

Catchment Group Story

Tairāwhiti/Gisborne | APRIL 2025

Whāngārā Community Catchment Group

Pakarae River, Waiomoko River, Pouawa River, and Turihaua River, Whāngārā

The Whāngārā Community Catchment Group (WCCG) has been operating for two years and comprises 30 landowners (including intergenerational farmers), five forestry companies, and Ngāti Konohi.

WCCG is committed to protecting and restoring the taiao, through collaborative projects with local schools and the community – notably wetland restoration.

Established as an incorporated society, WCCG ensures long-term sustainability through voluntary contributions. The catchment covers the Pakarae, Waiomoko, Pouawa, and Turihaua rivers, spanning approximately 38,000 ha of land severely impacted by Cyclone Gabrielle.

Its key objective is to use nature-based solutions to protect and enhance Te Tapuwae o Rongokako Marine Reserve, addressing the environmental challenges posed by widespread erosion, and ecosystem degradation.





PHOTO CAPTIONS – Front page: 1. Community volunteers helping with the Waiomoko saltwater wedge mapping. **Page left:** 2. WCCG member Paul Williams and 'Wai Connection' Coordinator Amy Hardy discussing native fish identification. 3. Dr Rebecca Eiers, Wetland Ecology, talking about wetland regeneration. 4. Sophie Land and helpers planting around Manaone Station wetland. 5. Wainui Beach School tamariki identifying freshwater macroinvertebrates as indicators of stream health. 6. 'Wai Connection' team member Anne-Marie Vigeant working with Wainui Beach School students to investigate the benefits of wetlands using an interactive 3D model. 7. Paddy Stewart, Acoustic Monitoring Consultant, placing acoustic monitors at strategic locations on Pouawa Station in the Whāngārā catchment. **Back page:** 8. Kirsty Gaddum (back) and Steph Gardner (front) mapping the saltwater wedge in the Pouawa River. 9. A view across the wetlands in the Whāngārā catchment.

Protecting Whāngārā: Collaborative Conservation Efforts

'Wai Connection – Tatai Ki Te Wai' have worked with the WCCG on a number of exciting projects since the 'Wai Connection' team started in June 2024.

Wetland Wānanga & Assessment

In November 2024, Dr Rebecca Eivers, Wetland Ecologist of Wai Kōkopu Consulting, led a valuable wetlands wānanga organised by 'Wai Connection' Catchment Coordinator, Anne-Marie Vigeant. The wānanga included field visits to a number of wetlands across the Whāngārā Catchment. This initiative was suggested by WCCG Co-facilitators, Sarah Williams and Steph Gardner, both local landowners keen to restore wetlands on their farms and support others doing the same.

Dr Eivers provided practical recommendations for multiple wetland habitats, which fostered a sense of achievability and optimism about restoring these ecosystems. At one site, a wetland that has retained its naturally high water table and has good hydrological connectivity to the Waiomoko River enables fish passage for migratory fish from the ocean. Potential outcomes from further restoration include recreating essential nesting habitat for threatened native wetland birds, such as matuku-hūrepo (bittern) and mātātā (fernbird), and spawning habitat for native fish species, such as banded kōkopu, and giant kōkopu, and kōaro. Importantly, restored wetlands would also help slow and detain floodwaters from the upper catchment during heavy rainstorms.

Acoustic Monitoring Survey

Paddy Stewart of Soundcounts, who was contracted to deploy 100 acoustic monitoring devices at strategic locations within the Whāngārā Catchment with the help of Sam Gibson, 'Wai Connection' Catchment Coordinator. The results of this survey showed the presence of critically endangered pekapeka (New Zealand long-tailed bats), nationally at-risk pūweto (spotless crakes), and mātātā (fernbird).

Recommendations from the survey included:

- » further planting around water bodies
- » increasing the number of ponds, to improve farm resilience and wildlife habitat for both bats and birds
- » continued use of automated monitoring equipment to better understand the behaviour of cryptic wildlife species, and improve outcomes for wildlife.

Education & Action for Īnanga Habitat

Other projects have included regular saltwater wedge mapping to identify Īnanga spawning habitat. The Īnanga Spawning Programme Coordinator, Kirsty Gaddum, enlisted group volunteers to paddle various awa to investigate the extent of where seawater and freshwater meet, and where Īnanga spawn during spring high tides. Mapping identifies whether the streamside margins are suitable for adult Īnanga to lay their eggs and whether these areas would benefit from riparian plantings and temporary artificial spawning habitat.

Kirsty invited Matt Brady, Department of Conservation freshwater fish expert, to Tairāwhiti to educate the group about freshwater fish species and their habitat, as well as carrying out electrofishing surveys where group members learned identification skills in the NIWA fish viewers.

He Awa Ora, He Tai Ora (HAOHTO) delivered educational programmes at Whāngārā School and Wainui Beach School through the delivery of Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust's (MTSCT) Whitebait Connection (WBC) programme. This programme is delivered by 'Wai Connection' Catchment Coordinators, Amy Hardy and Hana Hardy. Tamariki learn about Īnanga, their life cycle, identifying spawning zones and habitats, and what we can do to protect them. The programme combines classroom learning with planting days, investigations of the saltwater wedge, and artificial spawning habitats.

Also included, was planting around a sizable wetland at Mangaone Station that Sophie Land and her family have fenced off and are restoring. This provides a model for other restoration projects in the catchment.

Next Steps



The WCCG are looking to pull together the environmental baseline monitoring carried out with 'Wai Connection' to inform its future strategy and direction. Key areas of focus include:

- » management of animal pests
- » restoration of habitat for terrestrial and freshwater native fauna species
- » restoration of inanga spawning zones

The strategy will be developed through workshops with the local hapū, farmers, and foresters, interwoven with mātauranga Māori principles. The group will continue to work with Amy Hardy and Hana Hardy through the MSCT education programmes with local schools. It's also looking to improve communication through the use of social media and the development of its Facebook page.



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To learn more about Whāngārā Community Catchment Group, or how 'Wai Connection – Tatai Ki Te Wai' is supporting them, please contact:

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