

The availability and quality of water in our catchment underpins and reflects the health and prosperity of our people. Water is vital to us all, it is a source of life and food, and for iwi it is also central to their identity. We are all connected to it, rely on it, and perhaps take for granted how much it shapes our lives.

Managing land and water better is a matter of urgency. We all know that the health of our waterbodies depends on what we do on the land and we all share responsibility for that as tangata tiaki – in short as New Zealanders.

The chapter of the Natural Resources Plan that will result from this work will be the cumulative product of a collaborative process which began more than three years ago and has been led by the Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee. The Whaitua committee consists of a broad range of [community representatives](#) including farmers, householders, iwi, Councillors (both District and Regional), business owners, scientists, recreationalists and environmentalists.

The committee was formed partly in response to the government's new freshwater management regime for New Zealand, which is set out in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management or [NPS-FM](#). This includes minimum standards for freshwater that regional councils must seek to achieve, so that the overall water quality in a region is maintained or improved. This document describes the ways that we in the Ruamāhanga catchment want to manage our water now and for future generations in a way that is fair, efficient and accountable. This is done by using a range of integrated tools, policies, and strategies to improve our management of land and water.

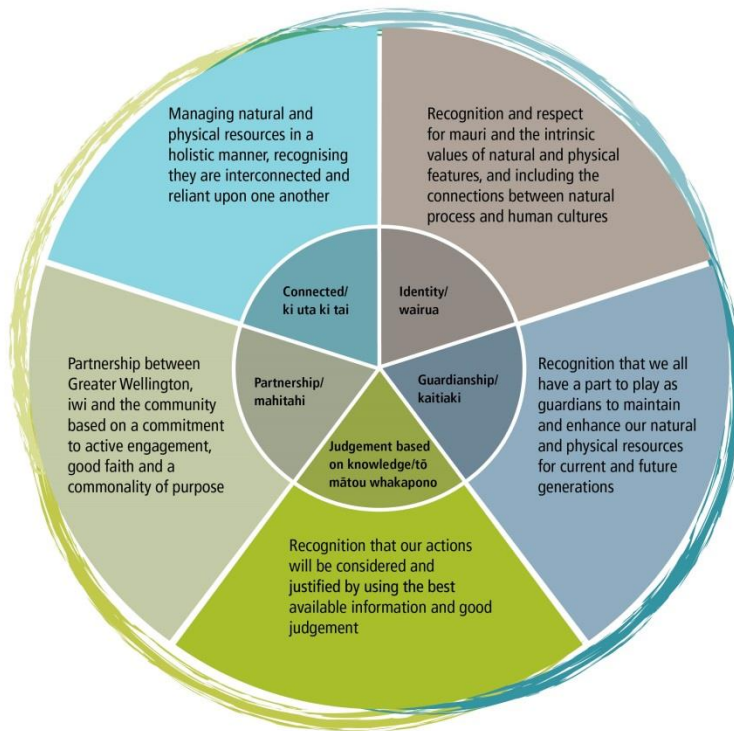
The NPS establishes a National Objectives Framework (NOF). This contains a set of optional values (things that the community want water in their region to be used for, such as swimming, irrigation and economic or commercial development), as well as two mandatory 'national values' (ecosystem health and human health for recreation). The NPS sets a number of bottom lines for key attributes for the mandatory values, and directs how councils are to go about setting objectives for the state of our waterbodies and related limits on takes and discharges; on improved decision making; and on managing within those limits, including better practices and better means of allocation.

The purpose of the committee has been to facilitate community and stakeholder engagement in the development of a Whaitua Implementation Programme (WIP). A WIP is a non-statutory report to Greater Wellington Regional Council which will contain recommendations for specific plan provisions and work programmes for the integrated management of land and water resources within the whaitua boundary. The WIP will contain both regulatory and non-regulatory proposals.

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee has operated in partnership with tangata whenua and our recommendations were guided by the five following principles:

- Ki uta ki tai – interconnectedness
- Wairua – identity
- Kaitiaki – guardianship

- To matou whakapono – judgement based on knowledge; and
- Mahitahi – partnership.



The identity and wellbeing of Wairarapa’s two iwi; Rangitāne and Ngāti Kahungunu is directly associated with Te Awa Tapu o Ruamāhanga (the sacred Ruamāhanga River) and its many tributaries. From the headwaters to the sea, local iwi and hapū (families associated with a particular area and marae) identify with the river system as a source of mana (pride and strength) and mauri (vitality and sustenance). Iwi have a traditional relationship with the catchment which is being limited by changes in water quality and quantity. In addition to the direct effects of changing water quality on community health, economic and social wellbeing that they share with the whole catchment, local Māori point to a decline in mahinga kai (traditional food sources) and their ability to interact with water for cultural and spiritual purposes.

These traditional relationships of Māori with water are recognised in the Resource Management Act (RMA) and NPS-FM as matters of national importance. More recently Wairarapa’s Treaty Settlement has given local recognition of the iwi relationship with the catchment through establishment of an ongoing role for iwi in the governance of Wairarapa Moana and the Ruamāhanga River. Integration of iwi perspective in catchment planning is critical to the work of the Whaitua committee who have been working with local kaitiaki and marae communities to ensure that Māori values are recognised and provided for in the Ruamāhanga WIP.

A fundamental basis of this process has been the adoption of the collaborative approach to decision making. The collaborative model has given an unprecedented opportunity for the people of the catchment to imagine goals and put into reality methods to achieve those goals, whether they be improved water quality or quantity, or the economic or cultural prosperity that comes from balanced, sustainable and efficient functioning of the catchment.

The community has been instrumental in contributing to how land and water resources will be managed.

The catchment has diverse habitat and water quality from the mountainous upper catchments in the Tararua ranges, to the estuarine Lake Onoke. Lake Wairarapa is the largest lake and surrounding wetland area in the lower North Island. A brief [history](#) of the Wairarapa and description of the catchment, and water quality values can be found [here](#).

Information collected during this process suggests that there are some issues within the catchment that need to be addressed, key points being:

- The natural state of rivers and lakes has been modified such that low flows occur in our rivers that could harm the ecology & natural habitat, and that affects our ability to use rivers for recreation and cultural purposes.
- Reliability of irrigation water supply is decreasing.
- Water quality fails to meet national objectives in some places in rivers.
- Water quality fails to meet the national bottom lines in Lake Wairarapa and Lake Onoke.
- Water quality does not meet the expectations of the community in some places.
- The current water allocation mechanism is not the most efficient or equitable method.
- Effects of climate change are expected to become more pronounced, which will exacerbate flooding issues, droughts, irrigation reliability, and habitat loss.
- Iwi values and interests are not well recognised in the current water management system.

The quantity, quality, and flow patterns of water within a catchment are affected by a complex mix of criteria from land use change to water allocation and abstraction. The historic draining of wetlands and deforestation in the catchment to produce farming land has given us economic opportunity, but also has negative effects in terms of the hydraulic functioning of the catchment, giving 'peakier' flows, higher flood flows, and lower low flows. The complexity of the way in which the catchment works requires that the solution to catchment problems is also complex.

Things are always changing – new agricultural methods, expectations on water quality, and even the environment itself is changing through climate change. Against this backdrop we have to negotiate a way forward that allows for change and innovation, and achieves the community's goals and visions. This will require a diverse range of methods from small, immediate changes, to long-term education and valuing of water.

Since 2013, we asked you, the community, what is important about our water ways? Your [responses](#) identified a range of [issues](#) within the catchment and helped us to form our [community values](#), our vision and [outcomes](#) for the Ruamāhanga Whaitua. People throughout the catchment told us that improved water quality, along with a sustainable economic and ecological future is important. So are recreational and cultural opportunities in and around our waterways. We all want a resilient and connected community who take responsibility for the water flowing through our catchment.

From what we heard we developed our vision for the Ruamāhanga River catchment: ***Where water glistens***. This aspirational vision describes a future where the community is engaged and proactive in the long term sustainability of the catchment as a whole.

A place where:

- we are all connected to the water so we are all equally responsible for creating a more natural state;
- holistic land and water management creates resilience;
- recreational and cultural opportunities are enhanced;
- there is a sustainable economic future;
- water quality is improving;
- ecological enhancement is sustainable;
- Ko wai, Mo wai, No wai: waterways connect communities, there is a sense of identity for people and water;
- there is safety and security of (drinking) water supply.

To achieve this vision we are adopting the following process:

- The formation of Freshwater Management Units (FMUs), which break down the catchment into a number of zones depending on the soil, land use, topography, rainfall etc. Each of these zones will have different management requirements.
- Analysis of the water quality in comparison to the requirements of the National Objective Framework (NOF) and other community aspirations.
- Reviewing the allocation mechanisms in the catchment and comparing them to the ability of the catchment to sustainably provide water for irrigation, ecological, cultural, and recreational purposes.

We need to test management options to help understand how the catchment will react to any changes, and what the cost implications of those changes would be. To do this Greater Wellington Regional Council established the [collaborative modelling project](#), which brought together experts from many subject areas to model the catchment from top to bottom.

We formulated [scenarios](#) that test the reaction of the catchment to various triggers like riparian planting, farm mitigation methods, and climate change effects. From this we are in the process of compiling a strategy of management actions that will be delivered by methods and policies within the Natural Resources Plan and that will form the backbone of the Whaitua chapter of the Plan.

The Whaitua chapter involves the contribution of a great deal of time, much of which has been voluntary, from both the committee and the project team. It would not be possible without the input from the community and the expert advice of modellers and scientists. It is truly a collaborative venture that we hope sets the scene for progressive improvements in the way in which we respect the importance of water to our community and fulfil our kaitiaki obligations so that future generations can enjoy and prosper from our *Glistening Waters*.

*Presentations and reports of interest can be found on the website:*  
<http://www.gw.govt.nz/ruamahanga-whaitua-presentations-and-reports/>.