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OUR VISION: WHERE WATER GLISTENS



The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee has reached a significant place on its journey to develop a community-led action plan for the Ruamāhanga River Catchment. Fact finding, investigation, data gathering, analysis - much learning and many, many conversations across the community have characterised the last twelve months.

“Our journey has brought us to a place where we can describe the Ruamahanga Catchment Community’s view about what they value, how important and special our land and water is to them,” said Peter Gawith, Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee Chair. “The community has engaged in a comprehensive conversation to narrow down its concerns about, and aspirations for, the future of land and water management for the Ruamāhanga River catchment.”

‘Ruamāhanga - where water glistens’ is an aspiration developed on behalf of the community following extensive discussions with those who have an interest in

land and water management in Wairarapa.

“As a farmer I use water wisely and look to maintain and improve the quality of soils while at the same time trying to make the business profitable. While farming is my business, the family-run land I live on is also my passion. We have farmed the same piece of land for more than 150 years and I know my children will continue to care for it into the future. My perspective is not unique in the Wairarapa.”

“Landowners aside we have a vibrant kaitiaki, energetic recreationalists and many people who value our shared waterways, public and private land just as passionately as I do. I have talked to people across the catchment. As a committee we have analysed public workshop sessions, group and individual discussions to develop a vision that captures a sense of what people want – and it is broadly similar.”

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee 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:

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

“The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee vision synthesises many of these discussions and will help the Whaitua Committee make informed decisions about the future of the catchment”.

Communities leading the way

Managing land and water resources in regional catchments is a national and regionally significant issue for urban and rural communities as well as regional and local councils.

Meeting the needs of current and future generations means taking action based on a clear understanding of what is important about land and water for these communities.

Greater Wellington Regional Council has taken an innovative approach to finding a way forward by establishing whaitua, or catchment management committees.

These community-led committees will bring local people together to agree shared goals for land and water management. Work has begun in greater Wellington’s Ruamāhanga (Wairarapa) and Te Awarua-o-Porirua catchments. A further three Whaitua Committees will be established across the Wellington region including one for Wairarapa’s eastern hill country.

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee (RWC) has been working to understand what the Ruamahanga River community

values and wants from land and water. They have created a community vision for land and water management following discussions across the catchment.

The next step is to test ideas and options that deliver this vision through land and water management practices. The RWC is working in partnership with the wider community and a range of experts in agriculture, biodiversity, tangata whenua perspectives, recreation, urban and economic interests to gather the essential information needed to prioritise objectives for land and water management.

This team of experts is creating a representation or ‘model’ of the current state of the catchment. The model can be used to show the potential impact of any changes that the community, through the committee, want to better understand.

In early 2017, the community’s objectives for land and water management will be translated into the Whaitua Committee’s recommendations to achieve their vision. These recommendations will



The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee has talked to communities across the catchment, beginning with people from Taeuru and Bideford at the Whangaehu Hall last year.

feed into the Ruamāhanga Whaitua Implementation Programme (WIP). This WIP will describe some rules specifically for the Ruamahanga River catchment.

The programme will be presented to the Greater Wellington Regional Council and Te Upoko Taiao committee for approval. The Ruamāhanga Whaitua will then have its own section in the GWRC

Natural Resources Plan –the legal, guiding document for the council.

Importantly the programme will also describe some ways to manage land and water that the Ruamāhanga Whaitua community want to undertake - ideas that reflect the passion our rural and urban community have for sustainable land and water management in our region.

Tackling the big issues

Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee member and Greater Wellington Regional Council Committee Chair, Chris Laidlaw, spoke on climate change to a crowd of over two hundred at a Sustainable Wairarapa organised event earlier this month.

“Developing a plan for integrated land and water management, that works now and into the future, needs careful consideration. The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee has to look at the local detail and character of the catchment. But the guiding document that we develop must also take account of the big picture: the natural state of waterways, historical modifications, the current and future national regulatory framework and the impacts of climate change.”

