

Maunga ki Tai

A newsletter from the

 Waikato River
 Authority

Boosting tuna numbers in the lower Waikato River

Manaaki Tuna, a collaborative project that is working towards enhancing the tuna population of the Waikato River, is now well underway. The project was developed by Waikato Tainui College for Research and Development in partnership with Waikato Raupatu River Trust and NIWA.

It is one of the largest projects to be funded by the Waikato River Authority.

The project is focusing on a number of key areas:

- Developing a Tuna Restoration Plan for the Waikato River – best practice guide that identifies and prioritises actions for restoration; and
- Restoring and enhancing the tuna (eel) populations of the Waikato River, through a combination of riparian habitat enhancement, eel transfers, and improved fish passage; and
- Supporting Waikato-Tainui in the collation of maatauranga o te tuna and development of a community tuna monitoring framework; and
- Supporting the implementation and monitoring of the Waikato River fisheries bylaws whose purpose is to ensure the sustainability of fisheries resources and recognise the cultural and traditional management practices of Waikato-Tainui.

Dr Sarah Jane Tiakiwai, Academic Director Waikato Tainui College for Research and Development says baseline tuna monitoring has been completed at nine sites throughout the Waikato-Tainui rohe, which will be work that will form the basis of developing the community monitoring framework.

“Habitat restoration is ongoing with two sites identified, restoration plans completed. Work is now underway and this year we are focusing on further habitat enhancement, eel transfers, collation of Waikato-Tainui eel matauranga and improving fish passage.

“Our relationship with the Waikato River Authority is strengthening all the time. We were fortunate to be funded for the Toku Awa Koiora project, an online learning tool attached to the Science Learning Hub which enabled our maatauranga to sit equally alongside the science about our tupuna awa. We have since been funded for the Manaaki Tuna project. These funding opportunities have enabled us to contribute positively to improving the health and wellbeing of our tupuna awa,” says Dr Tiakiwai.

MESSAGE FROM THE CE

As the Waikato River Authority gets underway with the process of deciding on what clean-up projects will be funded in 2015, an analysis of funding over the first four years shows a strong partnership with iwi.

Of the \$22 million dollars that has been distributed by the Authority so far, nearly \$10 million has gone to iwi or iwi partnership projects. This is an encouraging statistic and includes a number of funded projects of major scale. Iwi are generally now well positioned to play an even bigger role in the health and wellbeing of the river following the preparation of environmental management plans and fisheries plans.



Bob Penter
 Chief Executive



Long fin tuna captured in the lower catchment of the Waikato River for monitoring, which are ready to be measured and released as part of the Maanaki Tuna project being led by Waikato Tainui College for Research and Development.

New team members at the Authority

THE WAIKATO RIVER AUTHORITY IS SEEING SOME CHANGES IN PERSONNEL WITH RECENT APPOINTMENTS TAKING EFFECT IN SEPTEMBER.



New Authority team members (L-R) Jo Pikia, Keri Neilson and Michelle Hodges.

Keri Neilson has taken on the role of Funding Manager following Sean Newland joining Beca. Keri was previously with the Waikato Regional Council and took a leading role in the development of the Waipa Catchment Plan. Also joining the team is Michelle Hodges who is working in the policy area for the Authority. A further change has seen the recruitment of Jo Pikia who replaces Susan Stephens as Administration Manager. Susan has left to join the Waikato Raupatu River Trust in an exciting new role.

Meanwhile, chief executive Bob Penter has accepted an offer from the Waikato River Authority Board to extend his contract for another five years. Authority co-chair Hon John Luxton says the Board is very pleased to be able to lock in Bob's experience and expertise for the future.

"There will inevitably be some changes to the team over time, however the benefits of retaining a top-class chief executive are significant, both to the organisation and to the long-term task of seeing a restored and protected Waikato River."

The extension of the CE's contract was universally supported by the Board and has also been welcomed by the other river iwi chairs outside of the reappointment process, Rahui Papa from Waikato-Tainui, John Bishara from Tuwharetoa and Tiwha Bell from Maniapoto.

Hui held to inform Strategy project

The Waikato and Waipa River Restoration Strategy project team is making good progress and is currently focused on the Waipa catchment. It recently held a goal setting hui with representatives of catchment landowners, mana whenua and the River Restoration Forum. The well attended hui resulted in goals being set for cultural values, erosion and sedimentation, water quality, sustainable land management, fisheries and biodiversity. Project manager Keri Neilson says there will be similar hui held in the Upper Waikato within the next two to three months and contact will be made with stakeholders about this shortly.

The project's aim is to develop a five to 15 year action plan for the protection and restoration of the Waikato and Waipa Rivers. It is intended to guide all organisations involved in catchment restoration activities through identifying priority locations and actions in consultation with catchment stakeholders.

Further information is available on waikatoriver.org.nz.



Profiling the Waikato River Authority

A new video has been produced that outlines the work of the Waikato River Authority. The video is available on the front page of the Authority website waikatoriver.org.nz and is fronted by the co-chairs Tukoroirangi Morgan and Hon John Luxton.

Learning from Maurea Islands restoration

A project to begin restoration of the Maurea Islands in the main stem of the Waikato River near Rangiriri is nearing completion and at the same time providing valuable information for weed control at other planting projects.

The project was an undertaking between Waikato Raupatu River Trust and NIWA with support from Landcare Research, Maurea Marae, Ngaa Muka Development Trust, DOC and the Waikato Regional Council. The project has involved 79 people.

As well as wanting to return the islands to native vegetation with the removal pest plants, the work compared the use of herbicide spraying regimes to removal of weeds manually and native plant competitiveness.

NIWA wetland ecologist Kerry Bodmin says the amount of extra work required in the areas that were not sprayed was considerable. When comparisons were made between herbicide spray and non-spray areas it was estimated that the additional work to manually removed pest plants was a 34-fold increase.

This project also developed a number of useful resources, including pest and native plant identification guides which will be available on the Authority website. Key learnings from working in a river environment, whether on an island or riparian



One of the large scale pest weeds on the Maurea Islands is tradescantia, here it is being cleared by hand and replanted with cabbage trees.

margins, are also contained in the final report available on the Authority website.

A key consideration for the Authority in the future when considering funding for planting projects, will be the significantly high and constant level of labour required to undertake weed control where there is a wish to use no, or minimal, herbicide.

Wetland restoration features strongly in funding applications

The Waikato River Authority has received 57 applications to fund river clean-up projects totaling just over \$14 million in its fifth funding round with a strong showing from projects dedicated to wetland restoration.

There is up to \$6 million available for initiatives that help restore or protect the Waikato and Waipa rivers.

Waikato River Authority Chief Executive Bob Penter says it is encouraging to see both the quantity and the quality of applications. "We are particularly heartened to see the number of wetland restoration projects. This is one of our key strategic priorities and so to see this alignment

from the people and organisations who are wanting to undertake clean-up projects is very encouraging," he says.

Project applications have come with a strong level of additional funding support. While \$14 million is being sought from the Authority the total value of projects is close to \$30 million.

The applications will now undergo an independent evaluation process. The evaluation panel will make recommendations to a sub-committee of the Authority who in turn will then make the final funding recommendations to Authority's board. It is intended that successful project applicants will be announced by the end of November.

Major planting at Te Pahu



Whaingaroa Habourcare planters at Te Pahu, (L-R) Motu Piula, Te Hoesa Riki, Don Waitere and Roy Murch.

A project to carry out extensive planting at a Te Pahu dairy farm that has streams feeding into the Waipa River has made significant progress. The project is being undertaken by Whaingaroa Habourcare.

In total 22 hectares of gully and wetland is being planted and restored next to the Paratawa Stream which run into the Waipa. The area is sited below the Kapamahunga Range, an area identified as an "ecological hot spot" in the Waipa District Significant Natural Areas Assessment.

This farm is subject to regular floods and the volume of water passing through the farm is considerable, especially when the Waipa River backflows through the wetland. By restoring this wetland, biodiversity will be enhanced and important ecological services will be repaired by helping flood control, groundwater replenishment, sediment and nutrient retention. The project involves planting 160,000 native trees over a two year period and is fast becoming a showcase for planting and wetland restoration in the area.

Authority sets out principles for limiting water allocation and contaminant loss

The Waikato River Authority has adopted principles to help guide thinking on resource and contaminant limit setting for the Waikato and Waipa rivers.

The principles have been set out as Healthy Rivers: Plan for Change/Wai Ora: He Rautaki Whakapaipai nears a major milestone.

From late October to November, people can provide feedback to help finalise a solution for the health of the Waikato and Waipa rivers.

Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora, a joint project involving Waikato and Waipa River iwi and Waikato Regional Council, is working with stakeholders to develop changes to the Waikato Regional Plan to help restore and protect the health of the rivers.

The plan change will involve reducing sediment, bacteria and nutrients entering water bodies in the 1.1 million hectare Waikato and Waipa river catchments.

A 24 strong Collaborative Stakeholder Group represents stakeholders and the community in the project. Modelling is helping the group investigate

a number of scenarios for the catchments, and indicates the changes on land required to meet various scenarios.

From late October to November, the Collaborative Stakeholder Group will ask for public feedback on the direction they are heading.

The principles adopted by the Waikato River Authority Board are:

- Limits on resource allocation or use, such as for water allocation or contaminant loss, should be set at a level that at a minimum provides for the achievement of the objectives of the Vision and Strategy
- These limits should be set with recognition of lag times, where historical or current contaminant losses are yet to be exhibited in the river either in part or in full
- Once limits are set, any over-allocation or over-use shall cease in the shortest possible reasonable time
- No new allocation or use shall be allowed to occur that would exceed agreed limits
- A precautionary approach shall be taken to limit setting where decisions may result in significant adverse effects on the river, in particular where those effects threaten irreversible damage to the river.

More information is available on Healthy Rivers: Plan for Change/Wai Ora: He Rautaki Whakapaipai at www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/healthyrivers