

Wai Kōkopu Chairs Report

Me mahi tahi tatou mo te oranga o te katoa – we must work together for the wellbeing of all!

This report covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It is my third report as Chair of Wai Kōkopu and the fourth for Wai Kōkopu as an organisation.

Our Setting

Wai Kōkopu is reliant on the ongoing support of landowners and managers within the catchment: our funders, our Wai Kōkopu team including contractors, board members and volunteers and the wider community. To make a difference we need to ensure that we all have a strong commitment to the kaupapa of working together over the next generation to restore and replenish the Waihi estuary; Pongakawa, Kaikōkopu and Wharere rivers and surrounding lands, contributing waters and associated biodiversity.

Our three pou are about reducing sedimentation; reducing total nitrogen (by 66%); lowering phosphorus (by 30%) and bringing E coli down (by at least 50%).

This year has been a year of ongoing focus to ensure we can meet our commitments to producing environmental plans, retiring sensitive land, enhancing fish passageways in our streams and working towards the enhancement of the catchment. I want to acknowledge all here today and those that have supported Wai Kōkopu over the past year and prior and in particular, our funders, lighthouse farmers, fellow board members and our team of contractors that have committed to the ongoing work of Wai Kōkopu.

We would be extremely challenged to achieve much without significant support from TECT, BayTrust and MPI and close working relationships with our lighthouse farmers, BoP Regional Council and our wider community.

Our Work Programme

Our work over the past year has been a combination of programmes of delivery, education and working with others. I have also highlighted recurring areas of focus from previous AGMs and areas where we have not been successful in our ambitions (eg, Catchment Model). The areas of focus and programmes of work over the past year have included:

1. Producing newsletters and enhancing our online presence to tell the stories about the work that we are doing. Not surprisingly, the majority of our supporters are located in the Bay of Plenty Region with most aged between 25 and 65. Each month we have had a series of posts in areas covering our activities such as revegetation and planting and wider updates that would likely benefit land management such as technology, waste water systems and other enablers that reduce environmental impacts. Over time, our communications have shown increased levels of engagement through distinct types of advertising, use of LinkedIn and Facebook. We note that a lot of feedback is being generated on LinkedIn, which may have good value for our supporters. We have also produced more short-term videos and covered off local events such as plantings at Pongakawa School. On a success area we note that WKI/AgVice won the ArcGIS Mapping Competition in New Zealand in 2023.
2. Holding field days and seminars and presenting to the Monitoring and Operations Committee of BoP Regional Council. We also supported other organisations such as the BoP Farm Forestry Association around their events in the catchment to provide information on what good practice looks like. These provide the tools and confidence for farmers to make changes in farm, horticulture and land management practices. Our major public facing activity was an Ag Summit on 13th March 2024 which over 200 people attended and provided an opportunity for lighthouse farmers to tell their story. This major event also raised the profile of what positive things can be embraced in the face of uncertain regulation at local and national levels. The seminar was titled - 'Our Choice: Better Farming, Better Business, Better Future' and the day demonstrated the myriad of ways in which farmers

can proactively build better businesses for themselves and enhance Te Taiao. The speakers were farmers, catchment leaders, and agribusiness - all operating individually, collectively, or part of value chains that are leading change and showing ways that NZ farmers, horticulturalists, foresters, and agriculture can create a future that is more vibrant, diverse, and secure.

3. Providing information on matters such as effluent treatment ponds and information on key areas of focus particularly around consent renewal reports which were produced for farms. These showed an assessment of the current situation and what good management looks like to avoid future challenges and how the warrant of fitness approach will assist farmers over the next few years. The reports were very comprehensive and covered areas such as descriptions of current effluent systems, consent action summary, things to improve on and good effluent infrastructure. Detailed elements of the reports included risk areas, assessed effluent capacity, soils, an effluent storage calculator and requirements to ensure system compliance.
4. The formulation of a pest and weed strategy and the ability to join with others around implementation of this. This has been a significant piece of work which is ongoing. Meetings and workshops have been held and our team has been actively engaging with parties around funding the delivery of the strategy, albeit likely in a series of components.
5. In early 2023 we sought feedback from farmers in the catchment around key areas of focus and this has assisted in understanding which programmes to prioritise given available resources. Note this is a challenging area as it is reliant on balancing the needs of land owners for support against the resources we have to deliver these. This was through interviews and also a farmers' strategy meeting which was held on 14 September 2023 attended by around twenty people. This provided guidance on what information and support would assist farmers to make ongoing changes to reduce their environmental footprint while maintaining viable farm operations. Wai Kōkopu is in constant dialogue with farmers to ensure that we are listening and assisting where there is an alignment of good practice and resources to support these.
6. Delivering land retirement programmes. Wai Kōkopu has been a strong advocate for the Timata planting method as we believe it can produce strong revegetation outcomes in sensitive catchment areas at lower costs than other planning methods and we have done this through advocacy and information and there is a video and technical report to support the Timata method. There is more work required around the need to build local revegetation teams locally and engage the community.
7. We endeavoured to get a full Catchment Model built which could assist in deciding on the most economic and effective remediations in the catchment. This would have provided further information on Building Catchment Resilience (BCR) and could have created a world-first catchment decision-support tool to address the complex, inter-connected needs of people, land and water we went some way to explore this project which developed an optimisation tool to support catchment planning in the context of where mitigation actions are undertaken, and costs involved. The actions are focused mostly on hillslope revegetation, gully remediation, wetland establishment and riparian management. The tool uses a procedure known as multi-objective simulated annealing, which supports complex decision making in the context of trade-offs among different variables (eg, cost, nitrogen, sediment). This process enables multiple optimised solutions to be compared, the constraints to be discussed, and good investment decisions to be made with an overarching plan in mind. I have highlighted this as this is something that may come back to be explored in the future if funding and wider support provided for it. We were not successful in endeavouring to fund it. The purpose would still be of benefit as it a catchment model attempts to show the range of mitigations that both satisfy the council approach (ie, need to meet NPSFM etc.), while also guiding farmers as to the wider benefit of any mitigations they might do on their farm, in a cumulative manner, to help assist contaminant runoff. For example if they retire LUC 6e-7-8 or exclude stock from steep slopes and change land use

to natives or exotics this would provide carbon income, constrain the pastoral area and reduce both GHG and contaminants. It would have provided a visual, science-based approach at a catchment level, that demonstrates what needs to be done to both inspire farmers (that what they do at a spatial and systems level will have cumulative benefit) and also meet cumulative catchment contaminant limits, while also enhancing ecological outcomes, (of where should have natives vs exotics, and include biodiversity corridors where required). Another benefit of this catchment plan, it is a larger form of a farm plan that joins up council's drivers with farmers drivers, and ecological requirements in a manner that community can engage in.

8. In addition to our current contractors we also appointed a Rural Connector contractor to encourage improved and lower footprint farming systems by working alongside farmers who are passionate about making change for good. This position is working with our contractors across all of our programmes to deliver primary sector projects that accelerate landowners towards a sustainable future.

Key Focus Areas

Our kaupapa is an intergenerational project and we note the commitment of those who are prepared to review their practices in the catchment to improve areas such as:

1. Better riparian management such as stock exclusion from riparian zones.
2. Strategic use of N and P and reducing amount applied at any one time and applications not occurring in highly saturated soils.
3. System change (eg, dairy to beef, spring herd to autumn herd, regenerative focus, reducing stocking rates such as dairy cow numbers).
4. Focussing on land class related to the most suitable land use such as retirement of steep country to native or forestry.
5. More effective and resource efficient irrigation and effluent systems.
6. More diverse swards such as over sowing with more resilient species.

These and other processes are leading to farmers have greater knowledge of their properties' characteristics through improved monitoring and data collection and advice. Overall it is noted that change is one step at a time and ensuring that people have the confidence, information and support to make changes.

It has been a busy period with the Board and I note changes since our 2023 AGM. With the retirement of Andre Hickson and John Burke at last year's AGM we appointed Paul Hickson to the Board. Grendon Boynton has been unwell and has not been able to attend any board meetings and we have also had the resignation of Ross Bawden and Lilian Harly and the Board thanks them for their service. Given our slimmed down operating environment we are not proposing to appoint any additional board members but would consider coopting a person from the community to build out the connections and capability of the board.

While our annual financial report shows prudent use of the financial resources with a small surplus we cannot maintain the same level of delivery in our programmes due to a very low funding base. As reported previously I would invite the community to support us in our endeavours and funders to actively consider support as we move forward. As noted at last year's AGM this is an intergenerational programme and as Sir James Henare said, "we have come to far not to go further; we have done too much, not to do more".

The Future

In previous reports I have highlighted that change is not easy and when there are multiple challenges to family/whanau livelihoods then it is even more difficult. A key role for Wai Kōkopu is to have a community-led programme to replenish and revitalise the health of the Waihi Estuary. This is an intergenerational journey and there will be pressures and tensions along the way and it is important to acknowledge those that have stood up and said we must make changes to restore and replenish the Waihi Estuary; Pongakawa, Kai Kōkopu, and Wharere rivers and surrounding lands.

Over the next period key areas of focus for us must be to:

1. Ensure that we are meeting the goals that we have set.
2. Work closely with all of our funders.
3. Collaborate with other community, partner and stakeholder groups that share the same aspirations.
4. Further develop our relationships with iwi and ensure that we have strong and complementary alignment of work programmes.
5. Have more public facing in our programme and activities and engage and involve all in our communities around our programmes.
6. Strengthen and have closer working relationships with industry groups such as DairyNZ, Fonterra, Zespri, Beef and Lamb and forestry groups.
7. Support initiatives that address issues of climate change mitigation and adaptation.
8. Continue to advocate for approaches that provide for great environmental outcomes at lower costs such as detention bunds and planting in the upper catchment area.
9. Support initiatives that will enhance land use improvements, estuarine rehabilitation, riparian corridor plans, riparian, wetland and ngāhere (forest) restoration and establishment.
10. Connect landowners, hau kāinga, sector groups, volunteers, and communities to our projects, to our learnings and to each other.
11. Continue to facilitate the transfer of knowledge.
12. Facilitate access to funding, knowhow, and services to carry out the above work.

There has been a groundswell of activity around catchment groups nationally and also in the BoP Region. Critical will be our ability to work with other catchment groups around aligned programmes, effective use of resources and more joined up outcomes. Our funders have been a key anchor with our various work programmes and with an uncertain future around funds to support our ongoing work we are undertaking programmes of work that are supported by funding otherwise we will be limited in further progress in the catchment.

Through commitment and understanding of all parties we can continue to make progress around sustainable land use practice.

My thanks to fellow Board members Darryl Jensen, Michael Crawford, John Scimgeour and Paul Hickson and to our contractors Alison Dewes, June Mobley, John Burke, Hannah Fromont, Stef Kincheff, Guy Wilkins, Brian Sparrow, Debbie care, Rachel Mudge, Alanah Bunyard, Sarah Dudin, Graham West, Lesley Dodunski, Geoff Reid, Peter Russell and Sharon Searle

Nga mihi nui

Deryck Shaw

4 December 2024