

Catchment Group Story

Tairāwhiti/Gisborne | JUNE 2025



Waimatā Catchment Group Restoration Project

Waimatā River, Gisborne

The Waimatā Catchment Group (WCG) has been operating for seven years. It's currently composed of 30 landowners, including intergenerational farmers, and five forestry companies. Together they work with local schools and the community on projects which will protect and restore the taiao/natural resource.

The group has an invested passion for biodiversity across coastal, freshwater, and terrestrial environments, including wetland restoration to attenuate storm flows, capture sediment from erosion-prone land, and provide habitat for rare wetland birds.

The voluntary contributions to WCG as an Incorporated Society have ensured its long-term success. The catchment includes the Pakarae and Pouawa Rivers, and the Waiomoko and Turihaua Streams, which directly influence the East Coast marine environment. These subcatchments cover approximately 38,000 ha, all severely impacted by erosion caused by Cyclone Gabrielle.





PHOTO CAPTIONS – Front page: 1. WCG members & students gather for the restoration planting day. **Page left: 2.** WCG, 'Wai Connection', & Makauri School students pose together after their successful planting working bee. **3.** Mahaki Mahinga Kai employees with Waimata Catchment Group & DOC attaching a lamprey pheromone detection filter to a waratah in Waimata River. **4.** A young student carrying stalks for planting. **Back page: 5.** Mahaki Mahinga Kai employees attaching a lamprey pheromone detection filter to a waratah in Waimata Awa with Matt Brady, Department of Conservation. **6.** WCG members guide tamariki during the planting working bee.

Education, Conservation & Community in Waimatā

'Wai Connection – Tatai Ki Te Wai' have worked with the WCG on a number of exciting projects since June 2024. The initial meeting with WCG Coordinators, Laura Watson and Shanna Cairns, highlighted the need to help train Steve Kendall from WCG, to take water samples using their SHMAK kit. Anne-Marie Vigeant, 'Wai Connection' Catchment Coordinator, has been working with Steve at designated sampling sites on a regular basis.



Īnanga Spawning & Fish Habitat Research

Regular visits to the awa/river by the team have been with Kirsty Gaddum, 'Wai Connection' Īnanga Spawning Programme Coordinator. Kirsty has been enlisting WCG volunteers to investigate the extent of the salt water wedge, the area where native Īnanga spawn along the river banks during spring high tides. This mapping identifies whether the riverbanks margins are suitable for the adult Īnanga to lay their eggs, as well as understanding whether these areas would benefit from riverside plantings, and temporary artificial spawning habitat. In addition to these surveys, Kirsty invited Matt Brady, Department of Conservation Freshwater fish expert, to Tairāwhiti to educate the catchment groups about various freshwater fish species and their habitat requirements, as well as carrying out some electrofishing surveys and fish identification using NIWA fish viewers. More recently, Matt has returned to Tairāwhiti to deploy pheromone filters to detect the presence of lamprey in some of the awa.



Restoration Planting

Sam Gibson worked with WCG and Makauri School to support a riverside restoration in the Waimatā catchment, where the cyclone had washed away the banks and previous restoration work. The team planted over 1,000 plants with the students, caught tuna/eels in hinaki/eel traps, spoke about the tuna's lifecycle and how they were impacted by the cyclone, showed the students the tuna and released them back to the river. Sam was invited due to his strong relationship with the WCG leaders in his previous role with New Zealand Landcare Trust, and he produced some stunning photographs of the event, showcasing the community spirit and planting achievements of the day. The day was finished off by roasting lamb tails and marshmallows over the fire.



From Classroom to Catchment

Amy Hardy delivers Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust's (MTSCT) – Whitebait Connection (WBC) school programme at Te Wharau School and Ilminster Intermediate Schools, teaching tamariki about Īnanga lifecycles and protection of this precious tāonga. The programme is delivered in class, and then out of the classroom with hands-on planting days, investigations of the saltwater wedge, and artificial spawning habitats. On these surveys, Te Wharau School identified banded kōkopu (one of the five native whitebait species) living in the stream running directly behind the kura leading into the Waimatā River.

Amy has also been working with Champion College and Gisborne Boys' High School, completing NCEA Biology achievement standards on the Waimatā River tributaries. Hana Hardy and Joe Palmer ('Wai Connection' Coordinators) are delivering MTSCT's Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) programme at Te Tapuwae o Rongokako, helping Te Wharau School connect upstream impacts to marine environments.



Community Wellbeing Initiatives

The importance of improving mental health was highlighted by almost all catchment groups in the region after a tough few years of cyclones, poor lamb prices, and plummeting forestry prices, so the 'Wai Connection' team decided to collaborate with Rural Support Trust to deliver a series of events to help meet the mental health needs of Waimatā. Anne-Marie Vigeant and Sam Gibson, delivered an event at Waimatā Hall where members of the WCG attended a one-day leather craft workshop. The event had a great turnout, including a number of farmers. Knife belts, breastplates for horses, and knife sheaths were among the most common items made. All feedback said it was great to get off- farm, catch up with friends, and do something creative together.

Next Steps



Their focus remains at a catchment-wide scale, using nature-based solutions to protect and enhance the awa/river and moana/sea, the receiving environment of land-based activities.



5

To learn more about Waimatā Catchment Restoration Project, or how 'Wai Connection – Tatai Ki Te Wai' is supporting them, please contact:

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6