

FINDING COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS

From its source in the Tararua Ranges the Ruamahanga River winds its way down the Wairarapa valley, through bush, farmland and towns until it meets the sea at Onoke Spit. It is joined by other rivers and streams on its journey.

The Ruamahanga River is enjoyed by swimmers, walkers and fishermen, supports town drinking and waste water needs, is used by farmers and valued for its spiritual significance. But the river carries pollutants and sediment eroded from some of the 130kms of river banks – affecting river habitat along its length. Water quality decreases as the river reaches the lower valley and the Wairarapa Moana wetlands.

Both urban and rural communities are responsible for the Ruamahanga River's water quality as David Holmes, Masterton District Council's representative on the Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee, local farmer and representative on a number of groups, well understands. He has had years of experience finding

solutions that balance community aspirations with social and cultural concerns and within acceptable financial budget levels.

"To my mind the No 1 concern across the catchment is discharge of treated wastewater into our rivers. And most people seem to agree that an acceptable solution is discharge to land which is where most district councils are moving to. Discussions have ranged about making this happen more quickly," says David.

"Questions around the natural character of the river and management techniques have raised discussion throughout the months. We have been discussing a way forward for the catchment effects on fish life and habitat, erosion control, as well as the need to protect our community and assets from flood risk. This is a really difficult nut to crack."

"Low flow in the rivers is another key concern expressed over time – but there is not necessarily public consensus about cause. Some

people blame those with water take consents. Some see that low rainfall due to a lack of westerly moving weather systems could be responsible for this – underground storage in aquifers may not be refilling. Whatever the cause of lower than desired river levels, suggestions about water metering have been put forward."

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee is working to understand how the catchment community wants land and water resources managed into the future. They will bring this information together into a guiding document for the Ruamāhanga River catchment. The committee has heard community concerns and is keen to hear solutions. They understand there is a long way to go in a relatively short timeframe.

"It is so important that we hear from as many people as possible to inform our decisions. Ultimately, some decisions will not suit everyone."

TALK TO US

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee has a vision for the Ruamāhanga River catchment - a Wairarapa where water glistens.

We all want a resilient and connected community that is responsible for the water flowing through our catchment. You can help shape the future of land and water management.

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee is asking for community feedback on a number of key questions:

- What is the fairest way of restricting water use during the summer?
- What do we need to do to make our rivers swimmable and how long should it take to get there?
- How should we manage rivers to improve natural character while safe guarding community assets, income and households?

Join the conversation online or talk to committee members at a meeting near you. In July and August meetings will be held in Pirinoa, Kopuaranga, Whangaehu, Gladstone, Featherston, Carterton, Masterton, Martinborough and Greytown.

Discuss land and water management with the committee:
Thursday 11 August Lion's club, Martinborough 6.30-8.30pm
Tuesday 16 August, WBS Room, Greytown Library 6.30-8.30pm

Want to know more?

Go to: <http://haveyoursay.gw.govt.nz/ruamahanga-whaitua>