms from all sources including land, marine and freshwater ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species (including genetic diversity), between species and of ecosystems.
Biosecurity	The exclusion, eradication or management of pests and diseases that pose a risk to the economy, environment, human health or cultural/social values.
Capacity	The skills, knowledge, resources and organisational capability required to undertake biodiversity work.
Climate change	Long term shifts in global or regional climate patterns (typically over decades or longer). May be due to natural factors or human activities.
Climate refugia	Areas that remain suitable for species, natural communities or ecosystems despite wider climate change impacts.
Ecosystem	A community of living organisms interacting with each other and with their physical environment.
Ecosystem health	The ability of an ecosystem to function naturally, support life, and remain resilient to stress or disturbance.
Ecosystem services	The benefits people obtain from nature, such as in nutrient cycling, soil development, clean water, climate regulation and cultural identity.
Endemic species	An indigenous species found only in Aotearoa New Zealand or within a particular locality or region.
Enhancement	The active, deliberate, and ongoing improvement of condition, resilience and biodiversity value of ecosystems, species, and genetic resources
Fragmentation	The breaking up of habitat into smaller, isolated areas that results in a loss of ecological connectivity.
Habitat	The area or environment where an organism or ecological community lives or occurs naturally for some or all of its life cycle, or as part of its seasonal feeding or breeding pattern.
Hapū	Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe.
Healthy ecosystem	An ecosystem that functions naturally, is resilient to stress and supports diverse species.
Indigenous	Native to Aotearoa New Zealand.
Indigenous biodiversity	The living organisms that occur naturally in New Zealand, and the ecological complexes of which they are part.

³² [New Zealand Threat Classification System](#)

Term	Definition
Indigenous vegetation	Vascular and non-vascular plants that are native to the ecological district in which that area is located.
Iwi	Tribal group of Māori people descended from a common ancestor(s).
Kaitiaki	A person practising guardianship of ecosystems and natural resources.
Kaitiakitanga	Active protection and enhancement of the life force/mauri of ecosystems.
Ki uta ki tai	Managing the environment as an interconnected system – from the mountains to the sea.
Mahinga kai	Traditional food gathering areas.
Maintaining indigenous biodiversity	Ensuring no overall reduction in the population size of indigenous species; the functioning, range, extent, connectivity or resilience of their habitats and ecosystems; and where necessary, the restoration and enhancement of ecosystems and habitats.
Mana	Authority and prestige; can be lost, diminished or restored.
Mana whenua	People with ancestral authority over an area.
Maramataka	The traditional Māori lunar calendar used to guide environmental rhythms and seasonal activities.
Mātauranga Māori	Māori customary knowledge, values, practices and world views developed through long-term relationships with place.
Maunga	Mountain, peak.
Native species	Species found naturally in Aotearoa New Zealand, including migrant species visiting on a regular or irregular basis.
Nature	A holistic term that encompasses the living environment (te taiao) i.e. all living organisms and the ecological processes that sustain them. By this definition, people are a key part of nature. <i>This strategy uses the term “biodiversity” to refer to biological diversity and “nature” when considering the wider processes, functions and connections of the natural environment, of which biodiversity is a part.</i>
Nature-based solutions	Actions that restore, manage or protect ecosystems to address challenges such as climate impacts, flooding and erosion while simultaneously providing community wellbeing and biodiversity benefits.
Pest	Any living organism that causes significant harm to native biodiversity, the environment, human health or the economy.
Private land	Land owned by individuals or entities (not managed by the Department of Conservation or any other public body).
Public conservation land	Land administered by the Department of Conservation for whatever purpose.
Pou	A carved wooden post, pillar, or upright support used in traditional architecture.

Term	Definition
Resilience	The ability of an ecosystem to recover from and absorb disturbances, and its capacity to reorganise into similar ecosystems.
Restoration	Active work to improve or reinstate degraded ecosystems or habitats so that they regain their natural character, ecological processes, and cultural or visual qualities. Restoration may also include enhancement.
Rohe	Territory or region.
Taiao	The natural world.
Tangata whenua	The people of the land.
Taonga	In the context of the strategy, are plants and animals treasured by tangata whenua.
Te ao Māori	The Māori world; A Māori perspective / world view.
Threatened species	A species facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild and includes nationally critical, nationally endangered and nationally vulnerable species as identified in the New Zealand Threat Classification System lists.
Wetland	Includes permanently or intermittently wet areas, shallow water, and land water margins that support a natural ecosystem of plants and animals that are adapted to wet conditions.
Whakapapa	Genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent.
Whenua	Land.

Appendix 1 Organisations and agencies involved in the biodiversity system

Organisation	Roles and Responsibilities
Regional councils	WRC is responsible for maintaining indigenous biodiversity across the region under the RMA 1991, which requires regional councils to establish, implement and review objectives, policies and methods for maintaining indigenous biological diversity. This includes managing the effects of land use on freshwater, coastal and terrestrial ecosystems, protecting significant native vegetation and habitats, and supporting pest management under the Biosecurity Act 1993. The council also leads regional-scale monitoring, catchment management, and policy development to ensure biodiversity is safeguarded across all land tenures—public, private, and Māori. The council's role is further guided by national direction, including the NPS-IB, which requires councils to identify and manage significant natural areas, work in partnership with tangata whenua, and maintain indigenous biodiversity through clear policies and monitoring.
Territorial authorities	Under the RMA, territorial authorities have the role of controlling the effects of the use, development and protection of land, including for the purpose of the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity. Territorial authorities (city and district councils) share significant responsibilities for biodiversity management under the RMA 1991. They are required to control the effects of land use and subdivision to maintain indigenous biodiversity, and to protect significant natural areas and significant habitats of indigenous fauna through their district plans. Under the NPS-IB, territorial authorities must identify and map SNAs and manage the effects of new activities on these areas, and update district plans to give effect to national and regional requirements. Territorial authorities also play a practical, on-the-ground role by managing biodiversity on council-owned land such as parks, reserves and road corridors, supporting local restoration groups, and aligning district-level biodiversity strategies with regional priorities.
Department of Conservation (DOC)	Responsible for conserving the natural and historic heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand on behalf of and for the benefit of present and future New Zealanders. DOC is funded and empowered to manage the public conservation estate, including on land and in marine protected areas. In the Waikato region, DOC owns or administers 347,053 hectares of protected terrestrial indigenous cover, representing 89% of all protected natural land cover in the region. DOC also directly manages 800 hectares of marine reserve - while this is the primary "no-take" area owned/managed by DOC, the region has broader marine protection coverage across the east coast (Hauraki Gulf Marine Park) and west coast (West Coast North Island marine mammal sanctuary). DOC works with private landowners, councils and other agencies to manage biodiversity in these areas.
Ministry for Cities, Environment,	A mega-ministry launched on 1 July 2026, responsible for advising the Government on policies and issues affecting cities, transport, housing, regional development and the environment, and for providing an integrated

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

Appendix 2 Key legislation and policy documents for biodiversity management

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

	Legislation / Policy Document	Summary
NATIONAL	Marine Reserves Act 1971	Marine reserves provide the highest level of marine protection in New Zealand. This act provides for the establishment of fully protected marine reserves where all extraction and disturbance are prohibited. Reserves safeguard entire marine ecosystems from the surface to the seafloor, allowing species and habitats to recover. They serve as reference areas for scientific research and long-term monitoring and contribute to wider marine biodiversity outcomes.
NATIONAL	Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana Protection Act 2025	Strengthens the legislative framework for protecting the Hauraki Gulf, building on the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 and the <i>Sea Change</i> spatial plan. It supports integrated management across agencies, iwi, and stakeholders; introduces enhanced marine protection tools; and enables implementation of an ecosystem-based fisheries plan. Measures include restricting bottom trawling to a few specific corridors and improving environmental outcomes for the Gulf.
NATIONAL	Biosecurity Act 1993	New Zealand's core legal framework for managing pests and diseases that threaten the environment, economy, and human health. It provides regional councils with powers to detect, control, and eradicate unwanted organisms and supports border biosecurity, surveillance, and incursion response. For Waikato Regional Council, implementation occurs through the Regional Pest Management Plan and wider biosecurity programmes.
NATIONAL	New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (amended 2025)	The NZCPS requires councils to protect coastal biodiversity, preserve natural character, manage coastal hazards, and avoid adverse effects on significant coastal ecosystems. The NZCPS has strong legal force: regional policy statements and coastal plans must give effect to it. Its provisions guide how councils manage coastal development, activities, and resource use.
NATIONAL	Planning Bill (introduced in 2025)	As part of the RMA reform programme, the Planning Bill replaces current regional and district plans with a single combined plan for each region, integrating spatial planning and land-use planning. The purpose of the Planning Bill is to establish a framework for planning and regulating the use, development and enjoyment of land.
NATIONAL	Natural Environment Bill (introduced in 2025) (NE Bill)	The purpose of the NE Bill is to establish a framework for the use, protection, and enhancement of the natural environment as a replacement to the RMA.
NATIONAL	Local Government Act 2002	This Act requires councils to prepare Long Term Plans and Annual Plans to state a community's long-term goals and priorities and key performance targets. Key elements of Long Term/ Annual plans relating to biodiversity include funding local government activities through rates and charging development contributions.
NATIONAL	Predator Free 2050 strategy	Predator Free NZ Trust and DOC are the key players of the Predator Free strategy with a goal to eradicate rates, stoats, ferrets, weasels and possums in New Zealand by 2050. The movement brings together iwi and hapū, individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, central government, local government, community groups, and landowners.

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

Appendix 3 Waikato Biodiversity Accord: Principles

Waikato Biodiversity Accord: Principles

waikatoregion.govt.nz/biodiversity-accord

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and treaty settlements as a foundation

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

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

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

Collaboration and partnership

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

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

Integrated and coordinated approach

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

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

Honesty, trust and accountability

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

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

Inclusiveness and participation

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

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

Long-term commitment and adaptability

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

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

6.2 SIGNIFICANCE AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY REVIEW 2026

Rā | Date: 27 August 2026
Kaituhi | Author: Toby McIntyre, Senior Corporate Planner
Kaituku | Authoriser: Janine Becker, Director, Customer and Corporate Services
Mana whakatau | Delegation Status: For recommendation to Council.

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is to present updates on, and seek approval for, the recommended changes to the Waikato Regional Council (WRC) Significance and Engagement Policy.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Section 76AA of the [Local Government Act 2002](#) (LGA) requires all councils to have a Significance and Engagement Policy (SEP). A SEP must include:
 - (a) the council's approach to determining the significance of matters and proposals,
 - (b) the criteria or procedures for assessing matters and proposals,
 - (c) how the local authority will respond to community preferences about engagement, and
 - (d) how the council will engage with communities on matters.
3. The Significance and Engagement Policy (the SEP) is reviewed every three years to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
4. Councils must consult with the community before amending a SEP. It is recommended that consultation occurs on the proposed changes via Council's website, enabling the updated policy to be applied to the Long Term Plan (LTP) consultation.
5. A review of the SEP was undertaken, and minor changes were identified to future proof the policy and improve understanding of its application. Staff brought the draft policy to the Committee on 18 June 2026, and were directed to investigate further amendments, before bringing it back.
6. The June 2026 report outlined six proposed amendments to the Policy. Three of these have been revised based on feedback from the Committee, with the other three proposed amendments remaining as previously presented.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the report *Significance and Engagement Policy review 2026* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 17 September 2026) be received.

2. That the Strategy and Policy Committee endorses the proposed changes set out in Attachment 1, being the Draft Waikato Regional Council Significance and Engagement Policy 2027.
3. That the Strategy and Policy Committee recommends to Council that the proposed amendments to the Draft Waikato Regional Council Significance and Engagement Policy 2027 (Attachment 1) be approved for consultation via Council's website and inform consultation for the 2027-2037 Long Term Plan.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

7. The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) requires all councils to have a Significance and Engagement Policy (SEP). A SEP must include:
 - (a) the council's approach to determining the significance of matters and proposals,
 - (b) the criteria or procedures for assessing matters and proposals,
 - (c) how the local authority will respond to community preferences about engagement, and
 - (d) how the council will engage with communities on matters.
8. Councils must consult with the community before amending a SEP, and it is best practise to review the SEP every three years as part of the Long Term Plan (LTP) process.
9. In 2014, a standardised SEP template was developed by the Mayoral Forum's regulatory policy and bylaw workstream. WRC, along with most of the other councils in the region, adopted this policy with minor alterations to suit the individual council needs.
10. Council's SEP has been reviewed every three years since, as part of the LTP process.
11. A review of the SEP was undertaken earlier this year. The review focused on:
 - (a) What other regional councils include in their SEPs,
 - (b) Review of how 'significant activity' is defined,
 - (c) Review of the assessment criteria, and
 - (d) Review of the community engagement guide.
12. Staff presented the [outcomes of this review, and a draft policy](#), to the Committee on 18 June 2026, and were directed to undertake further review and make amendments to the draft before returning it to the Committee for recommendation to Council.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

13. Staff have considered the feedback elected members provided during the June 2026 Committee meeting and have made further amendments to the draft policy.
14. The recommended changes are presented in a tracked changes version of the draft SEP that is attached to this report (*refer to **Attachment 1***). Rationale for each of these recommended changes is presented below.

Legislative references

15. The Resource Management Act 1991 is referenced under the 'purpose and scope' in paragraph 4.
16. To future proof the policy staff recommended that this was replaced with a generic reference to 'resource management legislation', acknowledging that the Resource Management Act 1991 will be replaced by the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act, but that legislation had not been enacted at the time of this review.
17. Proposed change 1 (unchanged from June): Update Resource Management Act 1991 to 'resource management legislation.'

Significant activities

18. Section 97 of the LGA states that an LTP amendment is required if there is a decision to alter significantly the intended level of service for a significant activity undertaken by the council.
19. However, Council's SEP states that 'Council does not provide activities that are defined as significant in the LGA'. Staff consider that this is misleading as there may be circumstances where an LTP amendment would be required, and where our activities could be deemed significant.
20. Independent legal advice confirmed that determining whether an activity is a significant activity is a matter for Council's judgement, as the Significance and Engagement Policy **does not** conclusively define the threshold.
21. This advice also confirmed that there is no statutory requirement for a SEP to specify what constitutes a 'significant activity'. Accordingly, Council must exercise its judgement - taking into account the guidance in the SEP and any other available information at the time.
22. A review of how other councils approached the definition a significant activity showed that:
 - Most regional councils do not define 'significant activity' in their policies.
 - Bay of Plenty Regional Council define 'significant activity' as all activities in their long term plan, except those in the Corporate Services Group."
 - Several district councils in our region list their core activities as 'significant activities'.
23. To reduce future ambiguity, it was recommended through the June meeting of the Committee that the definition of 'significant activity' was removed to enable Council to exercise discretion when determining if an activity is significant (using the criteria set out in the SEP and the relevant circumstances at the time).
24. Some elected members expressed concern during the June committee meeting in regard to removing this definition entirely from the Policy.
25. In response, staff recommend shifting from 'significant activities', which aren't defined in legislation to shifting the assessment focus to how a proposal would affect levels of service (and how they are delivered), as this more clearly links to both staff and the community's understanding of the impact of those decisions. A revised criteria can be seen in part 1 of the *Whakataunga o te tāpuatanga / Assessment of significance* section.
26. Proposed change 2 (revised from June): Remove the definition of 'significant activity', and include a revised criteria based on levels of service.

Assessment of significance

27. Council's SEP sets out a list of criteria to be considered when assessing the degree of significance of proposals and decisions, and to inform the appropriate level of engagement.

No weighting is applied to the criteria in this list. Instead, an internal assessment tool supports staff to form an overall judgement of significance.

28. This approach is consistent with Taituara's guidance that supports a continuum approach and reflects legislative changes that removed the requirement for thresholds, with the intent of moving away from a binary ("black and white") assessment model.
29. A review of policies from other councils indicated that most regional councils include a list of criteria like our own. However, a small number of councils take a more prescriptive approach by explicitly identifying matters that will result in a 'high degree' of significance. These councils specify three key criteria, with corresponding thresholds. If these thresholds are met, the matter is deemed to be of high significance.
30. Whilst this approach may provide greater clarity, staff have indicated a strong preference for retaining the ability to exercise judgement, considering the specific circumstances of each decision or proposal.
31. During the June Committee meeting, elected members shared some concern with the use of 'judgement', as it could be seen as subjective. It was recommended that use of the term 'Material/Materiality' would provide a stronger indication of the evidence-based decision-making.
32. In response, staff have added a definition for Materiality/Material to the *Rārangi whakamārama / Definitions* section, to aid in understanding how the criteria for significance are applied.
33. To provide greater clarity about how to apply the SEP, staff have included an additional explanatory paragraph in the assessment template, supported by a flow chart, as a part of the internal guidance documents.
34. Staff have recommended adding "...Council's judgement..." and "...holistically..." to the statement in part 1, to make it more explicit that staff use the Policy to make recommendations, and the final decision rests with elected members.
35. Staff also recommend adding "...on a case-by-case basis..." to the introduction of the criteria to highlight the individualised nature of each assessment.
36. It also allows for staff and elected members to apply all the Policy's criteria to a wide variety of contexts/proposals and still be mindful of the individual circumstances of each individual decision.
37. The SEP assessment that staff complete requires explanation of the decision/application for each criterion is peer reviewed and can be outlined to elected members.
38. Too tightly applying criteria (without some recognition of the circumstances being possible) when they do not apply as directly to a proposal could lead to recommendations that do not best suit the needs of both Council and the community (i.e. not commensurate with the level of significance of the issue/proposal, or a negative cost benefit analysis).
39. Proposed change 3 (revsied from June): Add an additional paragraph to the Assessment of significance section (4) as follows:

"Assessing the level of significance of a decision or proposal will be a matter of Council's judgement. All the above criteria will be considered holistically but, depending on the circumstances, some criteria may be more relevant than others. The outcome of the assessment will be High, Medium or Low.", and

Include “..., on a case-by-case basis,...” to part 1, and

Include a definition for Materiality/Material to the Rārangī whakamārama | Definitions section, as follows:

“A statement, omission, fact, or item of such a nature or amount that its disclosure, or the method of treating it, given full consideration of the circumstances applying at the time the financial and performance information is completed, could reasonably be expected to influence readers’ overall understanding of the financial statements and performance information in making decisions or assessments.”

Assessment criteria

40. Following the review, the list of criteria was considered generally fit for purpose. However two minor changes were recommended.
41. First, it was recommended that bullet 6 in the list of criteria is updated. The current criteria refer to ‘whether the proposal affects the level of service of a significant activity.’ Under the proposed removal of the definition of significant activity this criterion is likely to be consistently assessed as ‘not applicable’.
42. It is therefore proposed that this criterion instead focus on levels of services as set out in Council’s LTP. This was supported by elected members in the previous Committee meeting.
43. Proposed change 4 (unchanged from June): Amend bullet point 6 under ‘Assessment of Significance’ in the SEP, to reference levels of service instead of significant activities.

~~Whether the proposal affects the level of service of a significant activity~~

Whether the proposal materially impacts on the levels of service provided by Council or the way in which the level of service is delivered,

44. Secondly, staff highlighted the need to recognise where Council has already made a commitment to engage with a specific group or the community on key topics. For example, previous commitments to engage with iwi, or references in our LTP consultation document committing to consult on the future of Te Huia when funding arrangements change.
45. Elected members wanted it made clearer that this commitment only applied when the commitment to consult came from Council itself.
46. Proposed change 5 (revised from June): Include the following, revised, new criterion:

~~Whether there has been a prior commitment to consult with the community on a specific matter.~~

Whether Council has already made a commitment to consult with the community on a specific matter.

Strategic assets

47. The strategic assets section has been reviewed and is considered to remain appropriate. However, it is noted that this section may be impacted by future changes as a result of the reform of local government.

Schedule 2: Community Engagement Guide

48. No significant changes were proposed for this section. Minor changes have been proposed to the table of engagement tools and techniques to provide more up to date examples of the types of tools that we might use for the different levels of engagement.

49. Proposed change 6 (unchanged from June): Make minor changes to the example tools listed in the engagement tools table.

TE URUTAI KI TE HURIHANGA ĀHUARANGI | ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

50. The decision is likely to have no impact on the ability of Council or the region to proactively respond to the impact of climate change, now or in the future.

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

51. The decision is likely to result in no impact in greenhouse gas emissions.

TE HAUTŪ ĀHUARANGI | CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

52. The decision will have no impact on Council's ability to show climate leadership.

TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

53. Having regard to the decision-making provisions in the LGA and Council's Significance and Engagement Policy a decision in accordance with the recommendations is considered to have a high degree of significance. Consultation on the proposed changes will occur via Council's website, enabling adoption ahead of any policy changes ahead of the commencement of the 2027 – 2037 Long Term Plan. In doing this, requirements for consultation through the LTP can be assessed against the new SEP.
54. Staff are of the opinion that the content and recommendations in the report are consistent with the decision-making requirements contained in Part Six of the LGA and that the decision-making requirements of the LGA have been met.

TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

55. Section 76AA of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) requires every council to have a Significance and Engagement Policy. A SEP must include:
- (a) Council's approach to determining the significance of matters and proposals,
 - (b) the criteria or procedures for assessing matters and proposals,
 - (c) how the local authority will respond to community preferences about engagement, and
 - (d) how the council will engage with communities on matters.
56. When adopting or amending a policy under section 76AA, the local authority must consult in accordance with section 82 unless it considers on reasonable grounds that it has sufficient information about community interests and preferences to enable the purpose of the policy to be achieved.

KŌWHIRINGA I MANAKOHIA | PREFERRED OPTION

57. That Council adopts the proposed changes to the SEP and resolves to consult with the community on the changes through the Long Term Plan consultation process.

NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHERE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

58. To the best of the writer's knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by Council or any plan required under the LGA or any other enactment.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

59. Council is obligated under the LGA to recognise and respect the Crown's responsibility to take appropriate account of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and to maintain and improve opportunities for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making processes.
60. s77 of the LGA requires the SEP to consider of the likely impact on Māori cultural values and their relationship to land and water, when assessing the significance of a decision. The SEP is also supported by the Māori Engagement Framework, which provides guidance on best practice engagement to those looking to engage with Māori.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

61. Council's SEP remains fit for purpose, and there are no substantive changes required. Several minor amendments are proposed to future-proof the Policy and enhance clarity in its application.

ĀPITIHINGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Draft Significance and Engagement Policy 2026 - (Doc # 35554516)** [↓](#)
2. **Attachment 2. 2027-2037 LTP. SEP Assessment template.** [↓](#)

TE KAUPAPAHERE MŌ TE TĀPUATANGA ME TE WHAKAPĀNGA SIGNIFICANCE AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY



Kupu whakataki | Introduction

Waikato Regional Council's Significance and Engagement Policy was adopted in 2014 and has since been reviewed every three years to meet our legislative requirements under the Local Government Act 2002 (the LGA). The policy:

- enables the council and our communities to understand the significance council places on certain issues, proposals, assets, decisions and activities, and
- identifies how and when communities can expect to be engaged or specifically consulted on these items.

The Significance and Engagement policy applies across our council. When assessing the degree of significance and deciding on appropriate engagement or consultation processes, the policy requires us to take into consideration other legislative requirements, as well as any other agreements that might already be in place. To ensure Council engages as effectively as possible with the Waikato region's diverse communities, we gather information on people's views and preferences in a variety of ways. Sometimes that might be via formal statutory consultation, or it might be via a more informal engagement process. Either way, the overall intent is to ensure that, wherever possible, anyone who wishes to contribute ideas or information to important council processes and decisions has the opportunity to do so.

Koronga me te aronga | Purpose and scope

1. To enable the council and its communities to identify the degree of significance attached to particular issues, proposals, assets, decisions and activities.
2. To provide clarity about how and when communities can expect to be engaged in decisions made by the council.
3. To inform the council from the beginning of a decision-making process about the extent, form and type of engagement required.
4. This policy does not apply to decision making under [the Resource Management Act 1991](#) and or other legislation that includes a prescribed consultative/engagement process.

Rārangi whakamārama | Definitions

Asset class	Council operational assets and council infrastructure assets, as disclosed in the council's Annual Report - Property, Plant and Equipment table.
Community	A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. Includes interested parties, affected people and key stakeholders.
Decisions	Refers to all the decisions made by or on behalf of the council including those made by officers under delegation. (Management decisions made by officers under delegation during the implementation of council decisions will not be deemed to be significant).
Engagement	Is a term used to describe the process of providing information to or seeking information from the community to inform and assist decision making. There is a continuum of community involvement.

Materiality / Material	A statement, omission, fact, or item of such a nature or amount that its disclosure, or the method of treating it, could reasonably be expected to influence readers' overall understanding in making decisions or assessments.
Significance	As defined in Section 5 of the LGA "in relation to any issue, proposal, decision, or other matter that concerns or is before a local authority, means the degree of importance of the issue, proposal, decision, or matter, as assessed by the local authority, in terms of its likely impact on, and likely consequences for,— (a) the district or region; (b) any persons who are likely to be particularly affected by, or interested in, the issue, proposal, decision, or matter; (c) the capacity of the local authority to perform its role, and the financial and other costs of doing so.
Significant Activity	Council does not provide activities that are defined as significant in the LGA.
Strategic Asset	As defined in Section 5 of the LGA "in relation to the assets held by a local authority, means an asset or group of assets that the local authority needs to retain if the local authority is to maintain the local authority's capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that the local authority determines to be important to the current or future well-being of the community; and includes— (a) any asset or group of assets listed in accordance with section 76AA(3) by the local authority; and (b) any land or building owned by the local authority and required to maintain the local authority's capacity to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy; and (c) any equity securities held by the local authority in – i. a port company within the meaning of the Port Companies Act 1988; ii. an airport company within the meaning of the Airport Authorities Act 1996".

Kaupapahere | Policy

- Engaging with the community is necessary to understand the views and preferences of people likely to be affected by or interested in a proposal or decision.
- An assessment of the degree of significance of proposals and decisions, and the appropriate level of engagement, will therefore be considered in the early stages of a proposal before decision making occurs and, if necessary, reconsidered as a proposal develops.

Whakataunga o te tāpuatanga | Assessment of significance

- Council will take into account the following matters, [on a case-by-case basis](#), when assessing the degree of significance of proposals and decisions, and the appropriate level of engagement:
 - Whether there is a legal requirement to engage with the community,
 - The level of financial consequences of the proposal or decision,
 - Whether the proposal or decision will affect a large portion of the community,
 - The likely impact on present and future interests of the community,
 - The likely impact on Māori cultural values and their relationship to land and water (also refer section [910](#)),
 - Whether the [proposal materially impacts on the levels of service provided by Council or the way in which the level of service is delivered](#), ~~proposal affects the level of service of a significant activity~~
 - Whether community interest is high,

- Whether the likely consequences are controversial and/or has a likely impact on the reputation of Council,
 - Whether community views are already known, including the community's preferences about the form of engagement,
 - [Whether Council has already made a commitment to consult with the community on a specific matter, and](#)
 - The form of engagement used in the past for similar proposals and decisions.
2. The council will take into account the degree to which the issue has a [material](#) financial impact on the council or the rating levels of its communities, using the following thresholds:
- An unbudgeted operating expenditure greater than 5 per cent of council's total operating expenditure in that year, excluding amortisation and depreciation.
 - An unbudgeted capital expenditure greater than 2 per cent of the total value of council's assets in that year, excluding amortisation and depreciation.
3. If a proposal or decision is affected by the above considerations, it is more likely to have a high degree of significance.

~~3.4.~~ [Assessing the level of significance of a decision or proposal will be a matter of Council's judgment. All the above criteria will be considered holistically but, depending on the circumstances, some criteria may be more relevant than others. The outcome of the assessment will be High, Medium or Low.](#)

~~4.5.~~ In general, the more significant an issue, the greater the need for effective community engagement.

Te whakapānga me te akoakotanga | Engagement and consultation

~~5.6.~~ The council will apply a consistent and transparent approach to engagement.

~~6.7.~~ The council is required to undertake a special consultative procedure as set out in Section 83 of the LGA, or to carry out consultation in accordance with or giving effect to Section 82 of the LGA on certain matters (regardless of whether they are considered significant as part of this policy).

~~7.8.~~ For all other issues requiring a decision, the council may determine the appropriate level of engagement (section 82 of the LGA) on a case by case basis.

~~8.9.~~ The Community Engagement Guide (schedule two, attached) identifies the form of engagement the council will use to respond to some specific issues. It also provides examples of types of issues and how and when communities could expect to be engaged in the decision-making process.

~~9.10.~~ Where Joint Management Agreements, Memorandum of Understanding or any other similar high-level agreements exist, these will be considered as a starting point when engaging with Māori.

~~10.11.~~ For mana whenua groups without a formal agreement a separate engagement plan will be developed as appropriate.

~~11.12.~~ When the council makes a decision that is significantly inconsistent with this policy, the steps identified in Section 80 of the LGA will be undertaken.

Note: A Māori Engagement Framework, developed in 2017, initially formed Schedule 3 of the Significance and Engagement Policy. This framework is now a standalone document which provides guidance on best practice engagement to those looking to engage with Māori. The framework can be accessed on our website [here](#).

WĀHANGA 1 | SCHEDULE 1

NGĀ RAWA MAUROA | STRATEGIC ASSETS

Section 5 of the Local Government Act requires the following to be listed in this Policy:

- (a) any asset or group of assets listed in accordance with section 76AA(3) by the local authority; and
- (b) any land or building owned by the local authority and required to maintain the local authority's capacity to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy; and
- (c) any equity securities held by the local authority in –
 - (i) a port company within the meaning of the Port Companies Act 1988;
 - (ii) an airport company within the meaning of the Airport Authorities Act 1996.

The following is a list of assets or group of assets that the council needs to retain if it is to maintain its capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that it determines to be important to the current or future well-being of the community.

- infrastructural fixed assets owned or maintained by the Waikato Regional Council such as its river management, flood protection and drainage assets,
- the overall system of communications for flood and resource monitoring and control, including the radio communication system and associated computer systems,
- the council's investment fund, and
- data held in the council's geographic information system (GIS) and environmental databases.

WĀHANGA 2 | SCHEDULE 2

NGĀ TOHUTOHU WHAKAPĀNGA HAPORI | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Te whakapānga ki te hapori | Community engagement

- is a process.
- involves all or some of the public.
- is focussed on decision-making or problem-solving.

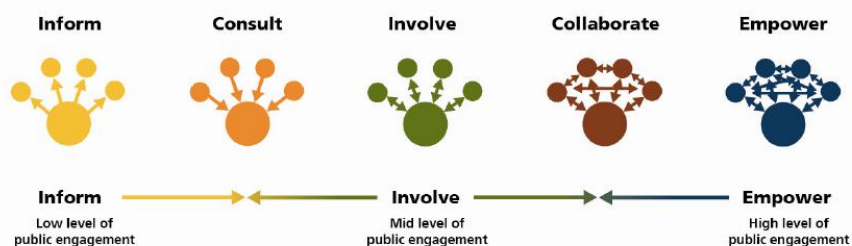
The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a Public Participation Spectrum to demonstrate the possible types of engagement with the community. This model also shows the increasing level of public impact as you progress through the spectrum from left to right - 'inform' through to 'empower'. In simply 'informing' stakeholders there is no expectation of receiving feedback, and consequently there is a low level of public impact. At the other end of the spectrum, 'empowering' stakeholders to make decisions implies an increase in expectations and therefore an increased level of public impact. Differing levels of engagement may be required during the varying phases of decision-making on an issue, and for different stakeholders.

It will not always be appropriate or practicable to conduct processes at the 'collaborate' or 'empower' end of the spectrum. Many minor issues will not warrant such an involved approach. Time and money may also limit what is possible on some occasions.

In general, the more significant an issue, the greater the need for effective community engagement.

When engaging with the community, the council will:

- Seek out and encourage contributions from people who may be affected by or interested in a decision,
- Provide reasonable access to relevant, timely and balanced information so people can contribute in a meaningful way,
- Provide a variety of appropriate ways and opportunities for people to have their say,
- Tell the community what the council's decision is and the reasons for that decision, and
- Provide a clear record or description of the relevant decisions made by council and explanatory material relating to the decision.



Ngā tūmomo hanga o te whakapānga | Forms of engagement

The council will use the Special Consultative Procedure (as set out in section 83 of the LGA) where required to do so by law, including the following issues requiring decisions:

- Adoption or amendment of the long term plan (sections 93(2) and 93A).
- Making, amending or revoking a bylaw that the council identifies using this policy as having significant interest to, or significant impact on, the public (section 156(1)(a)).

The council will consult in accordance with, or using a process or a manner that gives effect to the requirements of, section 82 of the LGA 2002 where required to do so by law, including for the following specific issues requiring decisions:

- Adopting the annual plan if required under section 95 of the LGA.
- Transferring responsibilities to another local authority under section 17 of the LGA.
- Establishing or becoming a shareholder in a council-controlled organisation.
- Adopting or amending a revenue and financing policy, development contributions policy, financial contributions policy, rates remission policy, rates postponement policy, or a policy on the remission or postponement of rates on Māori freehold land.

For such consultation, Council will develop information fulfilling the requirements of Section 82A of the LGA.

For all other issues, the following table provides an example of the differing levels of engagement that might be considered appropriate, the types of tools associated with each level and the timing generally associated with these types of decisions/levels of engagement.

Ngā utauta me ngā āhua ā-mahi o te whakapānga | Engagement tools and techniques

Over the time of decision making, the council may use a variety of engagement techniques on any issue or proposal and the tools may be adapted based on a range of other factors, including history and public awareness of the issue, stakeholder involvement, and timing related to other events and budgets. The council will also take into consideration other engagements underway, and combined initiatives will be utilised where appropriate to maximise efficiencies and to alleviate 'consultation/engagement fatigue'.

Each situation will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Level	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
What the consultation involves	One-way communication providing balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.	Two-way communications designed to obtain public feedback about ideas on rationale, alternatives and proposals to inform decision making.	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision-making.	Working together to develop understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions.	The final decision making is in the hands of the public, however, under the LGA, the Regional Council Chair and Councillors are elected to make decisions on behalf of their communities.
Types of issue that we might use this for	Flood warnings Annual Reports Civil Defence preparedness	LTP consultation Drainage Infrastructure funding	Regional Policy Statement Regional Plan	Healthy Rivers: Plan for Change/Wai Ora: He Rautaki Whakapaipai Catchment planning	Local body elections
Tools we might use	Websites Social media Apps (e.g. Antenna) Digital and/or print advertising Newsletters Public notices Subscribed email/text alerts	Formal submissions and hearings Social media Apps (e.g. Antenna) Digital and/or print advertising EngagementHQ Newsletters Websites Public notices Focus groups, surveys.	Websites EngagementHQ Workshops Focus groups Citizens panels / assembly	Websites EngagementHQ Collaborative stakeholder group Technical alliance	Binding referendum Local body elections
When the community can expect to be involved	The council would generally advise the community once a decision is made	The council would advise the community once a draft decision is made and the council would generally provide the community with up to 4 weeks to participate and respond.	The council would generally provide the community with a greater lead in time to allow them time to be involved in the process.	The council would generally involve the community throughout the process - at the start to scope the issue, throughout the information collection, and to consider options.	The council would generally provide the community with a greater lead in time to allow them time to be involved in the process. e.g. typically, a month or more.

ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTIONS

The table below provides guidance on determining whether a proposal has a low, medium or high level of significance in relation to each policy consideration. In the assessment column (column B), use the drop-down options to select low, medium or high for each policy consideration. Then provide an explanation.

The low, medium and high assessments will be a visual aid to assist in the overall assessment. If only one of the policy considerations is assessed as having high significance, that doesn't necessarily mean the overall assessment would be high. However, any considerations indicating medium or high significance should alert the assessor that some form of higher engagement may be required. It should also be noted that significance is only one indication that engagement needs to occur, judgement must be applied to determine the appropriate level engagement for each proposal.

In committing to effective engagement and consultation, the Council must also recognise that there is a time and financial cost to seeking the views and input of stakeholders and the community. The time and level of engagement undertaken needs to be appropriate to the decision/actions to be taken by council. It may not be possible to consult extensively on every decision that the Council makes. Further guidance can be provided by the Communications team.

Please note that the Significance and Engagement Policy assessment needs to be referenced in council reports and included as an attachment.

Significance and Engagement Policy considerations	Level of significance		
	Low	Medium	High
Is there a legal requirement to engage?	No, or the requirement to engage is based on other considerations.		Yes.
What is the level of financial consequence?	There is no/minor financial impact on Council budgets, reserves, debt levels or limits in the Financial Strategy.		There is a substantial financial impact on Council budgets, reserves, debt levels, or results in Council's Financial Strategy limits being exceeded.
Is there a large portion of the community affected?	A small portion of the community will be affected e.g. one neighbourhood or small special interest group.		A large portion of the community will be affected e.g. a town or the region.
What is the likely impact on present and future interests of the community?	A low impact on the present and future interests of the community.		A high impact on the present and future interests of the community.
What is the likely impact on Māori cultural values and their relationship to land and water?	Unlikely to impact on Māori cultural values and their relationship to land and water.		Likely to have a large impact on Māori cultural values and their relationship to land and water.
Does the proposal impact on the level of service provided by Council or the way in which the level of service is delivered.	There is a low level of change to the services but no changes to the levels of service stated in the Long-Term Plan and no change to the way in which services are delivered.		There is a major change to the levels of service, for example, removal or a major decrease of a level of service stated in the Long-Term Plan; or the addition or major increase of a level of service stated in the Long-Term Plan.
Is there a high level of community interest?	Community interest in the matter is low.		Community interest in the matter is high.
Are the likely consequences controversial and/or will they impact on the reputation of council?	Unlikely to cause a controversial consequence or impact council's reputation.		Likely to cause a controversial consequence or impact council's reputation.
Has the council already made a commitment to consult with the community on a specific matter?	Council has not made a commitment to consult with the community.		Council has signalled a clear commitment to consult with a group or community prior to making a decision (e.g. In previous LTP consultation documents)

Are the community views already known including the community's preferences about the form of engagement?	Community views are already well known on the issue and they do not have a specific expectation to be engaged.		Community views are not known on the issue and they prefer higher levels of engagement.
Are the financial thresholds met?	Financial thresholds are not met.		Financial thresholds have been met.
<i>(Unbudgeted operating expenditure greater than 5% of council's total operating expenditure in that year, excluding amortisation and depreciation. And/or</i>			
<i>Unbudgeted capital expenditure greater than 2% of the total value of Council's assets in that year, excluding amortisation and depreciation.)</i>			
Overall assessment:	Assessor to select the overall assessment of low, medium or high.		

6.3 2027-2037 LONG TERM PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Rā | Date: 1 September 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Jane Apperley, Manager, Corporate Planning

Kaituku | Authoriser: Janine Becker, Director, Customer and Corporate Services

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To provide the Strategy and Policy Committee (the committee) with an update of the 2027–2037 Long Term Plan (LTP).

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The LTP is progressing to ensure that Council meets the legislative requirement to adopt prior to 30 June 2027.
3. A series of workshops have been planned and are taking place throughout the remainder of 2026, allowing councillors to provide feedback and direction to staff. Alongside this, detailed budgeting is being undertaken.
4. The 2027-2037 LTP is being prepared in an environment of considerable legislative change which creates some uncertainty and extra complexity in the planning landscape.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *2027-2037 Long Term Plan development* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 17 September 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

5. Under the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA), councils must update their LTP every three years. The LTP process provides the opportunity to review the services that Council provides, the extent to which these services are provided, and how they are funded. After a period of community consultation, the refreshed LTP sets a roadmap for the next decade, providing the basis for Council accountability for service delivery to its communities.
6. Waikato Regional Council's current LTP was adopted in June 2024, and through the current planning and decision-making provisions set out in the LGA, a new 10-year plan must be adopted no later than 30 June 2027. The LTP must comply with legislation and should receive an unmodified audit report.
7. The development of the LTP requires active ownership and engagement from councillors to ensure confidence in the decisions required by 30 June 2027. A structured programme of engagement with councillors has been developed with a series of workshops throughout the second half of 2026 leading into key decision points in early 2027. Given the fluid nature of Council's operating environment, staff are regularly reviewing the proposed content for workshops to ensure that this addresses any new / emerging topics. Regular updates are

provided to the Strategy and Policy Committee, with all formal decisions to be made by full Council.

8. A draft timetable for the LTP, and a resource management/local government reform timeline are available as Attachments One and Two.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

9. A workshop on levels of service for the 2027-2037 LTP was held with Council on 3 September. This workshop presented the work that staff have been undertaking over the last two months to review Council's current levels of service, utilising the structured approach of Enterprise Work Management.
10. At this workshop, elected members commenced a review of Levels of Service change proposals, including the review areas of discretionary spend, including discretionary funds / community partnerships and education activities.
11. The intention is to present the remaining change proposals at the 16 September 2026 Council workshop. This workshop also provides the opportunity for Council to provide additional guidance to staff on any other areas of review that they wish to have considered through the LTP process.
12. Based on direction provided by elected members, following the 3 September workshop, staff will commence detailed budgeting, along with the development of Investment Cases to support recommended changes to current levels of service.

ĒTAHI ATU TAKE | OTHER MATTERS

13. This LTP is being developed in an environment of considerable legislative change, with new and emerging regulations requiring Council to test assumptions and its planning response throughout LTP development.

Rates capping

14. The Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill passed its first reading on 1 September 2026.
15. Rates capping will require Council to operate within annual rates increases of between 2 per cent – 4 per cent from 1 July 2029. The LTP is being developed with these limits in mind, noting that direction is sought from Council on its appetite for rates increases in the first two years of the Plan which are not covered by the rates cap.

New resource management system

16. As outlined in the 3 September workshop report, a significant driver for new investment needs through the 2027-2037 LTP is the new resource management system.
17. In September 2026 the coalition government is expected to pass legislation that repeals the present resource management system. The passing of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill into law will repeal the Resource Management Act 1991.

Plan Change 1

18. The recent government decision will require a reassessment of how PC1 will be provided for in the LTP.

19. Legislative responsibilities regarding the Environment Court and High Court processes remain, as do Council's responsibilities for making the Plan operative. What the draft legislation includes is a deferral in timing for stock exclusion requirements, farm environment plans and the need to apply for resource consents for some but not all the rules of the plan.
20. National freshwater farm plan requirements will commence from mid-2027; there is still much work to be done in the interim. Working with those in the catchment will require a reframing and staff are developing options that will be brought back to Council for consideration.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

21. The LTP work programme remains on track towards meeting the legislative timeframes.
22. Significant input from elected members remains a key part of this work programme.
23. More detailed budgets will be provided at a Council workshop in December, as staff work through the processes.

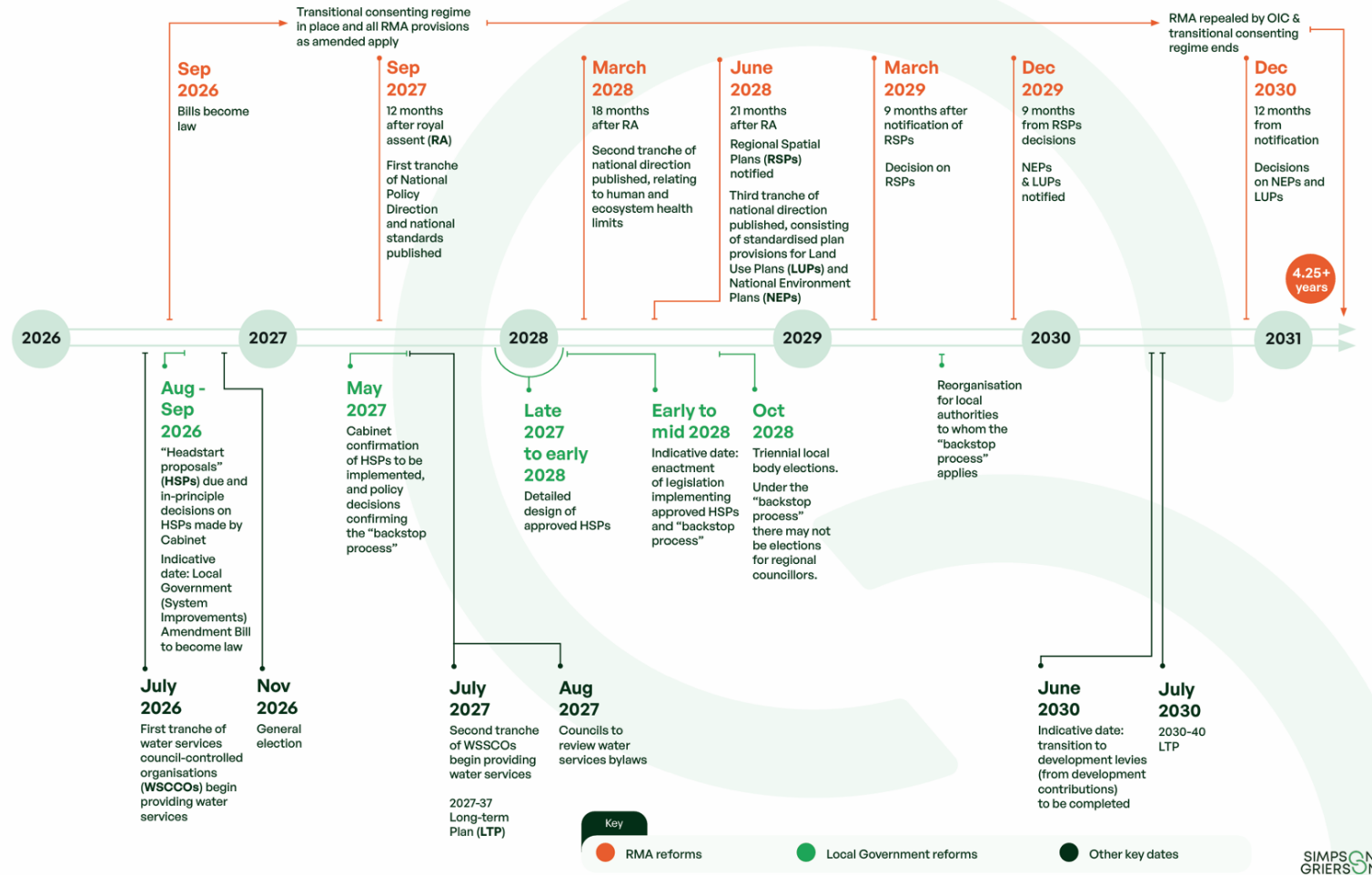
ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Long Term Plan timeline for Strategy and Policy Committee report – (Doc # 38677559) [↓](#)
2. Resource management and local government legislative changes timeline – (Doc # 38666033) [↓](#)

Date	Type	Time	Time slot	LTP Proposed Agenda Items for discussion
16/09/2026	Workshop	09:30-16:00	TBA	Complete review of information provided for 3 September, including Council direction on additional areas of review; present key planning assumptions
29/09/2026	Workshop	13:00-16:00	3 hours	Infrastructure Strategy (Key assumptions)
12/10/2026	Workshop	09:30-12:30	3 hours	Review of Investment Fund Strategy
27/10/2026	Workshop	13:00-16:00	1.5 hours	Financial Strategy & Financial Policies (Revenue & Financing Policy and Rates Remissions)
1/12/2026	Workshop	13:00-16:00	3 hours	Draft Infrastructure Strategy
15/12/2026	Workshop	13:00-16:00	3 hours	Draft budget overview
25/01/2027	Meeting	1 week		Draft LTP incorporating Draft Budget, approved Investment Cases, Financial Strategy / Infrastructure Strategy / Performance Framework & Measures / Activity Statements
4/02/2027	Workshop	09:30-16:00	TBA	To be determined
25/02/2027	Meeting	13:00-16:00	TBA	Draft Consultation Document / Revised Draft LTP / Draft Budget
25/03/2027	Meeting	09:30-16:00	TBA	Final Consultation Document approved
17/05/2027	Meeting	4 days		LTP Hearings (incl. 1 reserve day)
25/05/2027	Meeting	4 days		LTP Deliberations
15/06/2027	Workshop	09:30-12:30	TBA	To be determined
24/06/2027	Meeting	09:30-16:00		LTP Adoption

*Some of these dates may be subject to change

Select Committee recs: implementation timeline



6.4 UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT REFORMS

Rā | Date: 28 August 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Lisette Balsom, Manager - Strategic Policy Implementation

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

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. There has been a flurry of announcements relating to resource management reform ahead of, and during, the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill process through Parliament. This report provides updates on the numerous processes occurring at once.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill are expected to become law this month. Many and significant changes have been made up until the last moment via Amendment Papers to the Bills.
3. This report provides an overview of the changes and some preliminary points on impacts from these changes.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Update on Government Reforms* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 17 September 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

Where the legislative process is at and next steps

4. The Natural Environment and Planning Bills has proceeded through to the Committee of the Whole House stage. At this stage any Member of Parliament can table Amendment Papers (formerly known as supplementary order papers) proposing changes to the Bills, which are then voted on.
5. The Third Reading and Royal Assent of the Bills are still to come as at time of writing. If passed, the Bills are likely to become law sometime in September.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

Government announcements and Amendment Papers

6. In late August, the Government announced further changes to support delivery of the new planning system. The Government progressed the changes through extensive Amendment Papers to both Bills that were introduced through the Committee of the Whole House stage.
7. In summary, the changes:

- (a) strengthen central direction through national policy and standards
 - (b) narrow the indigenous biodiversity goal from “no net loss” to protecting significant biodiversity
 - (c) remove resource-use caps
 - (d) allow national standards to authorise activities that breach environmental limits where the Minister is satisfied there is a net public benefit and mitigation conditions are imposed
 - (e) add detailed Treaty-settlement protections, Te Ture Whaimana provisions, iwi participation agreements, EPA monitoring and stronger ministerial oversight, while establishing the machinery for transition from and eventual repeal of the RMA
 - (f) create an independent urban-land statutory officer
 - (g) directly change farming requirements under Horizons One Plan (PC2) and delay key Waikato Proposed Plan Change 1 (PC1) requirements until 2033.
8. Links to announcements are provided in the table below, along with a short summary of each change, and a preliminary overview of implications for Waikato Regional Council.

Summary	Implications for WRC
<u>Providing certainty for the marine sector</u>	
Changes to the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill to support and grow the aquaculture industry: - to prevent councils from making rules to regulate fishing and fishery resources that are already managed under the Fisheries Act. - to remove the need to consider outstanding natural landscapes or features or areas for activities more than three nautical miles offshore - to allow the Ministers to make allocate space for aquaculture.	<u>Fishing controls</u> Fisheries management will remain primarily under fisheries legislation rather than the new planning system. Current and proposed council fishing rules going through council planning processes will continue until natural environment plans are operative, expected to be in 2030. Environment Court assisted mediation on the fishing controls topic for the Proposed Waikato Regional Coastal Plan appeals is set down for 21-22 October 2026. The changes to the new planning system do not directly affect these appeals being considered under the RMA. The Council decision introduced a new rule prohibiting bottom trawling, dredging and Danish seining in specific areas of the Waikato coastal marine area identified for their significant biodiversity values. <u>Outstanding natural landscapes or features</u> These changes have no direct impact on the operative or proposed Waikato Regional Coastal Plan. The identification of areas of outstanding natural features and/or landscapes in Schedule 3 of the proposed coastal plan, adopts a seaward boundary of 5.5km from land, being the equivalent of the 3 nautical mile limit intended under the new planning system. When standing at sea level, the curvature of the earth prevents any visual effects of structures and the like from being seen

Summary	Implications for WRC
	from land. In addition, by Council identifying the areas of outstanding natural features or landscapes, and outstanding natural character already through its proposed coastal plan, these provide the basis for certainty for any future aquaculture activities, and do not necessarily present a barrier to aquaculture. New marine farms are encouraged through the plan to locate outside of these areas. <u>Aquaculture</u> While regional coastal plans cannot include permitted activity rules for aquaculture activities, a new clause provides a pathway for creating a permitted activity for aquaculture authorised by a current coastal permit. We understand this has been specifically included for possible use in resolving appeals to the Proposed Waikato Regional Coastal Plan and will be explored further through that appeals process. It does not allow for new aquaculture to be a permitted activity.
<u>Decisions on Freshwater Farm Plans released</u>	
Changes are made to Schedule 5 Freshwater Farm Plans of the NEB, and to the equivalent Part 9A of the Resource Management Act (RMA), relating to certification and auditing requirements for Freshwater Farm Plans (FW-FP). These changes include requiring certification, auditing, and associated reporting for the part of the farm where activities prescribed in regulations occur. Full farm certification and auditing would still be required for dairy farming, grazing pigs, commercial vegetable growing, and feedlots. Regulations for the FW-FP system are expected to be introduced after the General Election in November. These will also introduce a pathway	<u>Freshwater farm plans</u> • The RMA remains in force until repealed through an Order in Council process (with a 4-year backstop following Royal assent). Accordingly, initial implementation of the FW-FP system will continue under the RMA. This is why these proposed amendments have also been applied to the RMA legislation to maintain consistency through the transition. • The proposed amendment to the NEB introduces the concept of a limited certified and audited FW-FP. Certification may apply either to an entire FW-FP or to the part of a plan that relates to a prescribed activity in the regulations. • The proposed amendments provide additional flexibility for the Government to vary FW-FP land-use area thresholds through an Order in Council, including the ability to remove or lower area thresholds. • The FW-FP provisions will apply only in regions, districts, or parts of New Zealand specified in an Order in Council. It remains unclear where, and when, the FW-FP system will be implemented. The Government can also subsequently remove the application of the FW-FP provisions. Further detail will be provided through subsequent regulations. <u>Development of planning documents</u> The proposed amendments to Schedule 5 of the NEB do not materially change the process for preparing Natural Environment Plans or a Land Use Plan for the coastal marine area.

Summary	Implications for WRC
that enables industry organisations to provide certification and audit services to members for plans that deliver equivalent outcomes.	<u>Proposed Waikato Regional Plan Change 1: Waikato and Waipā River Catchments (PC1)</u> Based on MCERT fact sheet Fact sheet PC1 and PC2.docx, the change to PC1 will mean that the Farm Environment Plan (FEP) requirements in PC1 would not apply before December 2032. Notwithstanding, the impact of the proposed amendments on PC1 is only minor, as the FW-FP system would have sat alongside, not instead of, PC1 FEPs, with the more stringent requirements in PC1 applying. Furthermore, the key certification and audit provisions in the version of PC1 proposed to and accepted by the Environment Court, defer to the process detailed in eventual FW-FP regulations.
Certainty for Waikato and Manawatū-Whanganui farmers	
Changes remove elements of plan changes that regulate farming activities in the Horizons and Waikato regions. Changes will prevent parts of PC1 from applying during the transition period to the new planning system. Farmers in the Waikato and Waipā catchments will be able to continue operating under PC1's permitted activity rules during the transition period, while existing controls on land use change that have applied since 2016 when PC1 was notified remain in place.	The MCERT factsheets Fact sheet PC1 and PC2.docx for the amended legislation highlight the key matters in relation to PC1 as follows: • Deferral of requirements for FEPs, to obtain consent for some farming activities, and stock exclusion requirements, until 31 December 2032. • Land-use change requirements that have applied since notification of PC1 in 2016 would continue to apply. • Some minimum farming standards would continue to apply. • Expansion of commercial vegetable production that, at the commencement of the proposed changes, has not occurred lawfully as a permitted activity, would continue to require consent. The Government has also proposed amendments that provide for how Te Ture Whaimana will apply in the new system, reinforcing that it is intended by Parliament to be the primary direction-setting document for the Waikato and Waipā Rivers, prevailing over inconsistent provisions of national instruments, and must be given effect to. The proposed changes in the original withdrawn amendment paper also establish the expectation that particular regard is had to PC1 in the process of preparing the first Natural Environment Plan for the Waikato and Waipā catchments.
A more practical planning system food and fibre production	
Changes to the Bills to provide for fibre and food production include:	<u>Resource use caps</u> While the Bill still enables councils to allocate natural resources and include land-use and input controls through action plans and

Summary	Implications for WRC
- removing provisions that set resource caps as a primary mechanism for managing natural resource use where environmental limits have been, or are likely to be, breached. - changes to requirements relating to action plans. - changes to enable water storage and distributions systems to be considered 'long-lived infrastructure' thereby enabling consent durations longer than 35 years. - changes to sections 70 and 107 of the RMA to allow Councils, during the transition period to the new resource management system, the ability to permit or grant consent for activities where adverse effects in waterbodies are already occurring and steps are being taken to reduce effects over time.	Natural Environment Plans, the role of output controls is less explicit than in earlier versions of the Bill. <u>Action plans</u> - The amendments refine action plan requirements and further clarify that action plans propose or recommend measures rather than directly imposing regulatory controls. - While action plans remain a key mechanism for responding to breached or anticipated breach of environmental limits, some uncertainty remains about how action plans, FW-FPs, land-use and input/output controls and allocation approaches will work together in practice. <u>Water storage and distribution systems</u> - The amendments expand the definition of long-lived infrastructure to include structures, facilities and infrastructure used for water storage and distribution. As a result, these systems may be eligible for longer consent durations under the framework that applies to long-lived infrastructure. <u>Changes to sections 70 and 107 of the RMA</u> - The amendment to s70 of the RMA will ensure alignment with the effects addressed in s107, allowing for the inclusion of permitted activity rules in a plan where a breach of these effects are already occurring in the environment and the standards of the rule or other provisions will contribute to a reduction in those effects over time. - Waikato Region has areas where waterways already breach standards for suspended solids and the suitability of water for consumption by farm animals, in addition to areas where there are existing significant adverse effects on aquatic life (which s107 had been amended to address in 2024). - New activities can also potentially be granted where a wider range of existing effects occur where they can identify a way to make offset reductions. WRC had previously had concerns that s107 would be a potential significant barrier when consents were required under PC1 and for other discharge activities.
<u>Achieving competitive urban land markets in new system</u>	
The Government intends to establish an independent economic umpire to ensure Councils achieve competitive urban land markets.	WRC is a Tier 1 council under the National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD), which confers certain responsibilities such as monitoring and providing business and housing development capacity. WRC fulfils these responsibilities via the Future Proof partnership. The Future Proof Strategy already identifies sufficient land supply for 30+ years, however,

Summary	Implications for WRC
The intent is progressed through a change to the Planning Bill to establish a new Urban Land Market Officer who is responsible for determining if urban land markets are competitive, to monitor and report on land market performance, and to advise central government and councils on actions to increase competitiveness. This sits alongside other changes in the Bill to address over-regulation, including preventing restrictions on private plan changes and regulatory relief for private landowners.	infrastructure is the key limiting factor in enabling development. Infrastructure provision is limited by funding and will be further constrained by any rating cap. Future Proof and the partner councils have limited power to influence the competitiveness of markets beyond ensuring supply and providing core infrastructure. It remains to be seen how this new independent economic umpire will interrelate with the NPS-UD responsibilities and whether any tools or funding may be provided via this mechanism. The functions and powers proposed to be provided to the officer apply to any acts or omissions by local authorities under the Planning Bill, but it remains to be seen how this would play out.

Further detail on other notable changes in Government's Amendment Papers

9. In addition to the announcements above, other notable changes proposed through the Amendment Papers include:
- Mana Whakahono ā Rohe:** removing provisions that provide for existing or initiated MWāR to be carried over to the new system. Instead, iwi may request a 'participation agreement'. The Bill does not expressly require a local authority to enter an agreement because an iwi authority makes that request. The agreements may address how iwi authorities participate in consultation processes under the relevant Act. They may also address local authority engagement concerning implementation of Treaty settlement redress. The provisions do not establish a general iwi participation role across every consent or permit decision. The new mechanism therefore differs materially from MWāR.
 - Indigenous biodiversity:** changes to goals to replace the requirement for "no net loss in indigenous biodiversity" with a goal that requires the "protection of significant indigenous biodiversity".
 - Te Ture Whaimana:** specific provisions recognise Te Ture Whaimana as the primary direction-setting document for the Waikato and Waipā Rivers, providing for Te Ture Whaimana in its entirety to become part of relevant regional spatial plans, land use plans, and natural environment plans. Te Ture Whaimana also prevails over inconsistent provisions within specified instruments where those provisions give effect to Te Ture Whaimana. These include national instruments, regulations, regional spatial plans, land use plans, natural environment plans, water services standards, and water conservation orders. The overall effect is a significant statutory reaffirmation and implementation clarification. Te Ture Whaimana retains its settlement foundation while gaining an

explicit operating position throughout the replacement system. For WRC, the practical significance extends across spatial planning, regulatory planning, consents, permits, standards, monitoring, and other relevant statutory functions.

- **Environmental limits:** provisions substantially restructure the limits regime.
 - **National Standards:** expanded powers will enable standards to direct local-authority functions, plan content, natural-resource management processes and aspects of permitted-activity monitoring and cost recovery.
 - **EPA functions:** changes that allow the Minister to delegate functions to monitor the implementation and effect of this Act (including any regulations in force under it) and national instruments, to the Environmental Protection Authority.
 - **System architecture:** provisions contain extensive changes concerning national direction, plan hierarchy, Treaty-settlement protections, iwi participation, system monitoring, ministerial intervention, enforcement and transition from the RMA.
 - **RMA repeal and commencement:** the Planning Bill provisions provide for repeal of the RMA by Order in Council and contains detailed commencement, savings and transition provisions.
 - **Offshore renewable energy:** provisions ensure the Bills are integrated with the offshore renewable-energy permitting regime.
 - **Customary rights and wāhi tapu:** provisions address customary marine title, protected customary rights, protected customary activities and wāhi tapu.
 - **Climate effects:** provisions exclude consideration of specified adverse climate effects from greenhouse-gas emissions while permitting consideration of positive emissions-reduction effects.
10. In addition, opposition parties introduced Amendment Papers. There were 35 Amendment Papers in total for the Planning Bill, and 46 for the Natural Environment Bill. Other parties' Papers were not successful at Committee of the Whole House stage.
11. Opposition papers that were unsuccessful include:
- (a) **Regulatory relief:** proposing removing regulatory-relief provisions from both Bills, while other papers proposed tightening the threshold for relief.
 - (b) Strengthening the role of **environmental limits** in regional spatial plans, national direction, national standards and private plan changes.
 - (c) Removing barriers to **land-use controls and resource-management tools**;
 - (d) retaining broader **urban-form, landscape, green space and urban-tree considerations**;
 - (e) reintroducing a **precautionary principle** requiring decision-makers to favour caution and environmental protection where information is uncertain or inadequate;
 - (f) stronger **biodiversity protections**, including alternative objectives such as "maintenance", "no loss", and broader protection of significant indigenous vegetation, fauna habitat and wetlands;
 - (g) removing or narrowing the proposed **climate-effects exclusion** and requiring greater consideration of emissions-reduction plans.

Timing of impact of legislation and WRC responses

12. It will take time to work through the Government's Amendment Papers to understand the implications in more detail. In the meantime, there are three areas that staff will be actioning:
13. Immediate changes to consenting: Once passed into law, we expect changes that would have an immediate impact on WRC's consenting and compliance functions will come into force **one month** after enactment. Changes are expected to be targeted and narrow, and relate to notification tests for consent applications, restrictions on the types of effects that may be considered when processing consent applications, extensions to consent durations, and new principles that apply to decision-making.
14. Regional spatial planning requirements: Concurrently, WRC staff are fulfilling a coordinating role with territorial authority partners on first steps towards joint regional spatial planning. An inventory of key spatial information prepared by WRC staff in 2024 stands the region in good stead regarding required information elements for a regional spatial plan. The key first action now required is drafting a process agreement as per the Planning Bill's direction, which directs how the region will work together on regional spatial planning. Staff across the region are in the formative stages of establishing a up a nimble and responsive structure to coordinate matters through.

Further areas central government is developing

15. The Government has also released an 'illustrative draft' of the national policy direction that supports implementation of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill, for discussion. Staff are reviewing the illustrative draft in the context of expecting much more detailed direction to come from national standards which are expected to be released later in 2027.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

16. While there has been a lot of last minute government information and decision making as the two new planning system Bills move through parliament, there is still much more detail expected to come in the form of more specific government direction through secondary legislation (the National Policy Direction and related national standards). Staff will continue to keep up to speed with changes and report back what is known.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

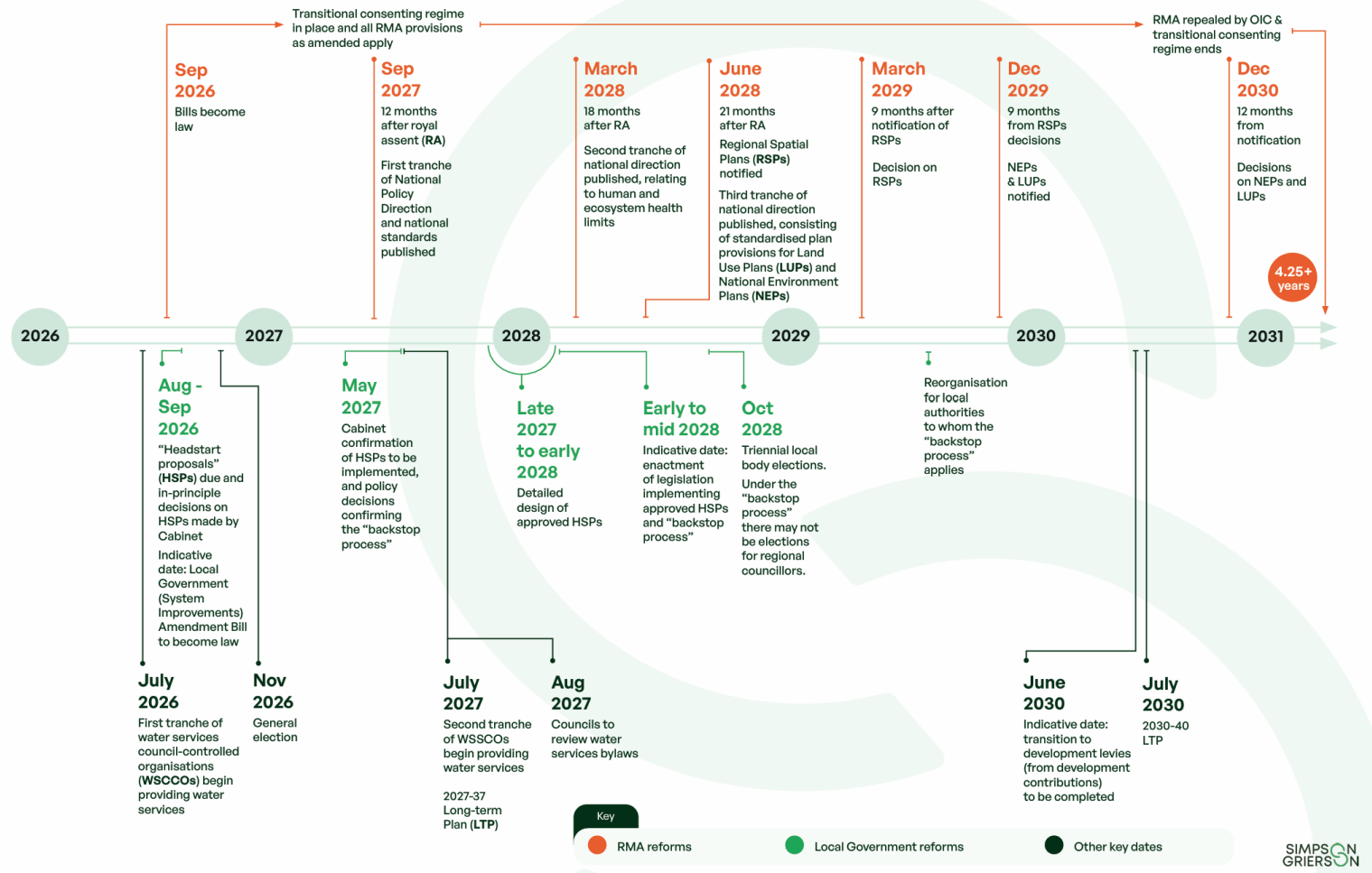
17. Government Amendment Papers:
 - (a) [Government Amendment Paper for Natural Environment Bill](#)
 - (b) [Government Amendment Paper for Planning Bill](#).
18. The full list of Amendment Papers, including opposition party Amendment Papers - [Natural Environment Bill amendment papers](#), [Planning Bill Amendment papers](#).

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Government reform timelines provided by Simpson Grierson – (Doc # 38618863)** [↓](#)

Attachment 1: Government reform timeline provided by Simpson Grierson

Timeline for RMA & Local Government Reforms



6.5 SUBMISSIONS SUMMARY REPORT SEPTEMBER 2026

Rā | Date: 28 August 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Miffy Foley, Team Leader - Strategic And Spatial Planning

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

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

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

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the *Submissions Summary Report September 2026* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 17 September 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

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

ĒTAHI ATU TAKE | OTHER MATTERS

5. There a number of bills and amendment bills being considered by the government in the final sitting days prior to the election, including the Natural Environment and Planning Bills and the Local Government (Systems Improvement) Amendment Bill. Staff will continue to monitor the implementation and progression of these legislative changes and will provide advice to the Committee where implications for Council functions, regulatory instruments, funding arrangements or future advocacy opportunities are identified.

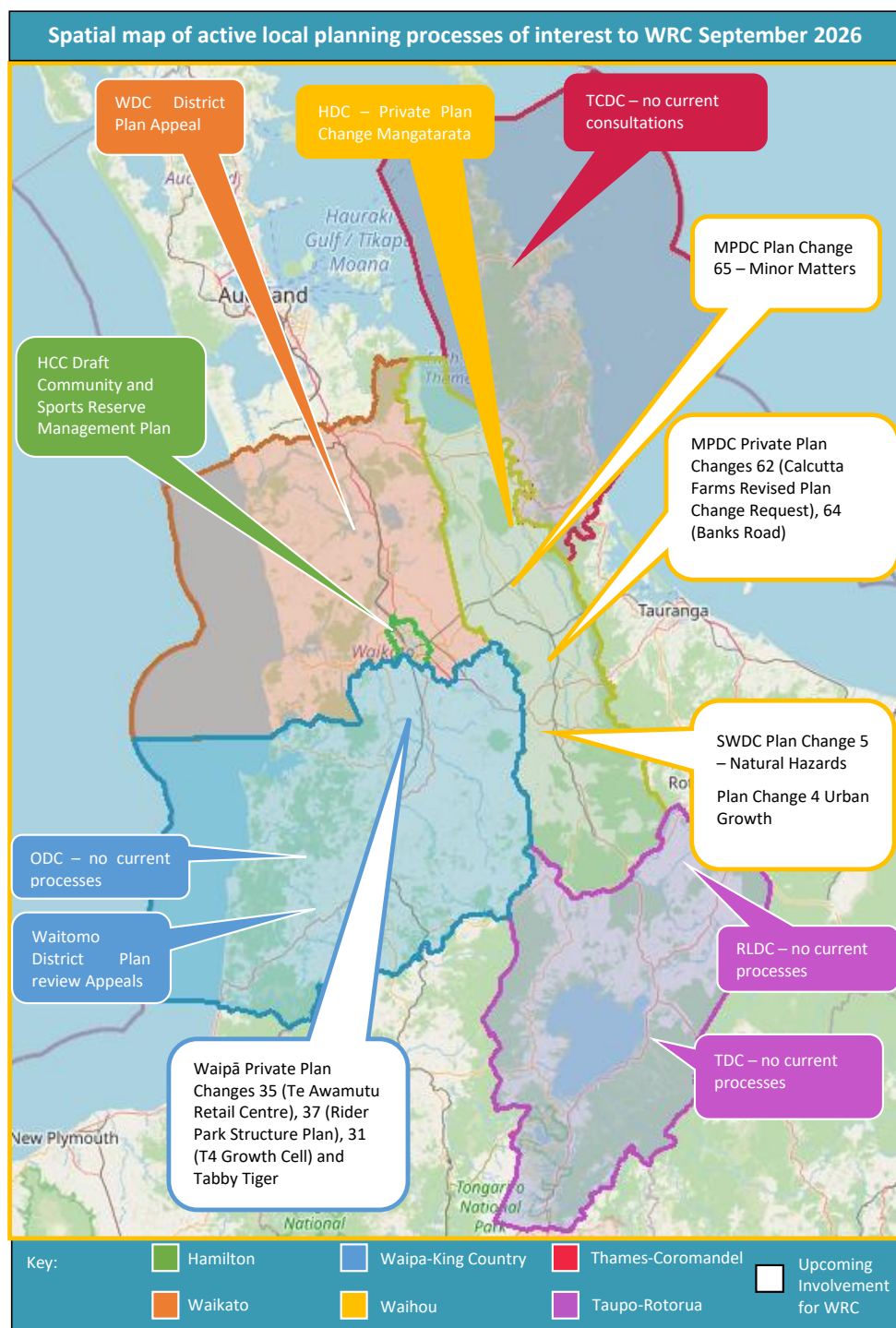
WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

6. This report provides an update on central government submission opportunities, recent legislative developments, and district plan processes in which the Council is involved. These reports are provided regularly to the Committee.

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Spatial map of active local planning processes - September 2026 (Doc #38573043) [↓](#)
2. District Plannig and Central Government processes - September 2026 (Doc #38574717) [↓](#)
3. Map of Fast Track Applications - September 2026 (Doc #38573212) [↓](#)

Attachment 1



District Planning processes by territorial authority**Hamilton City Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Community and Sports Reserves Management Plan	Submission	The Draft Plan covers Hamilton's parks that are used for community and recreation purposes. It replaces several older community and sports reserve plans, creating a single, up-to-date approach for managing reserves across Hamilton.	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.

Hauraki District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Private Plan Change Mangatarata	Pre-notification	This plan change aims to rezone rural land to enable a rural lifestyle/rural residential development of approximately 450 lots at Mangatarata.	Staff have had initial discussions with the consultant and provided preliminary advice. Notification is currently expected in early 2027.

Matamata Piako District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Calcutta Farms - Revised Plan Change Request - Plan Change 62	Pre-notification	The revised plan change proposes to rezone approximately 20 hectares of rural land at the eastern edge of Matamata (south of Tauranga Road/SH24) to General Industrial Zone.	Pre-notification engagement. Staff are assessing the proposal.
Private Plan Change 64 - Banks Road	Submission	This seeks to rezone approximately 26.3 hectares of land near the southeastern edge of Matamata from Rural Zone to Residential Zone. PC64 is consistent with the Future Residential Policy Area and the Banks Road to Mangawhero Road Structure Plan.	The plan change was notified on 25 August and is open for submissions until 22 September. Staff are reviewing the documents.

South Waikato District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 5 - Natural Hazards	Pre-notification	This will consolidate provisions relating to natural hazards into one chapter, as per the National Planning Standards. The plan change will map urban flood hazard risks as per the WRPS.	SWDC will progress this plan change as this topic is automatically exempt from the plan stop direction from central government.
Plan Change 4 Urban Growth	Submission	Plan change to implement the growth strategy in the Putaruru, Tirau and Tokoroa.	The plan change was notified on 22 July 2026 with submissions closing on 2 September 2026. Staff prepared a submission for consideration by the Submission Subcommittee on 2 September 2026.

Waikato DC

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
WDC District Plan Review	Appeal	WDC undertook a full review of the Waikato District Plan. WRC submitted on a number of aspects and participated in the hearing process.	The remaining unresolved appeal that WRC is a party to relates to conservation lots/rural subdivision. Draft consent orders were lodged with the Environment Court. The Judge has asked for further information relating to scope.

Waipa District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Proposed Private Plan Change 37- Rider Park Structure Plan	Submission	Proposal to rezone 94ha of land on the eastern fringe of Cambridge/Leamington for residential and commercial development. Proposal brings forward C5 Cambridge growth cell from post-2035 for development now.	Submission lodged. The summary of submissions was notified on 30 July. Staff reviewed and determined there was no need to prepare a further submission.

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Proposed Private Plan Change 31 - Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell	Pre-notification	This proposes to rezone the T4 growth cell on the western side of Te Awamutu from Deferred Residential to Residential Zone. The T4 growth cell is 29ha and is currently identified in the Waipa District Plan for residential development beyond 2035.	Submission lodged. Awaiting the summary of submissions.
Draft Private Plan Change 32 - Tabby Tiger	Pre-notification	Private plan change to rezone 33 hectares of land between Raynes and Lochiel Roads from Rural to Airport Business Zone (Agri-Tech Precinct).	Plan change application lodged in September 2024. Waipā DC has requested further information from the applicant.
Proposed Private Plan Change 35 - Te Awamutu Retail Centre	Awaiting decisions	The plan change seeks to amend the provisions of the Waipā District Plan for the Te Awamutu Large Format Retail Centre at 670 Cambridge Road, Te Awamutu. It also proposes to rezone the nearby land at 638 Cambridge Road from Medium Density Residential to Commercial Zone and to include this land as part of the centre.	Hearing was held on 11 August 2026. There was no need for WRC to attend, as the applicant had undertaken the additional flood modelling sought in WRC's submission and the submission points had been addressed.

Waitomo DC

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Waitomo DC Plan Review	Appeal	Waitomo DC is undertaking a full review of its district plan.	WRC's appeal relating to future urban zoning in areas of natural hazard risk has been resolved through direct negotiations. WRC joined aspects of Forest and Bird's appeal relating to the removal of indigenous vegetation in areas of natural features and landscapes. Direct negotiations have been ongoing between Waitomo DC and Forest and Bird with mediation scheduled for the coming months.

Central Government Proposals - Current processes

Process	What is it?	Current status
Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill	The government has introduced two bills to replace the RMA - a Planning Act and Natural Environment Act. The new legislation will be based on the enjoyment of property rights.	The Select Committee report was released on 20 July. The Bills completed their second readings on 4 August 2026. On 20 August, the government announced further amendments to the Bills. The Bills completed Committee of the Whole House stage in late August. September remains the target timeframe for enactment before the election.
Local Government (Management of Local Authorities) Amendment Bill	The purpose of this bill is to provide the mayor and elected councillors with the mandate to more effectively govern and control the activities of their local authority.	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.
Climate Change Response Amendment Bill	The Bill includes a range of amendments to support the operation of the Climate Change Response Act 2002 (CCRA) and the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). The Bill includes amendments across three key areas: • Adaptation planning – ensuring councils prepare adaptation plans for priority areas that support resilience to climate change • Supporting the operation of the ETS – including supporting governance of the ETS secondary market, and providing a way for new types of carbon removals, or new emissions sources, to be added to the ETS in the future • Efficiency changes to the CCRA – amending complex or duplicative requirements.	At first reading stage.
MCERT - Consultation on provisions in the Hamilton City Operative District Plan	The government is consulting on the investigation report commissioned by Minister for RMA Reform into various provisions within the Hamilton City Operative District Plan covering: - Mandatory electric vehicle charging infrastructure - Cycle and micro-mobility parking requirements - Deep soil planting rules - Urban tree canopy rules - Building design controls.	Staff have reviewed the investigation report and changes being considered and have determined that a submission is not required.

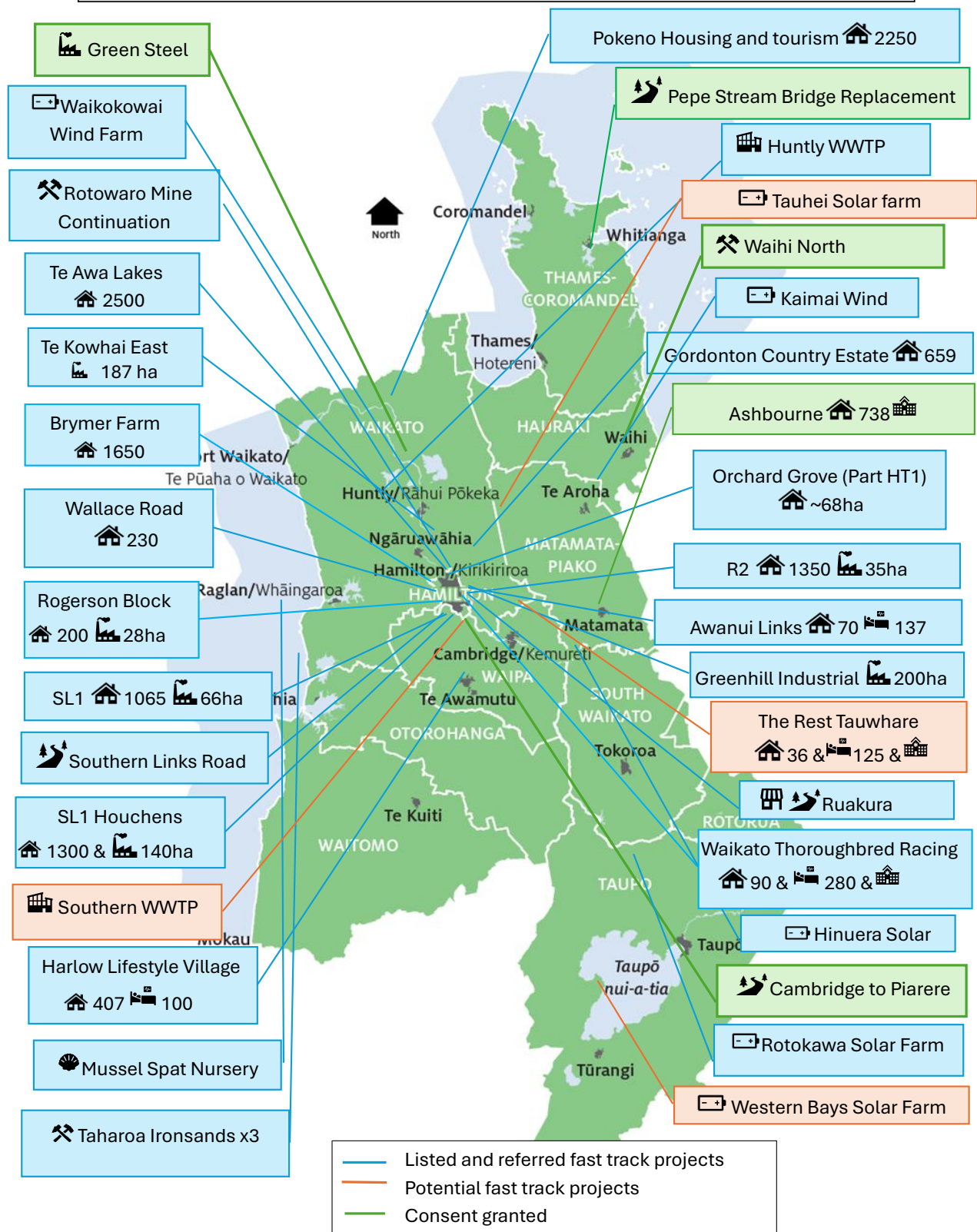
Process	What is it?	Current status
	The government is considering whether to make regulations to modify/remove these provisions from the District Plan.	
MCERT – Testing the approach to National Policy Direction	The government has released an illustrative policy document which provides an early example of how National Policy Direction under the new RM system could operate. It has been organised around housing and development, infrastructure, primary production, resources, and public values to reflect government priorities. Feedback is being sought on whether the proposed thematic structure is easy to understand, whether it provides a useful picture of how national direction could work, and whether there are priorities, gaps, or trade-offs that should be addressed.	Staff reviewing to determine if feedback is required.
MBIE Consultation on options to improve the efficiency of electricity distribution businesses	This consultation seeks feedback on options to improve the efficiency of electricity distribution businesses. Distribution networks will need to support increased electrification, new technologies, innovation, and provide reliable, resilient, and affordable services to consumers in the future. Feedback will inform potential reform to the regulatory framework for electricity distribution businesses.	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.
Water Services Authority – Taumata Arowai stormwater sector engagement survey	Taumata Arowai are engaging with the sector to inform how and when to use their stormwater tools and functions, and how they can work with other agencies that have a role in stormwater management.	Staff are reviewing to determine if a submission is required.
Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill	Under this Bill, councils will be subject to a “target range” of permissible rates increase each year. The cap will apply to a council's overall "rates price", being its total rates revenue (excluding rates for water supply, wastewater and stormwater - which are subject to separate economic regulation) as divided between the projected number of rating units (properties) in the district.	At first reading stage.

Process	What is it?	Current status
Emergency Management Bill	This Bill replaces the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002 and gives effect to the Government's response to the Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events.	The Bill has completed the third reading and will now go to the Governor-General for royal assent.

Other relevant processes - upcoming

Process	What is it?	Current status
Review of Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato	Te Ture Whaimana is the primary direction setting document for the Waikato River and activities within its catchment and was reviewed in 2011 with no amendments made. Under the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, clause 19, the review of Te Ture Whaimana is to be initiated no later than 10 years from the previous review. Therefore, this is the first major review of Te Ture Whaimana since it was established more than 10 years ago as a key part of the River Settlement.	Workshops have been held with WRA, Councillors and WRC staff to provide initial feedback. It is likely that formal comment will be sought first half of next year.

Waikato Region current and proposed Fast Track projects September 2026



7 PUBLIC EXCLUDED ITEMS

RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC

HE TŪTOHUNGA | RECOMMENDATION:

That in accordance with section 48(1) of the *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (Act) and the interests protected by section 6 or 7 of that Act, the public is excluded from the following parts of this meeting. The general subject of the matters to be considered while the public is excluded, the reason for passing this resolution in relation to each matter, and the specific grounds for excluding the public are set out below:

Meeting item no. and subject	Grounds for excluding the public	Reason for excluding the public
7.1 - Update on Proposed Plan Change 1 and Proposed Waikato Regional Coastal Plan Appeals	s7(2)(g) of the Act - To maintain legal professional privilege	section 48(1)(a)(i) of the Act - the public conduct of the relevant part of the proceedings of the meeting would be likely to result in the disclosure of information for which good reason for withholding would exist under section 6 or section 7

8 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA

Unuhia, unuhia

Unuhia mai te uru tapu nui

kia wātea, kia māmā,

te ngākau, te tinana, te hinengaro,

i te ara takatū

Koia rā e Rongo

e whakairia ake ki runga

kia tina! TINA!

Haumi ē, hui ē, TĀIKI ē!

Draw on, draw on,

Draw on to the supreme sacredness

To clear, to free

our heart, body and soul

Our pathway prepared

Lo, there is peace

suspended high above

manifest!

draw together!

Affirm!