AGENDA

Waiora Co-Governance Committee Meeting

Date:	**Tuesday, 5 May 2026**
Time:	**11.00am**
Location:	**Council Chambers** **Waikato Regional Council** **Level 1, 160 Ward Street, Hamilton**
Members:	Trustee Maria Nepia – Committee Co-Chair - Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board Cr Noel Smith – Committee Co-Chair - Waikato Regional Council Trustee Jackie Colliar – Waikato Raupatu River Trust Cr Robert Cookson – Waikato Regional Council Cr Micheal Downard – Waikato Regional Council Trustee Evelyn Forrest – Te Arawa River Iwi Trust Trustee Nachelle Griffiths – Raukawa Charitable Trust (interim) Cr Jennifer Nickel – Waikato Regional Council Trustee Gannin Ormsby – Te Nehenehenui Cr Liz Stolwyk – Waikato Regional Council
Alternates:	Cr Warren Maher – Waikato Regional Council Cr Angela Strange – Waikato Regional Council

Waiora Co-Governance Committee

Ngā Tikanga Whakahaere **| *Terms of Reference***

1. *Mana ā-Ture* **| *Status***

This Committee is established under the following legislation:

- *Section 46(2)(c)* of the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010.
- *Section 48(2)(c)* of the Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010.
- *Section 22(2)(c)* of the Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012.
- *Section 140* of the Maniapoto Claims Settlement Act 2022.

This Committee is not discharged at the end *or* start of a council triennium unless resolved otherwise.

The Committee is exempt from Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002, pursuant to:

- Sections 45–49 of the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010.
- Sections 47–50 of the Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010.
- Sections 21–24 of the Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Wāipa River) Act 2012.
- Sections 139–141 of the Maniapoto Claims Settlement Act 2022.

2. *Ngā Kawenga* **| Responsibilities**

This Committee is responsible for the promotion of the principles of co-governance and providing the mechanism for joint decision making on the *Freshwater Policy Review* to give effect to *Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato* to protect and enhance the health and wellbeing of the *Waikato*, *Waipā* and *Ngā Wai o Maniapoto River Catchments.* This Committee is also responsible for overseeing the development process of the *Freshwater Policy Review*, which includes the following tasks:

a. Establishing and agreeing upon a process by which the five Iwi will participate in making decisions regarding the notified Plan Change.
b. Receiving technical reports and seeking to understand their content and key messages.
c. Receiving and considering recommendations from Te Rōpū Hautū (the Joint Steering Group).
d. Reporting progress and providing recommendations to ensure compliance with relevant provisions of the treaty settlement legislation.
e. Providing oversight and making necessary amendments to the Waikato Regional Policy Statement and the Waikato Regional Plan to protect and enhance the health and wellbeing of the Waikato, Waipā and Ngā Wai o Maniapoto River Catchments.
f. Reviewing any provisions that the Council may refer back to the Committee for further consideration.

3. *Ngā Apatono* **| Powers**

All powers necessary to perform its responsibilities including:

a. Calling meetings as required.
b. Receiving reports as required.
c. Discussing and jointly deciding on recommendations to Council.

4. *Ngā Tūranga* **| Membership:**

4.1 *Ngā Mema* **| Members**

The Committee has ten members as follows:

a. Five elected members of the Council, sourced from those councillors who are within the Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato rohe.

b. One Trustee from each River Settlement Iwi:
   i. Te Arawa River Iwi Trust
   ii. Tuwharetoa Māori Trust Board
   iii. Raukawa Charitable Trust
   iv. Te Nehenehenui
   v. Waikato Raupatu River Trust

4.2 *Ūpoko me te Ūpoko Tuarua* **| Chair and Deputy-Chair**
The Committee will be co-chaired by an elected member appointed by Council and a Trustee appointed by River Settlement Iwi. The Council and River Settlement Iwi may also appoint Deputy Co-Chairs, who will serve as Co-Chairs in their absence.

4.3 *Ngā Kairiwhi* **| *Alternates***
Council may appoint alternate elected members for its representatives (from any constituency), and each River Settlement Iwi may appoint an alternate trustee.

5. *Tokamatua* **| Quorum**
Six members, comprising:
a. Three elected Council members, and
b. Three River Settlement Iwi Trustees

6. *Horopaki* **| Co-governance Context**
All parties agree and acknowledge that effective co-governance requires shared respect and understanding of each party's relationship with the Waikato, Waipā, and Ngā Wai o Maniapoto Rivers and their catchments.

This Committee facilitates a co-governance arrangement, enabling the Council and the five River Iwi to implement the relevant provisions of the following legislation:

- *Section 46 of the* Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010,
- *Section 48 of the* Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa, and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010,
- *Section 22 of the* Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act 2012, *and*
- *Section 140 of the* Maniapoto Claims Settlement Act 2022.

Within the framework of co-governance principles outlined in the joint management agreements[1] between the Council and River Settlement Iwi, the following key principles are emphasised:

a. All parties are committed to working together in a spirit of partnership, ensuring that decisions are made collaboratively and reflect the interests of both Iwi and the Council.
b. The Committee is responsible for making decisions on matters of mutual interest, ensuring that both perspectives are considered.
c. The importance of incorporating Iwi knowledge, values, and perspectives into the management of natural resources is recognized. This includes respecting traditional practices and ensuring Iwi have a meaningful role in decision-making processes.
d. A key focus is the sustainable management of natural resources, particularly the catchments of Waikato, Waipā, and Ngā Wai o Maniapoto Rivers. This involves working together to protect and enhance the health and wellbeing of these waterways for future generations.
e. The parties are committed to transparent and accountable processes, ensuring that decisions are made openly and that there is clear communication about the outcomes and impacts of those decisions.

7. *Tukanga mō te whakaae ki ngā taunaki* **| Process for approving recommendations**
The Committee will submit its recommendations on the project to the next meeting[2] of the full Waikato Regional Council for consideration.

[1] Waikato River and Waipā River co-management | Waikato Regional Council
[2] To meet necessary timeframes in accordance with LGOIMA etc

Upon reviewing the Committee's recommendations, the Council may decide to:

a. Approve the recommendations as submitted, or
b. Refer the recommendations back to the Committee, requesting reconsideration of specific aspects.

If the recommendations are referred back, the Committee will reconsider the specified aspects and may forward to the Council:

a. Amended recommendations, and/or
b. Additional information requested by the Council or deemed helpful by the Committee for the Council's decision-making.

Upon receiving amended recommendations or additional information, the Council will either:

a. Approve the amended recommendations, or
b. Convene a meeting with the full Council and Committee members to resolve any remaining differences.

If Council and River Settlement Iwi members are unable to resolve the issues, parties may invoke the dispute resolution procedures outlined below.

This process will also *apply* to the approval of the *final draft of the Freshwater Policy Review* for notification acknowledging that council is the final decision maker.

8. *Ngā mātāpono whakataunga* **| Principles for reaching resolutions**

The parties agree to address the resolution of issues between them in a constructive, co-operative, and timely manner consistent with the principles outlined in their respective legislation.

All parties agree that any decision made at a meeting will be made with the highest level of good faith and by way of consensus decision-making.

9. *Whakataunga Tautohe* **| Dispute Resolution**

The dispute resolution process is as follows:

a. If the parties cannot reach agreement, then any party may give notice to the other parties that they are in dispute.
b. As soon as practicable upon receipt of the notice, the Council and the River Settlement Iwi representative(s) will meet to work in good faith to resolve the issue.
c. If the dispute has not been resolved within 20 (twenty) business days of receipt of the notice, the Chief Executive of the Council and the General Manager(s) |Chief Executive Officer(s) of the River Settlement Iwi will meet to work in good faith to resolve the issue.
d. If the dispute has still not been resolved within 30 (thirty) business days of a meeting between the Chief Executive of the Council and the General Manager(s) |Chief Executive Officer(s) of the River Settlement Iwi, and as a matter of last resort, the respective Chairs (or nominees) will meet to work in good faith to resolve the issue.
e. At any point during the issue resolution process the parties may appoint a facilitator or take any other action considered appropriate to promote the resolution of any issues.
f. If, after exhausting all the steps above, the dispute remains unresolved, the matter will be escalated to the respective governing bodies of the parties for final consideration and resolution.

10. *Utu nama* **| Resourcing**

a. The Council and the Trust participants will each bear its own costs of participation.
b. Council will provide the Secretariat for the meetings.

11. *Whakapā tūmatanui* **| Communication**

Communications with the media and the wider public will be in accordance with an agreed communications protocol to be approved by the Committee Co-Chairs.

12. *Whakahau tū* **| Standing orders**
Committee procedure must accord with Waikato Regional Council *Standing Orders* (as current from time to time) (*Standing Orders*). Where any conflict arises between the *Standing Orders,* the joint management agreements or these *terms of* reference, the joint management agreements and these *terms of reference* prevail in that order of priority.

13. *Ngā Hui i te Tau* **| Frequency of meetings**
    a. Quarterly or as required
    b. Meetings are hosted alternately by Council and the five River Settlement Iwi, as determined by Te Rōpū Hautū (Joint Steering Group).

Order Of Business

1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA

Whakataka te hau ki te uru	**Cease o winds from the west**
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga	**Cease o winds from the south**
Kia mākinakina ki uta	**Bring calm breezes over the land**
Kia mātaratara ki tai	**Bring calm breezes over the sea**
E hī ake ana te atakura	**And let the red-tipped dawn come**
He tio	**With a touch of frost**
He Huka	**A sharpened air**
He hau hū	**And promise of a glorious day**
Tīhei mauri ora!	**Behold we live**

2 APOLOGIES

3 CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA

4 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Members are reminded of the need to be aware of maintaining a clear separation between personal interests and duties and their role as an elected member.

If any member has an interest that creates an actual, or could be perceived to create, a conflict in relation to any item on the agenda, it is recommended that this be disclosed.

5 MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION OR RECEIPT

Nil

6 GENERAL ITEMS

6.1 IMPLICATIONS OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REFORM ON FRESHWATER POLICY REVIEW

Rā | Date:	**13 April 2026**
Kaituhi | Author:	**Bruce McAuliffe, Manager - Resource Management Policy**
Kaituku | Authoriser:	**Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information**
Mana whakatau | Delegation Status:	**For recommendation to Council.**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To seek the Waiora Co-governance Committee's agreement to support a temporary pause of the Freshwater Policy review (FPR) project with targeted and focussed continuation on packages of work. This will be on key pieces of Freshwater Policy work while the implications of central government resource management reform programme are determined.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The FPR is underway during a period of significant reform to New Zealand's resource management and local government systems. The introduction of the Planning Bill (PB) and Natural Environment Bill (NEB) alongside proposed local government reform, has created a high level of uncertainty that impacts the ability of Council and iwi partners to efficiently progress the Freshwater Policy Review (FPR).
3. While all statutory obligations under the current framework will remain in place, progressing detailed policy development and engagement ahead of more fully understanding the new legislative framework presents a high risk of misalignment and rework. In response, this report recommends a temporary pause of the FPR policy development and engagement workstreams, while continuing science, economic, and technical work that will remain relevant under the new planning framework.
4. This approach recognises Joint Management Agreement (JMA) responsibilities and represents a prudent use of partner time and resources. It is not a cessation of work, but a realignment that maintains momentum and positions the Council and iwi partners to recommence the FPR in a timely and informed manner once greater certainty on the new resource management system is achieved.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Implications of Resource Management System Reform on Freshwater Policy Review* (Waiora Co-Governance Committee, 5 May 2026) be received.
2. That the Waiora Co-Governance Committee agree to temporarily pause the policy development and engagement workstreams of the Freshwater Policy Review.

3. That the Waiora Co-Governance Committee direct that remaining work on the science and economic workstreams of the Freshwater Policy Review continues to build the technical evidence base to inform policy development.
4. That the Waiora Co-Governance Committee direct Te Rōpū Hautū to report back to the Committee once the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill are enacted, including advice on implications for the Freshwater Policy Review and a revised workplan.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

5. Waikato Regional Council initiated the FPR to fulfil its obligations under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM). The region-wide review ensures the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) and the Waikato Regional Plan (WRP) give effect to the NPS-FM and builds upon the work undertaken in Plan Change 1 to give effect to Te Ture Whaimana for the Waikato and Waipā River catchment.
6. As part of this work, the Waiora Co-Governance Committee ("the Committee") was established in December 2024 through standing up the co-management arrangements in the individual Waikato and Waipā River Iwi Joint Management Agreements (JMA). The Committee last met on 9 September 2025.
7. On 24 November 2025 the Department of Internal Affairs publicly notified the “Simplifying Local Government” proposals that signalled potential changes to regional governance structures, including the creation of Combined Territories Boards. This change is likely to affect co-governance arrangements, iwi participation pathways, and the oversight of freshwater policy.
8. On 1 December 2025, Minister Simon Watts announced the Government is progressing a maximum 4% per annum ‘rates cap’ for all sources of rates. Targeted consultation with local authorities on transitional arrangements is being undertaken by DIA with the policy having effect for the 2027/37 Long Term Plan cycle.
9. On 18 December 2025, the Coalition Government introduced the Planning Bill (PB) and Natural Environment Bill (NEB) into parliament. These bills will replace the Resource Management Act (RMA) and represent a significant structural shift in New Zealand’s resource management system. The most recent advice from the Ministry for the Environment indicates that Bills will be enacted in August 2026, before the general election in early November.
10. The timelines for the resource management system reform programme are included in Attachment 1.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

11. The effect of recent reform proposals has created a high level of uncertainty that is constraining WRC’s ability to progress the FPR to the extent and timeframes previously agreed by the Committee.
12. At this time, there is a common understanding that the PB and NEB will replace the RMA with a nationally directed and standardised planning framework geared toward achieving a range of system goals. The new planning hierarchy is likely to be headlined by mandatory national

policy direction and standards that are implemented through of Regional Spatial Plans (RSPs) and Natural Environment Plans (NEPs).

13. The key problem is the process for preparing RSPs and NEPs in relation to how freshwater is to be managed is unclear. For example, Councils will need to prepare RSPs soon after the PB and NEB receive Royal Assent, however national instruments, such as methodologies for setting ecosystem health limits, will not be available until late 2026 or 2027. This creates a risk that strategic planning decisions, such as around the allocation regime for the Waikato River, could be made in the RSP before environmental limits are fully defined.

14. Additionally, the PB and NEB introduce a strong presumption of nationally standardised planning provisions that are framed through national instruments. This is likely to constrain the ability of Councils to put in place locally tailored planning provisions without substantial justification reports being prepared. While this does not prevent the development of a bespoke policy framework to give effect to Te Ture Whaimana in the Waikato and Waipā River catchment, the lack of clarity in the PB and NEB creates a high level of uncertainty.

15. The proposals to establish Combined Territories Boards and implement rates capping for the next Long Term Plan cycle exacerbates the levels of uncertainty.

16. Ultimately, while it would be possible to push ahead and undertake policy work now, there is a very high risk of misalignment, inefficiency, and potential rework.

Temporary pause

17. Te Rōpū Hautū consider there is merit in temporarily pausing the policy development workstreams of the FPR and prioritising existing work-in-progress.

18. Introduction of the bills requires that the FPR is realigned to the new planning framework and the still emerging national direction processes as well as the recently announced review of Te Ture Whaimana which is relevant for the Waikato River Catchment and Waipa River.

19. This approach will also enable Council to continue to meet council's statutory obligations in regard to the Waikato River Iwi Treaty Settlement Acts, Local Government Act 2002, and those that remain through the transition of the RMA and NPSFM.

20. During the temporary pause period it is proposed that WRC staff will focus on the following work areas:

<u>Science workstream</u>

- Continued identification of data gaps
- Design monitoring improvements.
- Refine water quality trend analysis
- Refresh hydrological models.

<u>Economics and GIS workstream</u>

- Complete the economic modelling work.

<u>Engagement workstream</u>

- Finalise the Farming Effluent TAG report which is currently being reviewed.
- Collaborative Science Advisory Group and NTM Reports finalised.

- Maintaining iwi relationships through regular project updates to co-governance groups informed including Te Rōpū Hautū.
- Wider communications are prepared to go to stakeholders and partners once formal project decisions are made.

Policy development workstream

- PC1 implications for the workstream
- Evaluating national direction as it is released to understand likely implications for future work
- Evaluate whether any of the FPR work already completed is suitable for inclusion in Regional Spatial Strategy – and work with the Regional Spatial Strategy team to integrate that information into the scope of their project (e.g. Freshwater Management Units).

21. The work areas that are on hold includes:

    (a) Detailed policy / rule drafting, due to the upcoming requirement to comply with national direction when it is promulgated. National direction will establish the policies and rules council will be required to include in NEP. There will be some scope in some national direction to include bespoke regional rules.

    (b) Determination of environmental limits for ecological health pending the National Direction on limit setting.

    (c) Stakeholder and community engagement on freshwater policy. There will be new engagement requirements in the Planning Act and in national direction that may significantly alter how WRC engages with stakeholders and communities.

    (d) The Technical advisory group on farming activities.

    (e) Tangata whenua engagement on policy directions for specific freshwater topics.

    (f) Science work to support detailed policy options.

Recommencement

22. The FPR will recommence in a revised form, upon the PB and NEB receiving royal assent, and the programme for developing replacement national direction becoming clearer.

23. Te Rōpū Hautū will ensure the committee is informed when and how the FPR will be recommenced in the coming months.

Other matters

24. It is noted that the review of Te Ture Whaimana is ongoing and remains foundational to the FPR in the Waikato and Waipā River catchments. This review process sits outside the resource management system review and is governed by Treaty Settlement legislation.

25. The indicative timeline for preparing the Spatial Plan and Natural Environment Plan is included in Attachment 1.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

26. The current programme of resource management system reform has created significant uncertainty for freshwater policy development. With the RMA soon to be replaced and key national direction and planning frameworks still unclear, continuing detailed freshwater policy and engagement work at this time poses a high risk of inefficiency and rework.

27. In this context, temporarily pausing the FPR's policy development and engagement workstreams is a sensible and proportionate response. This approach recognises the Council's statutory responsibilities while making responsible use of iwi, stakeholder, and community time and effort. Importantly, work will continue on science, economic analysis, and evidence-gathering that will remain valuable under the new legislation.

28. By maintaining technical readiness and closely monitoring emerging national direction, the Council and iwi partners will be well placed to restart the FPR once there is greater legislative certainty. This approach supports strong co-governance relationships and enables informed, effective decision-making during a period of significant system change.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Timelines for Resource Management System reform programme (as at December 2025) (Doc#35666958) ⇩

Resource management system reform programme

	2026				2027				2028				2029			
Calendar year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Financial year	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Planning Bill	Submissions close	Bill enacted Transitional consenting provisions begin	Joint Regional Spatial Planning Committee and process agreement		Preparation of spatial plans from enactment *(dependent on national direction)*		**September** Regional Spatial Plan chapter notified *(timeframe: 15 months after enactment)*		**March** Regional Spatial Plan chapter adopted *(timeframe: 6 months after notification)*	Develop remaining Regional Combined Plan chapters		**December** Notification of Land Use Plan *(timeframe: within 3 months of decisions on Regional Spatial Plan chapter)*				**December** Land Use Plan adopted *(timeframe: within 9 months of notification)*
Natural Environment Bill	**13 February** Submissions close	**June** Bill enacted Transitional consenting provisions enacted		Process agreement prepared for each region		Commence preparation of Land Use Plan and Natural Environment Plan *(dependent on national direction)*						**December** Notification of Natural Environment Plans *(timeframe: within 9 months of decisions on Regional Spatial Plan chapter)*				**December** Natural Environment Plans adopted *(timeframe: within 12 months of notification)*
National direction					**March** National policy direction - first suite to inform Spatial Plan *(timeframe: within 9 months of enactment of National Standards to inform Spatial Plan)*			**December** National policy direction - second suite to inform land use plans, including standardised zones		**June** National policy direction - third suite - national instruments on allocation						New resource management system switched on National e-plan and e-consenting ready National regulator operating Systems performance reporting operational
Digital transformation workstream		System monitoring begins National spatial planning standards		National e-plan viewer ready												

Local government reform programme

	2026				2027				2028				2029				2030			
Calendar year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Financial year	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Simplifying local government proposal	**20 February** Feedback due DIA rapid review of regional council functions Rapid review process finalised Minister's report back to Cabinet on outcomes of rapid review	**Mid-2026** Local Government Reform Bill introduced		Process agreement prepared for each region		Local Government Reform Act enacted	Formation of Combined Territories Board (CTB)			CTB begins preparation of Regional Reorganisation Plan (timeframe: within 2 years of the CTB being formed) CTB begins preparation of Regional Spatial Plan chapter		CTB becomes Committee for Natural Environment Plan		CTB adopts Regional Reorganisation Plan			**March** Minister approves Regional Reorganisation Plan			

6.2 ENGAGEMENT UPDATE FOR THE FRESHWATER POLICY REVIEW

Rā | Date: **14 April 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **Naomi Crawford, Team Leader - Water Policy**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To provide the Waiora Co-Governance Committee with an engagement update for the freshwater policy review (FPR).

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Engagement was originally structured across tangata whenua, sector, and community workstreams and has been undertaken to date in a way that builds a strong foundation for future stages of the review, however progressing further substantive policy-focused engagement at this time would present a high risk of misalignment given current legislative uncertainty. The Freshwater Policy Review is currently operating in a temporary pause for the policy development and engagement workstreams while legislative direction is clarified.

3. Tangata whenua engagement has been significantly strengthened through tailored, co-designed processes, including one-on-one meetings with River Iwi and broader engagement with pre-settlement iwi and those without joint management agreements. The Ngā Tira Mātauranga (NTM) technical working group has provided detailed feedback on Māori freshwater values, monitoring approaches, and policy tools to protect culturally significant water bodies. This input has directly informed draft provisions for the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) and Waikato Regional Plan (WRP), reinforcing the need for flexible, locally grounded policy approaches and ongoing, iterative engagement.

4. All sector engagement is currently on hold due to uncertainty associated with national policy changes, with engagement to resume once national direction is clarified. Community engagement, which is also on hold, has previously involved Community Reference Groups and public events. When engagement resumes, the focus and form of engagement will be shaped by the new legislative framework and national direction, it is intended to focus on seeking feedback on proposed policy tools and interventions to support water quality improvement where appropriate.

5. Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) have played a pivotal role in shaping the FPR. The Collaborative Science Advisory Group (CSAG) has emphasized the need for site-specific, outcome-driven targets, prioritisation of Sensitive receiving environments (SREs), expanded monitoring frameworks, and integration of climate change considerations.

6. Engagement undertaken to date has nonetheless provided a strong foundation for future work, which is intended to be drawn on and extended once policy development and engagement resume under the new legislation. In particular, tangata whenua engagement through established forums and technical working groups has strengthened understanding of Māori freshwater values, monitoring approaches, and policy expectations, while technical

advisory input most notably from the CSAG group has supported robust, place-based policy thinking.

7. No new engagement activity is proposed at this time. Once greater certainty is established, staff will develop a refreshed engagement plan and bring this back to the Committee for consideration.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Engagement update for the freshwater policy review* (Waiora Co-Governance Committee, 5 May 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

8. Both the WRPS and the WRP are undergoing review as part of the FPR to give effect to the NPSFM. Engagement is central to this process and is currently being managed through a temporary pause approach for policy development and engagement workstreams, consistent with the Council's response to system reform uncertainty. The approach is designed to ensure regional planning documents align with the NPSFM, while also fulfilling commitments under Treaty Settlement legislation and Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato.

9. River Iwi engagement has been strengthened in response to feedback, with a renewed emphasis on tailored and co-designed processes. Up to the end of 2025 Waikato Regional Council (WRC) has worked directly with each iwi to plan engagement formats and topics that reflect their priorities, including one-on-one meetings. Previous concerns about the lack of co-design are being addressed through planning towards bespoke, iwi-specific engagement, and broader tangata whenua engagement now extends to pre-settlement iwi and those without joint management agreements. Further policy-focused tangata whenua engagement is proposed to be sequenced once requirements of the new legislative framework are better understood with relationship-based engagement and information sharing continuing in the interim.

10. Sector engagement has been put on hold due to uncertainty around national policy changes. This approach is intended to prevent misalignment and confusion, and to ensure partner and stakeholder time is used responsibly, allowing for more meaningful engagement once the national direction is clearer and the engagement workstream is formally recommenced. Stakeholders will be kept informed during this period, and future sector engagement will include general stakeholder meetings once activities resume.

11. The formation of a TAG progressed up to the end of 2025, with technical experts selected for their skills and in-depth understanding of key topics. Engagement has included both face-to-face and online formats. In 2025, a CSAG TAG was established to provide expert, science-based insights that will inform initial policy thinking for the FPR.

12. There is significant uncertainty regarding future timeframes, as the December 2027 RMA statutory deadline that previously guided the work programme has now changed, and final decisions on Proposed Plan Change 1 (PC1) have not yet been received. In response, the

project team has progressively shifted from active engagement to a pause-and-hold position. This approach recognises the risk of seeking detailed feedback on tools, thresholds, or implementation pathways that may not be carried forward under future legislation.

Tangata whenua engagement update

13. The NTM report (attachment 1, circulated separately with this agenda) provides a comprehensive update on tangata whenua engagement for the FPR in the Waikato region. NTM, established as a technical working group to support iwi and hapū involvement, met regularly between October 2023 and November 2025. The report details eight hui, each focusing on key policy topics such as Māori freshwater values, tauranga waka, mahinga kai, water quantity and allocation, and the identification of culturally outstanding water bodies. Meetings were held both in-person (at venues like Wintec, Hamilton and the Cambridge Velodrome) and online, with participation from a wide range of iwi and hapū representatives across the region. The engagement process was designed to be inclusive, with invitations extended to over 270 tangata whenua contacts and support provided for new representatives to participate fully.

14. Throughout these hui, NTM representatives provided detailed feedback on draft policy material, emphasizing the importance of local interpretation and flexibility in any regional framework for Māori freshwater values and indicators. Key messages included the need for tikanga-led monitoring, data sovereignty, and active tangata whenua participation in both planning and implementation. Representatives highlighted the significance of whakapapa, kawa, and tikanga in shaping freshwater values, and called for policy tools that better protect culturally significant water bodies. The group also discussed the challenges of capacity constraints and resource pressures, noting that effective engagement requires adequate support and recognition of iwi and hapū expertise.

15. The report's findings have important implications for the FPR. Feedback from NTM has directly informed the development of draft provisions for the WRPS and WRP, particularly in relation to the expression and monitoring of Māori freshwater values, the protection of outstanding water bodies, and the management of water quantity and allocation. The engagement process has reinforced the need for policy approaches that are flexible, locally grounded, and responsive to the aspirations and concerns of tangata whenua. The report also underscores the value of ongoing, iterative engagement.

16. In summary, the NTM engagement has significantly strengthened the FPR by embedding tangata whenua perspectives and expertise into policy development. The collaborative approach has ensured that Māori values, knowledge, and priorities are central to the region's freshwater management framework, supporting both statutory requirements and the broader goal of partnership in environmental governance.

Collaborative Science Advisory Group (CSAG) update

17. The CSAG was established by Waikato Regional Council to provide expert scientific input into the FPR. The CSAG report (attachment 2, circulated separately with this agenda) provides a comprehensive update on this engagement process for the FPR in the Waikato region. Over the course of five meetings held between August and October 2025, the group brought together scientists from council, sector organisations, universities, and iwi technical advisors. These sessions were designed to rigorously test and refine draft policy concepts, ensuring that the FPR would be both technically robust and aligned with national freshwater management direction.

18. Throughout the engagement, CSAG emphasized the need to move away from blanket contaminant reduction targets, in favour of site-specific, outcome-driven targets. The group advocated for targets that are developed using the best available information and in close consultation with iwi and community stakeholders, focusing on the ecological endpoints and the underlying drivers of ecosystem health. This approach was seen as essential for delivering meaningful improvements in water quality and ecosystem resilience.

19. A major focus of the group's work was on Sensitive Receiving Environments (SREs), including estuaries, lakes, and wetlands. CSAG recommended that these environments be mapped and prioritised, with nutrient and sediment load targets set according to their vulnerability, ecological state, and connectivity within the catchment. Scenario modelling was highlighted as a valuable tool for supporting target setting, especially in cases where monitoring data is limited or incomplete.

20. The group also called for an expansion of the range of attributes considered in freshwater policy, such as temperature, dissolved oxygen, habitat quality, metals (particularly in urban streams), wetland extent, and lake levels. They stressed the importance of designing monitoring frameworks that can evaluate policy effectiveness at appropriate spatial and temporal scales, and that can adapt as new information becomes available.

21. Hydrological management emerged as another key theme, with CSAG identifying hydrological alteration such as drainage and flood control as a major driver of degradation in lakes and wetlands. The group recommended the development of lake-by-lake and wetland-specific management plans, linked to regulatory methods that would give practical effect to restoration and protection efforts.

22. Recognising the challenges posed by climate change and ecological lag effects, CSAG urged that future policy incorporate climate scenarios and account for delayed responses in freshwater systems. Restoration trajectories should be informed by scenario modelling and adaptive review cycles, ensuring that policy remains relevant and effective over time.

23. For the FPR, these findings have significant implications. The FPR should adopt a more nuanced, place-based approach to target setting, prioritise SREs, and develop management plans tailored to the unique characteristics of different water bodies. Expanded monitoring and adaptive management frameworks will be necessary to ensure policy effectiveness and defensibility. Integration of climate change considerations and lag effects will improve the resilience and long-term success of freshwater management strategies. Finally, ongoing collaboration with iwi, sector experts, and the community will be essential to ensure that policy is both technically sound and socially acceptable.

24. In summary, the CSAG engagement has provided the FPR with a strong scientific foundation and clear direction for policy development. The group's emphasis on site-specific targets, expanded attributes, adaptive management, and integrated planning will help ensure that the FPR delivers meaningful environmental outcomes and meets statutory requirements. Continued engagement and implementation of CSAG's recommendations will be critical as the FPR progresses toward notification and adoption.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

25. While national policy changes and legislative reforms have necessitated adjustments to engagement timeframes temporarily pausing engagement represents a prudent and

proportionate governance response, with engagement to be reactivated in a targeted and sequenced way once greater clarity is established on the new legislative and policy framework.

26. As the legislative and policy landscape evolves, staff will continue to monitor developments and provide updates to the Waiora Co-Governance Committee and Te Rōpū Hautū, ensuring the Committee remains informed of key implications for the freshwater policy programme.

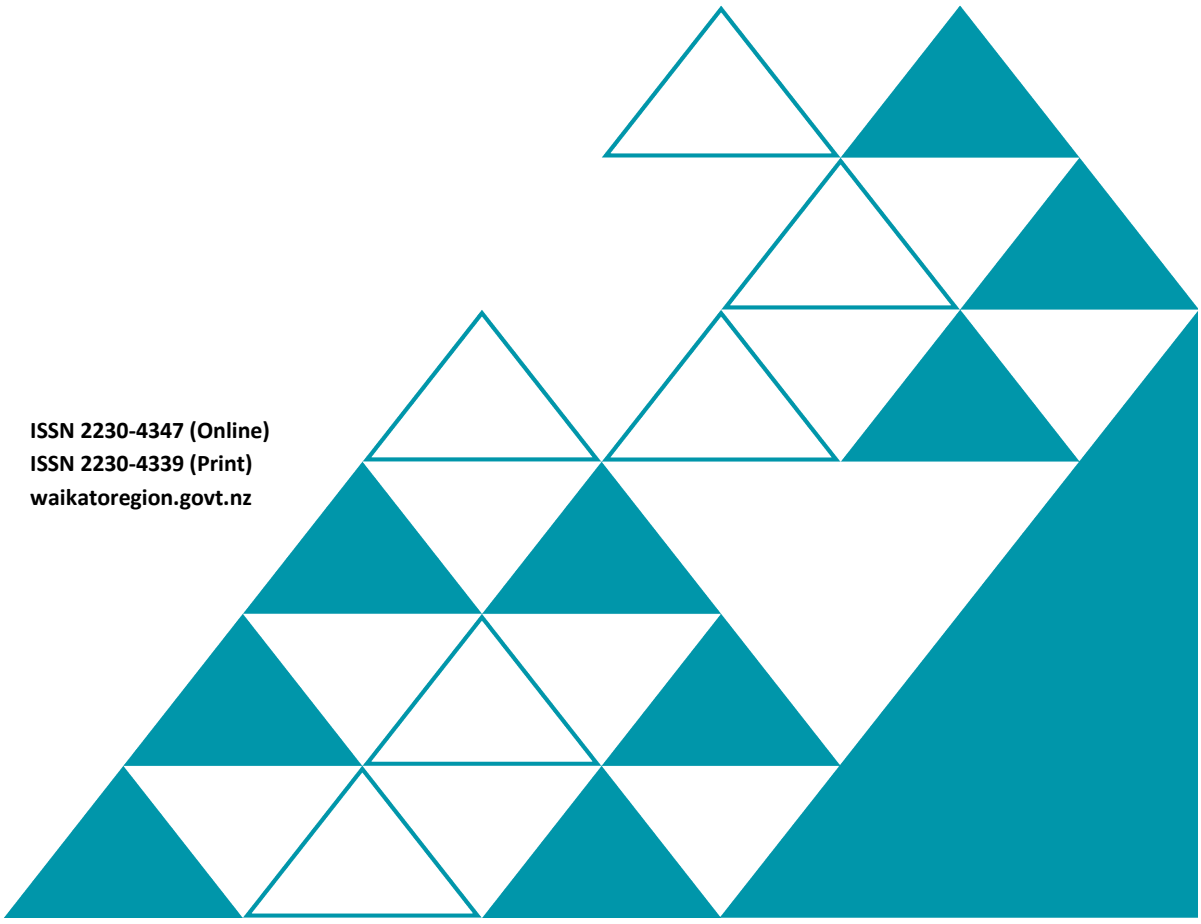
ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **PS25-18 - Freshwater Policy Review – Ngā Tira Mātauranga progress report 2 - 2025 - doc# 34295919** ⇩
2. **PS26-02 - Freshwater Policy Review – Colloborative Science Advisory Group Summary Report - 2026 - doc# 32925106** ⇩

Waikato Regional Council Policy Series 2025/18

Te Arotake Kaupapahere Waimāori – Te pūrongo a Ngā Tira Mātauranga

Freshwater Policy Review – Ngā Tira Mātauranga progress report 2 - 2025



ISSN 2230-4347 (Online)
ISSN 2230-4339 (Print)
waikatoregion.govt.nz

	Name	Date
Approving Manager	Bruce McAuliffe	January 2026

Prepared by	Angus Gray (Gray Matter Limited)
For	Waikato Regional Council Private Bag 3038 Waikato Mail Centre HAMILTON 3240
Publication date	January 2026
Document ID	32925106

He mihi | Acknowledgement

The authors and project staff would like to acknowledge and thank tangata whenua, mana whenua, iwi, hapū, and marae representatives and all who gave their time to provide input into the Freshwater Policy Review Ngā Tira Mātauranga working group.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the staff and supported and attended these meetings and contributed their time and expertise to support these discussions, and to those who assisted with collating, and reviewing this report.

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared for the use of Waikato Regional Council as a reference document and captures the ideas and feedback of the community and stakeholders and as such does not constitute Council's policy.

Council requests that if excerpts or inferences are drawn from this document for further use by individuals or organisations, due care should be taken to ensure that the appropriate context has been preserved and is accurately reflected and referenced in any subsequent spoken or written communication.

While Waikato Regional Council has exercised all reasonable skill and care in controlling the contents of this report, Council accepts no liability in contract, tort or otherwise, for any loss, damage, injury or expense (whether direct, indirect or consequential) arising out of the provision of this information or its use by you or any other party.

This report includes Māori terminology. A glossary of Māori terms can be found in the Appendices.

Rārangi Kaupapa | Table of Contents

Kōrero whakataki | Executive summary

This report provides an update on Ngā Tira Mātauranga (NTM), Waikato Regional Council's technical working group established to support the involvement of iwi and hapū in the Freshwater Policy Review. The report outlines the topics discussed at NTM meetings held between October 2023 and November 2025 and summarises the feedback shared by representatives on draft policy material and preliminary ideas presented for discussion.

NTM is made up of representatives nominated by tangata whenua entities across the Waikato Region who wish to participate in technical freshwater policy discussions. The purpose of NTM is to provide a forum for tangata whenua to engage with draft policy concepts, share mātauranga, and support the development of policy that aligns with the requirements of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020. Representatives are remunerated for their participation in accordance with Waikato Regional Council guidance.

Across the period covered by this report, NTM representatives engaged with draft material on Māori freshwater values and attributes, tauranga waka, mahinga kai, waitī/waimāori, water quantity and allocation, and culturally outstanding water bodies. Representatives shared a wide range of perspectives grounded in tikanga, whakapapa, and mātauranga Māori, and highlighted the importance of these concepts when defining, expressing, and monitoring freshwater values.

Across these discussions representatives shared key messages including that any regional framework for Māori freshwater values and indicators should allow for flexibility and local interpretation, as iwi and hapū are the experts within their own areas. Feedback reinforced the importance of tikanga-led monitoring approaches, data sovereignty, and active participation by tangata whenua in ongoing freshwater planning and implementation. Representatives also shared a range of aspirations and concerns relating to environmental outcomes, resource use pressures, and the need for policy tools to better protect culturally significant water bodies.

The feedback from these meetings, and feedback summarised in this report has, and will be used to inform the development of draft provisions for the Waikato Regional Policy Statement and Waikato Regional Plan, alongside other tangata whenua feedback received through NTM and other engagement pathways. Further NTM hui may occur in 2026 to continue testing draft material and supporting tangata whenua involvement in the freshwater planning process.

1 He tīmatanga kōrero | Introduction

The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM) was released as part of the Essential Freshwater package to halt the degradation of freshwater and bring about improvements. The NPS-FM sets out expectations that tangata whenua and the community will be engaged on many aspects of freshwater management. These include the application of the concept Te Mana o te Wai to local freshwater, setting long-term visions, and working through the National Objectives Framework (NOF).

In addition to identifying how Te Mana o Te Wai will apply in the Waikato Region, and identifying long-term visions the process steps of the NOF require WRC to:

- Identify Freshwater Management Units (FMUs) in the region
- Identify values for each FMU (including Māori freshwater values)
- Set environmental outcomes for each value and include them as objectives in regional plans
- Set attributes for each value and set baselines for those attributes
- Identify attribute states, environmental flows and levels and other criteria to support the achievement of environmental outcomes
- Set limits as rules and prepare action plans (as appropriate) to achieve the environmental outcomes.

The NPS-FM requires Waikato Regional Council (WRC) to review the freshwater aspects of their regional policy statement and regional plan by 31 December 2027, and this has given rise to the council's Freshwater Policy Review project.

To support active involvement of tangata whenua in the development of draft policy and in discussions on values and subsequent NOF steps, WRC worked with mana whenua who saw merit in establishing a technical working group: Ngā Tira Mātauranga (NTM).

The feedback and discussion shared at the NTM workshops and meetings will be used to inform revisions to the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and Waikato Regional Plan. NTM feedback and discussion will be considered alongside other tangata whenua feedback and discussion. Some tangata whenua may choose to provide feedback through the mechanisms provided in any formal agreements they have with council (e.g., Joint Management Agreements).

This report follows the previous NTM progress report.[1] The previous NTM report includes the following matters which, for brevity, are not repeated in this report:

- Purpose of NTM
- Principles of NTM
- Wānanga format and structure

[1] PS23-20 - Freshwater Policy Review - Ngā Tira Mātauranga Progress Report 2023

2 Programme Overview

The table below summarises the NTM programme to date, including Meetings 1 and 2 reported in the 2023 progress report. This progress report focuses on Meetings 3–8.

Table 1: Overview of NTM programme

Hui	Key topics	Location
1	• Introduction to the NTM kaupapa • Review of draft Terms of Reference and work programme • Administrative arrangements and remuneration • Introduction to the policy framework	The Link, Hamilton.
2	• Recap of policy framework • Te Mana o te Wai • Freshwater Management Units • Long-term visions • Establishing tikanga for NTM	The Link, Hamilton.
3	• Update on recent tangata whenua engagement • Tangata Whenua Chapter overview • Invite to Topic Advisory Groups • NPS-FM values and attributes • Monitoring considerations	Wintec, Hamilton
Engagement paused in response to emerging legislation and policy change and project reset.		
4	• Project refresh • Explanation of government changes • Introduction to Outstanding Water Bodies	Cambridge Velodrome
5	• Reintroduction to the revised programme • Mahinga kai • Tauranga waka • Waitī/Waimāori • Mātauranga Māori monitoring	Wintec, Hamilton
6	• Outstanding Water Bodies (continued)	Online (two hui)
7	• Water quantity and allocation • Plan Change 1 update. • Update on central government direction	Wintec, Hamilton
8	• Policy progress update • Summary of key NTM feedback themes • Overview of how NTM advice has shaped emerging policy direction	Online

3 Taiutu | Remuneration

NTM representatives were remunerated to recognise the time commitment and expertise involved, support iwi capacity, and acknowledge their contribution to the freshwater policy development process. Remuneration was determined in accordance with WRC's *Kaupapa Māori Services Guidelines*. Following a WRC review of this guidance, remuneration rates were increased in 2025 to reflect updated council policy. Remuneration covered:

- Preparatory work, including reviewing pre-circulated material
- Attendance at NTM meetings
- Post-meeting activities such as reporting back to respective entities or reviewing detailed workshop material
- Mileage for travel within the Waikato Region

4 Mematanga | Membership

WRC is required under the Resource Management Act 1991 and the NPS-FM to engage with tangata whenua. Under section 2 of the RMA, 'tangata whenua' means, in relation to a particular area, the iwi or hapū that hold mana whenua over that area. [2] More than 208 iwi and hapū are present within the Waikato Region. [3]

During the establishment of NTM, invitations to participate were sent to over 270 tangata whenua contacts across iwi and hapū in the region, including groups with marginal overlapping interests from adjoining regions.

In April 2025, WRC reviewed and updated its contact list for NTM. To support participation, additional invitations were provided to tangata whenua groups who had not been involved previously. Newly nominated representatives were provided with materials from earlier NTM meetings to help them engage with the work completed to date. [4]

NTM nominations were primarily done in writing by the board or chair of their iwi, hapū, or marae. This process aimed to ensure representatives were mandated to speak on behalf of their group. Table 2 below provides an overview of attendance across the duration of the NTM programme.

Table 2: Overview of NTM meeting attendance

Tangata whenua group represented	Represented at hui by one or more representatives *(green = attended)*							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Hineuru Iwi Trust								
Ngaati Aamaru								
Ngaati Koroki Kahukura								
Ngaati Maahanga								
Ngaati Wairere								
Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust								
Ngāti Hauā Mahi Trust								
Ngāti Hinerangi								
Ngāti Kea Ngāti Tuara								
Ngāti Maniapoto / Te Nehenehenui Trust								
Ngāti Maru								
Ngāti Porou Ki Hauraki								
Ngāti Pukenga Ki Manaia								
Ngāti Rangiwewehi								
Ngāti Raukawa								
Ngāti Rereahu / Roopuu o Rereahu								
Ngāti Tamaterā								
Ngāti Tara Tokanui								
Ngāti Tura Ngāti Te Ngakau								
Ngāti Whanaunga								
Tahaaroa Lakes Trust								
Te Kotahitanga o Ngāti Tūwharetoa								

[2] Resource Management Act 1991 https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1991/0069/latest/DLM230272.html
[3] Waikato Regional Council (2017). Māori Engagement Framework: He Ritenga Mahitahi. Accessed https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/Council/Policy-and-Plans/11340016-Maori-Engagement-Framework-Guide.pdf

Tangata whenua group represented	Represented at hui by one or more representatives *(green = attended)*							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Uenuku / Maringi								
Waikato Tainui								

Some tangata whenua groups nominated representatives who did not attend the meetings; however, all received the full suite of NTM correspondence and materials. This included:

- Ngāti Te Kohera
- Tūhourangi Tribal Authority
- Ngāti Pāoa.

Member availability was influenced by a range of factors, including capacity constraints, competing commitments, and scheduling pressures. WRC sought to accommodate these by:

- Enabling both primary and secondary representatives to support continuity.
- Not limiting the number of representatives who could attend each hui.
- Scheduling online hui during both daytime and evening.
- Accepting early or late written or virtual feedback.
- Progressively increasing remuneration.
- Meeting individually with representatives when needed.
- Offering follow-up discussions on request.
- Publishing materials on the *Engagement HQ* project page.
- Pre-circulating meeting material approximately two weeks in advance.

5 Ngā mātāpono waimāori me ngā tātai āhuatanga | Values and attributes

5.1 Background

The third NTM meeting was held Tuesday 10 October 2023 at the Long Room, Wintec, Hamilton. The following tangata whenua entities were represented by one or more representatives:

- Raukawa Charitable Trust
- Te Kotahitanga o Ngāti Tūwharetoa
- Te Nehenehenui
- Ngāti Hauā Mahi Trust
- Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust
- Ngaati Koroki Kahukura
- Ngāti Maringi - Uenuku
- Ngāti Porou Ki Hauraki
- Rereahu
- Ngāti Rangiwewehi
- Ngāti Whanaunga.

The focus of the meeting was on Māori freshwater values and attributes to give effect to the NPS-FM NOF. Representatives were also provided opportunities to be involved in chapter drafting of the Tangata Whenua Chapter of the Waikato RPS and participate in Topic Advisory Groups.

5.2 Values

To support the workshop on freshwater values in the NOF, WRC shared preliminary analysis highlighting that matters raised by tangata whenua ranged across potential NOF values, broader Māori principles, and matters potentially better suited to other policy tools. The following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of values:

- Representatives emphasised the importance of whakapapa (genealogy), kawa (protocols), tikanga (correct procedures), and related Māori principles in shaping Māori freshwater values and informing freshwater management and mātauranga Māori.
- Views differed on the role of WRC in identifying values. Many representatives noted that Māori freshwater values are best defined locally by iwi and hapū, are often site-specific, and reflect local tikanga.
- Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust shared an example of its own values framework, which illustrated distinctions between Māori principles and NOF values and supported discussion with WRC staff.
- Representatives highlighted the need for flexibility so that iwi and hapū can apply their own understandings of values, tikanga, and practice within their respective rohe.
- Some representatives supported exploring wai tapu (sacred waters), tauranga waka (canoe landing site), and mahinga kai (food harvesting) as possible Māori freshwater values within the NOF structure, subject to further discussion and local interpretation.
- Kaitiaki (guardians) were recognised as best placed to identify site- and catchment-specific values based on their relationships, knowledge, and responsibilities.

5.3 Attributes

WRC provided an overview of the purpose of attributes within the NOF, including how scientific, cultural, and mātauranga Māori measures may support the expression of Māori freshwater values. Preliminary material was shared to assist discussion, outlining different types of indicators that could support monitoring. This material was not intended to determine or limit the range of cultural indicators, and representatives were invited to contribute their own understandings, mātauranga, and monitoring approaches. Table 3 summarises the themes raised by representatives during discussion of indicators and attributes.

Table 3: Summary of feedback on attributes

Theme	Summary of feedback on attributes
Scientific indicators	Representatives acknowledged the value of scientific measures such as E. coli, turbidity, contaminants, flows, water clarity, habitat quality, groundwater levels, and taonga species condition particularly where these affect cultural values or practices such as mahinga kai harvesting.
Foundational concepts and principles	Representatives emphasised that whakapapa, tikanga, kawa, and mātauranga Māori should guide how cultural attributes are identified, assessed, and monitored. These concepts underpin Māori understandings of freshwater health.
Adverse effects on cultural values	Representatives noted a range of historic and ongoing pressures affecting water bodies and cultural values, including hydro schemes, land loss, wastewater discharges, contaminants, pesticides, urban stormwater, and activities such as boating. Concerns were raised that these impacts should be reflected in monitoring approaches.
Policy considerations	Representatives highlighted that cultural attributes should be grounded in tangata whenua visions, tikanga, whakapapa, and kawa. They also noted interest in partnership approaches to monitoring, shared training, science tools, and data, while acknowledging that some information may be sensitive
Mātauranga Māori indicators	Representatives discussed a wide range of potential mātauranga Māori indicators, including sensory observations (sight, smell, sound, feeling), metaphysical indicators (wairua (spirit), mauri (life force), taniwha(water spirit)), maramataka (Māori lunar calendar), taonga (treasure) species presence and condition, vegetation indicators, and local tikanga practices.

Theme	Summary of feedback on attributes
General comments	Representatives noted that different monitoring approaches may be appropriate for different iwi and places, and that flexibility is required. Some cultural indicators or knowledge may be sensitive or not suitable for broad publication.

5.4 Outstanding water bodies (introduction)

WRC staff introduced representatives to the topic of Outstanding Water Bodies (OWB) and explained the general concept to attendees. Feedback was sought on outstanding water bodies and possible approaches to creating a list, or cultural criteria. The following themes were raised by representatives during the introductory discussion on outstanding water bodies:

- Some representatives shared past experiences such as where foot traffic was used as a criterion for an outstanding waterbody which was not supported by the iwi.
- Representatives commented that tangata whenua have not always been included in previous decision making about OWB lists. They emphasised the importance of meaningful involvement in any revised approach.
- Some water bodies can be outstanding for a period then once things change; water bodies are removed from being outstanding.
- Queries raised around the policy tools to make water users accountable for breach of freshwater rules, and the protection of wai tapu waterbodies.

6 Ngā wai pounamu | Outstanding Water Bodies

6.1 Background

WRC hosted the fourth NTM wānanga on 30 May 2024 at the Velo Lounge, Grassroots Velodrome in Cambridge. The following tangata whenua entities were represented by one or more representatives on the day:

- Ngaati Koroki Kahukura
- Ngāti Rangiwewehi
- Ngāti Hauā Mahi Trust
- Ngāti Tangata
- Ngāti Hinerangi

WRC shared preliminary material to support discussion. This included an outline of the OWB purpose, the draft identification process, and a list of 34 candidate water bodies from the Waikato RPS. Representatives were invited to provide feedback on the draft approach and to consider how tangata whenua might contribute evidence about outstanding cultural values.

6.2 Legislation changes

WRC staff provided an update on recent central government freshwater reforms, including changes to stock exclusion provisions, Te Mana o te Wai application, fast-track consenting proposals, and the revised timeframe for notifying new freshwater planning instruments, which shifted from 2024 to 2028. Staff informed representatives that the project plan and programme timeline were being adjusted in light of these changes.

6.3 Waitī/Waimāori

WRC presented a revised concept for the draft value previously labelled 'wai tapu', proposing 'Waitī/Waimāori' as an alternative for discussion. The intent was to test whether a broader framing could better reflect the range of Māori understandings of water states. Waitī is one of the stars in Te Kāhui o Matariki, the Pleiades star cluster. A star connected to fresh water and the creatures that live in rivers, streams and lakes. Waimāori is freshwater. The rationale of this change was tested, and draft list of possible states of Waitī/Waimāori was presented to representatives:

- Waiora: Healing and life-giving water, pure and healthy
- Waiariki: Healing or curative waters, often hot springs
- Waitapu: Sacred water used for ritual and ceremony
- Waimāori: Consumable, sustaining life, and runs free and unrestrained
- Waiparu: Clouded waters
- Waipiro/pirau: Odorous waters
- Waikino: Dangerous/polluted water; mauri altered through pollution
- Waimate: Stagnant, dead, or death-inducing waters

Representatives noted that groundwater and aquifers should also be considered, and highlighted related terms such as waipuna (spring), and waiake. Others raised that te reo Māori terminology can carry risks of misinterpretation if not applied through tikanga and with appropriate guidance. Some representatives supported further exploration of this concept and encouraged WRC to continue refining it.

6.4 Outstanding Water Bodies

WRC shared a proposed approach to identifying outstanding water bodies for feedback from NTM representatives. This included early discussion material on the purpose of OWB provisions, the draft identification steps, draft criteria, and the Waikato RPS shortlist of 34 candidate sites. The following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of outstanding water bodies:

- Some representatives noted that terms such as 'outstanding' and 'significant' can feel arbitrary and may not align with tikanga Māori or with how iwi and hapū understand the importance of water bodies.
- One representative raised concern over the term 'cultural' values and suggested instead that 'tangata whenua' values is more accurate.
- Some representatives identified the risk that the criteria for outstanding may be changed in subsequent planning processes.
- Many representatives would feel uncomfortable being asked to assess the significance of a waterbody that they do not interact with, or affiliate to.
- Some representatives noted the challenges of applying quantitative assessment methods or scoring across different water bodies, as each iwi and hapū have their own perspectives and tikanga.
- Some representatives raised a concern with one criterion that simply counting the number of significant sites on a waterbody is arbitrary and does not reflect the differing significance of each of the sites.

- Some representatives queried if any of the 34 water bodies have had archaeological work done. Prior information about sites such as pā (forts), middens, urupā (burial places), cooking pits, and terraces may be required to assess some of the proposed criteria.
- Some representatives questioned how cultural, ecological and landscape values would be balanced, and noted that cultural values should not be treated as secondary. Some suggested cultural values should serve as a waharoa (gateway) or starting point.
- Representatives noted that tangata whenua should be meaningfully involved in any future panel or collective assessment process.
- Several representatives considered the shortlist of 34 sites incomplete and requires addition of surface water bodies such as the Mangapiko, Pūtangi, Raingaitiki, Taaharoa Lakes and aquifers such as the Kaimai Mamaku aquifer.

7 Ngā hua taiao me ngā tātai āhuatanga | Outcomes and Attributes

7.1 Background

On 14 May 2025, WRC hosted the fifth NTM wānanga at the Long Room, Wintec, Hamilton. The following tangata whenua entities were represented by one or more representatives on the day:

- Ngaati Wairere
- Rereahu
- Raukawa Charitable Trust
- Ngāti Porou ki Hauraki
- Ngāti Tamaterā
- Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Pū (Ngāti Maru)

The hui began with an update on central government freshwater reforms and discussion on how recent changes were affecting representatives. The wānanga then focused on draft values, environmental outcomes, and possible attributes for tauranga waka, mahinga kai, and waitī or waimāori. WRC shared preliminary material to support discussion and sought feedback on the draft concepts. Representatives were invited to share their own experiences, feedback, aspirations and indicators for each value.

7.2 Tauranga waka

The first value discussed was tauranga waka. WRC shared draft environmental outcomes for the draft value of tauranga waka for feedback and discussion. WRC sought feedback from representatives on these draft outcomes, what conditions and protections were needed for tauranga waka sites, and what other aspirations representatives had for tauranga waka values. The following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of environmental outcomes for tauranga waka:

- Representatives described tauranga waka as a distinctly Māori practice connected to a range of tikanga such as mahinga kai, movement along waterways, manaakitanga (protection and care), and customary use of wetlands and rivers.
- A good waka (canoe) site was described as having safe and accessible launching areas, suitable beaching space, and conditions that support customary use.
- Representatives emphasised the need to protect tauranga waka sites from development, loss of access, invasive species, and other disturbances.

- Some representatives noted that many tauranga waka sites have been lost or altered over time. They suggested the use of registers and accidental discovery protocols to recognise and manage these areas.
- Tauranga waka sites were noted as having strong whakapapa and iwi or hapū specific significance. Some representatives commented that district plans should be encouraged to restore access to historic sites.

WRC shared draft freshwater attributes for testing with NTM representatives as possible indicators of the state of tauranga waka values. This included potential human contact attributes such as *E. Coli*, as well as narrative bands for accessibility and condition, that could be assessed by iwi using their own mātauranga and tikanga, at their own monitoring sites. The following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of attributes and indicators for tauranga waka:

- Representatives supported partnership approaches to monitoring, including resourcing and training where tangata whenua undertake assessments.
- Some noted that knowledge of historic tauranga waka sites may be incomplete and suggested that attributes could recognise a category for lost or no-longer-accessible sites.
- Representatives emphasised the importance of local mapping and identification of tauranga waka sites by iwi and hapū.
- The potential use of an attribute relating to accessibility was discussed, with some representatives noting it may be subjective and require further refinement.
- Representatives noted that conditions considered unfavourable for waka use, such as the presence of grasses or weeds, may still hold ecological value for species such as tuna.
- Signage and local interpretation were viewed as opportunities to support recognition of tauranga waka sites.

7.3 Shared monitoring

WRC sought feedback on whether some monitoring activities associated with values such as mahinga kai, tauranga waka, and waitī/waimāori could be undertaken jointly. Representatives offered the following perspectives.

- There was general support for tangata whenua involvement in monitoring, provided appropriate resourcing, training, and professional development are in place.
- Some representatives noted that many iwi have limited capacity and may face challenges taking on additional monitoring responsibilities.
- Joint training and knowledge sharing between mana whenua and council staff was viewed as valuable and should be incorporated into ongoing partnership arrangements.
- Representatives emphasised the importance of data sovereignty. Tangata whenua should decide how environmental and cultural data is collected, stored, accessed, and shared, with clear protocols established.

7.4 Mahinga kai

The second value discussed was mahinga kai. WRC shared draft environmental outcomes for the draft value of mahinga kai for feedback and discussion. The following themes were raised by representatives during the discussion:

- Representatives emphasised the need to distinguish between water bodies ‘used for’ mahinga kai and those ‘valued for’ mahinga kai and noted that customary resources are exclusive to Māori and include a broader range of species and practices beyond kai.
- Representatives highlighted the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer and taonga tuku iho (treasure handed down) within mahinga kai.

- Some representatives encouraged council to support opportunities such as aquaculture training where these are sought by mana whenua.

WRC shared draft attributes for testing with NTM representatives, as possible indicators and attributes for the state of mahinga kai values. This included taonga species health (tuna (eel), kōura (freshwater crayfish), watercress) and mahinga kai site accessibility that could be assessed by iwi at their own mahinga kai sites. WRC also shared suggested monitoring methodologies with NTM representatives for their feedback. The following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of environmental attributes and indicators for mahinga kai:

- Tangata whenua should retain control over how data relating to mahinga kai species, practices, and sites is collected and shared. Sensitive information should only be used or published with explicit permission.
- Accessibility was seen as important to measure, and some representatives preferred the term unrestricted access rather than safe or somewhat accessible.
- Some representatives suggested adding a measure relating to condition for assessing species health.
- Representatives supported monitoring methods that avoid euthanising tuna and supported the use of visual size assessments.
- Attributes should allow flexibility for mana whenua to provide site-specific information, including seasonal factors, substrate, or maramataka.
- Monitoring for kōura should allow flexibility for alternative methods where bracken is not appropriate.
- Representatives supported the inclusion of watercress as a taonga species in attributes.

7.5 Waitī/Waimāori

WRC provided a recap of the proposed shift from wai tapu to waitī or waimāori and outlined possible water states to support discussion. No draft environmental outcome was provided, and representatives were invited to share aspirations and considerations for the value. The following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of environmental outcomes for waitī/waimāori:

- Representatives noted that outcomes should support water being usable for intended cultural and traditional purposes.
- Representatives expressed that mauri should be enhanced and that tikanga should be able to be exercised.
- There was interest in ensuring policy supports local setting of desired states and outcomes for different water bodies.

WRC shared a possible monitoring approach for the draft waitī/waimāori value for discussion and feedback with NTM representatives. This included various biophysical water quality attributes that measure the physical health of water, as well as a suggested mauri scale measuring the health of the water from a cultural and spiritual perspective. The draft states of waitī/waimāori that were discussed on the day is displayed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: *Draft 'Bands' or states for Waitī/Waimāori discussed with NTM representatives*

The following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of attributes and monitoring for waitī/waimāori:

- Representatives supported approaches that incorporate both scientific indicators in combination with kaitiaki led visual or sensory assessments.
- Representatives noted that conventional NOF style banding may not align well with te ao Māori perspectives, and suggested approaches that use a spectrum or binary 'waimāori' or 'not waimāori' concept instead.

- Representatives noted that all water states can have mauri and cultural value and that policy should aim to recognise to the intrinsic value of water, not only the more pristine states.
- Some representatives observed that it may not be realistic or appropriate to seek to achieve the highest purity state of waitapu for all water bodies.
- Some representatives suggested adding 'taonga tuku iho' to the description of wai tapu.
- There was desire among some representatives for attributes to be flexibly and locally identified.

8 Ngā wai pounamu | Outstanding Water Bodies

8.1 Background

WRC hosted the sixth NTM meeting via two online meetings on 11 June 2025 via Microsoft Teams, and a two follow up meetings for one group who was unable to attend, and another who wished to provide feedback verbally after the initial online meeting. Across these meetings, the following tangata whenua entities were represented by one or more representatives:

- Hineuru Iwi Trust
- Ngaati Amaru
- Ngaati Wairere
- Ngāti Hinerangi
- Ngāti Rangiwewehi
- Ngāti Rereahu / Roopuu o Rereahu
- Ngāti Tara Tokanui Trust
- Ngāti Whanaunga
- Taaharoa Lakes Trust

The focus of the wānanga was on outstanding water bodies.

8.2 Outstanding Water Bodies

WRC presented an overview of the policy context and function of outstanding water bodies, and the draft process for identifying culturally outstanding values. Staff shared a draft shortlist of 34 candidate outstanding water bodies previously identified in the Waikato RPS, and informed representatives how tangata whenua could share, collate, and provide evidence to support the identification of culturally outstanding water bodies.

WRC invited all NTM representatives to share evidence that may support the identification of culturally outstanding values for the shortlisted water bodies. WRC pre-circulated a draft assessment criteria including prompts to support NTM representatives in gathering and collating their evidence. Some representatives provided feedback during, or after the meetings. The following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of outstanding water bodies:

- Some representatives shared concerns that terminology like 'outstanding' and 'significant' are arbitrary policy ranking tools that often conflict with tikanga Māori.
- Some representatives noted that the spatial extent of 'outstandingness' should consider the relationship to upstream and downstream areas.
- Representatives noted that many sites used to have outstanding cultural values but have been diminished due to contamination, land alienation, and development.

- Waterbodies might be outstanding that are not on the shortlist.
- Taaharoa Lakes Trust provided information on the ecological and cultural values of Lakes Taaharoa, Numiti, and Rotoroa.
- Ngāti Hineuru's representative noted that the Rangitaiki River should be considered outstanding.
- Ngāti Hinerangi's representative provided information on the Mangapiko Stream, from Maungatautari to Pirongia and its cultural values.
- Ngaati Amaru consider Te Puuaha o Waikato (Port Waikato) as 'ngaa tapu' and that 'sacrosanct' better describes its value.
- Ngāti Rereahu / Roopuu o Rereahu's representative shared concerns that the shortlist didn't include the waterbodies within their rohe.
- Ngāti Rangiwewehi's representatives shared their interest in protecting their local aquifer of the Kaimai Mamaku area.

9 Te nui me te toha o ngā wai | Water quantity and allocation

9.1 Background

On 27 August 2025, WRC hosted the seventh NTM workshop at Wintec, Hamilton. A follow up meeting was also hosted online on 22 October 2025 for a member who was unable to attend. The following tangata whenua entities were represented by one or more representatives at the meetings:

- Ngaati Wairere
- Ngāti Rangiwewehi
- Ngāti Rereahu / Roopuu o Rereahu
- Ngāti Tamaterā
- Ngāti Tara Tokanui
- Raukawa Charitable Trust
- Tahaaroa Lakes Trust

The focus of the meeting was groundwater, water quantity and allocation, and the use of water. WRC also provided updates on Healthy Rivers Plan Change 1 and recent Government reform announcements.

9.2 Water quantity and allocation

WRC pre-circulated to all representatives a brief memo outlining the current approach to water quantity management, as well as a series of potential policy approaches for feedback from NTM representatives. WRC shared an overview of select policy options and discussed the options and implications with NTM representatives. The themes raised by representatives during discussion of outstanding water bodies are captured in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Summary of feedback themes during water quantity wānanga

Policy Option	Feedback themes
Cultural allocations of water	• Overall support for the suggested cultural activities as a starting point. • Many iwi/hapū lack the capacity, technical expertise, and funding needed to engage in or benefit from water allocation processes. • The complexity and cost of RMA water allocation systems place cultural allocation out of reach for many groups. • Rangatahi training and iwi workforce pathways (planning, law, science, council roles) are seen as essential long-term solutions.

	• 'Cultural allocation' should cover a broad set of practices, including mahinga kai, restoration, marae supply, traditional uses, and kaitiaki responsibilities. • Some iwi, such as Ngāti Tamaterā, emphasise allocating water back to the environment first, ensuring ecosystems can sustain cultural practices. • Navigation and waka use remain important cultural practices requiring adequate flows. • Maintenance of wai tapu and rongoā (medicine) resources is a critical cultural activity needing recognition. • Ngāti Rangiwewehi's example shows a 'wai first' joint consent model, embedding mātauranga into setting kaitiaki flows for municipal takes. • Ambiguity in the term 'cultural' could undermine the intent; iwi prefer terms like 'wellbeing' or 'holistic allocation.' • Overallocation (e.g., Waihou, Piako) and development pressures limit iwi ability to access water, with some communities dependent on rainwater and bore supplies.
Reducing the pressure on surface water	• The transition may be an unfortunate reality due to high pressure on surface waters. • Mauri and tikanga must guide groundwater decisions, as aquifers are also part of iwi identity and whakapapa. • There is concern about hidden or unforeseen impacts, including long-term depletion or ecological effects. • The mixing of waters (groundwater/surface water) may be culturally inappropriate and must be considered carefully. • Tangata whenua want ready and transparent access to science and monitoring data, including real-time information. • There are concerns about impacts on the marine environment, especially where river flows influence estuaries and coastal ecosystems. • Concern was expressed for small rural bore users, who may be vulnerable to drawdown if groundwater abstraction increases. • Representatives reiterated concern for marine impacts.
Enabling water storage	• Ownership and responsibility issues must be resolved. Landowners and contractors need clear agreements about who owns or controls water storage infrastructure. • Water sharing may help with allocation pressures but is context-dependent and could ease water accounting, but in some areas established users may be reluctant or unwilling to relinquish their allocation. • Water users in some rohe may resist parting with their volumes, signalling practical limits to storage-based solutions. • Storage is seen as a partial tool to help rebalance the first-in, first-served system.

10 Te whakahoki kōrero atu | Reporting back to NTM

On 19 November 2025, WRC hosted the eighth NTM meeting online via Microsoft Teams. The following tangata whenua entities were represented by one or more representatives at the meetings:

- Ngaati Amaru
- Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust
- Te Nehenehenui Trust
- Ngāti Rangiwewehi
- Raukawa Charitable Trust
- Ngāti Tamaterā
- Ngāti Tara Tokanui

The focus on this meeting was reporting back to NTM representatives on how their recommendations and feedback had shaped and influenced the development of the emerging policy direction, and an overview of key themes heard from NTM.

WRC pre-circulated a memo summarising key themes from all NTM meetings. WRC also pre-circulated a discussion document that outlined many of the emerging freshwater objectives based on past work and how NTM feedback has informed it. This meeting was primarily to close the loop with regards to how where and how WRC had actioned and implemented the feedback of participating NTM representatives. In response to the key themes, the following themes were raised by representatives during discussion of NTM feedback themes:

- Concern over proposed new standards, legislation, and reform easing the restrictions and allowing increased contaminant discharges.
- Local 'lived' experiences and knowledge are important resources for freshwater policy development.
- Provide more specific solutions for the management of water takes, particularly for large municipal takes such as Watercare abstraction near Port Waikato.
- Resource consent applicants for large volume abstraction applications should be required to engage with tangata whenua.
- Cross boundary management of farm plans and cross agency functions are becoming more complicated to interact with as iwi.
- Policy must consider downstream impacts on coastal communities, harbours, estuaries, and the coastal marine area.

11 Kupu whakatepe me te ara ki tua | Conclusion and next steps

NTM representatives have provided extensive feedback on freshwater values, attributes, wai tapu, tauranga waka, mahinga kai, water quantity and allocation, and culturally outstanding water bodies. Their perspectives, experiences, and mātauranga have helped shape the development of draft policy material and have strengthened the understanding of how tikanga, whakapapa, and local context should guide freshwater planning.

The feedback summarised in this report will continue to inform the preparation of draft provisions for the Waikato RPS and Waikato Regional Plan alongside other tangata whenua engagement pathways. As the policy programme progresses, WRC will consider how best to support tangata whenua involvement in this work.

WRC acknowledges the commitment and expertise that NTM representatives have contributed throughout the programme. Their participation has strengthened the quality of discussions and improved understanding of iwi and hapū priorities for freshwater across the region. WRC will continue to update NTM representatives and other tangata whenua partners as next steps in the freshwater planning process are determined.

12 Ngā kupu whakamārama | Glossary of terms

Māori term	English translation
Ahi kā	Home fires: those who are here preserving one's connection to the land
Ahi mātao	Cooling fires of occupation - a term used where the customary title to land may be lost through lack of occupation over two to three generations.
Ahi teretere	Flickering fire, unstable fire - a term used when members of a whānau have not returned to their tribal lands to 'keep the fires burning' for three or four generations and their rights have almost been extinguished
Awa	River, stream, creek
Hapū	Sub-tribe
Heke kōrero	Dissemination of knowledge
Huhu	Longhorn beetle endemic to New Zealand
Ika	Fish
Īnanga	Common galaxias, juveniles are a component of the whitebait catch
Iwi	Tribe, nation, people, society
Kāeo	Freshwater mussels
Kākahi	Freshwater mussels
Kai	Eat, food, dine
Kaitiaki(tanga)	Guardian, caretaker, (guardianship)
Karakia	Incantation, prayer, chant
Kaumātua	Elders (plural), not gender specific
Kaupapa	Topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan
Kōiwi	Māori skeletal remains
Kōaro	Climbing galaxias, juveniles are a component of the whitebait catch
Kōkopu	Kokopu is a common name used for three species of fish of the genus Galaxias. They are found in the rivers, lakes and swamps of New Zealand, to which they are endemic.
Kōkōwai	Red ochre
Kōmitimiti	Joining
Kōrero	Speech, narrative, story, news, account, discussion, conversation
Kōrero tuku iho	Dissemination of knowledge, oral tradition
Koroua	Male elder
Kōura	Freshwater crayfish
Kuia	Female elder
Mahi	Work, perform, practice
Mahinga kai	Food safe to harvest, customary resources available
Mana	Prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object
Manaakitanga	Protect, take care of, support
Mana whakahaere	Governance, authority, jurisdiction, management, mandate, power
Mana whenua	Authority over land or territory
Maramataka	Māori lunar calendar
Marae	Sacred meeting place, courtyard in front of the wharenui (meeting house)
Matamata	Whitebait species
Matariki	Māori New Year and the Pleiades star cluster
Mātauranga	Māori knowledge. The body of knowledge originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world view and perspectives, Māori creativity and cultural practices
Maunga	Mountain
Mauri	Life principle, life force, vital essence, special nature. The essential quality and vitality of a being or entity
Moko(puna)	Grandchild(ren), descendant(s)

Māori term	English translation
Morihana	Goldfish
Muka	Flax fibre
Pā	Fortified area
Pā tuna	Eel weirs
Paru	Dirty, muddy, soiled
Pepeha	Tribal saying, tribal motto, proverb
Pōrohe	Common smelt (fish)
Puhi	Silver belly eel
Puna	To well up, spring of water
Pūrākau	Cosmogonic stories / ideology
Pure	Ceremony or ritual to remove tapu
Pūtea	Funds, finance
Rāhui	To put in place a temporary ritual prohibition, closed season, ban, reserve - traditionally a rāhui was placed on an area, resource or stretch of water as a conservation measure or as a means of social and political control for a variety of reasons which can be grouped into three main categories: pollution by tapu, conservation and politics
Rangatahi	Youth, younger generation
Ranginui	The sky father
Repo	Wetland(s)
Rohe	Area, territory
Rongoā	Medicine, to remedy
Tāhuhu kōrero	History
Taiao	Nature, environment
Tamariki	Children
Tangata whenua	People of the land, locals, host, resident, indigenous people - people born of the whenua, i.e. of the placenta and of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried
Taniwha	Water spirit
Taonga	Treasure, prized possession
Taonga tuku iho	Treasure handed down, cultural property, heritage
Tapu	Sacredness
Tauranga waka	Canoe landing place
Tikanga	Correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention
Tinana	Physical wellbeing, physical body
Tohi	Blessing, baptism, dedication ceremony
Tohu	Sign, symbol
Tūāhu	Sacred place for ritual practices, consisting of an enclosure containing a mound (ahu) and marked by the erection of rods (toko) which were used for divination and other mystic rites
Tuna	Freshwater eel
Tupāpaku	Deceased person's body
Tūpuna	Ancestor(s)
Urupā	Cemetery, burial place, graveyard
Wāhi tapu	Shrine, sanctuary, sacred area/place
Waharoa	Gateway
Wai	Water
Wai ariki	Healing or curative waters
Wai māori	Freshwater, mineral water
Wai ora	Healing and life-giving water, pure and healthy
Wai puna	Spring of water
Wai tapu	Sacred waters
Waitī	One of the stars in Te Kāhui o Matariki, the Pleiades star cluster. A star connected to fresh water and the creatures that live in rivers, streams and lakes.
Wai whakarite	Cleansing
Wairua	Spirit, soul

Māori term	English translation
Wānanga	To meet and discuss, forum
Whakanoa	Removal of tapu
Whakapapa	Genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent, ancestry
Whānau (whānui)	Extended family, family group, to be born
Whenua	Land

Waikato Regional Council Policy Series 2026/02

Collaborative Science Advisory Group Summary Report

ISSN 2230-4363 (Online)
ISSN 2230-4339 (Print)
waikatoregion.govt.nz

	Name	Date
Approving Manager	Bruce McAuliffe	

Prepared by	Mike Scarsbrook (Collaborative Science Advisory Group)
For	Waikato Regional Council Private Bag 3038 Waikato Mail Centre HAMILTON 3240
Publication date	2026
Document ID	34295919

Contents

Executive Summary

CSAG Purpose

- Waikato Regional Council (WRC) has been working through its Freshwater Policy Review project, including its response to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPSFM) 2020.
- A Collaborative Science Advisory Group (CSAG) was formed to provide a robust, science-based test of WRC's draft thinking to support development of effective policy options for the Freshwater Policy Review (FPR).
- The purpose of the CSAG was to provide free and frank advice to WRC, based on members' experience and professional expertise. This process is one of many streams of input into the FPR project.
- Over five meetings from 1 August to 20 October 2025, CSAG provided comment on a range of topics presented by the WRC Policy and Science Teams.
- This report serves as a record of discussions over those five meetings. It represents the views of CSAG members based on what was presented to them by WRC staff.
- This report does not represent a formal council position on topics covered in the report.

Meeting 1: Foundations and Reflections

- The Group provided insights on their experiences at the Science-Policy interface, including reflections on Proposed Plan Change 1- Waikato-Waipā River catchments (PC1) and other relevant planning processes in New Zealand.
- The Group highlighted the importance of:
    - Translating science into policy-relevant language.
    - Importance of collaborative processes and expert conferencing.
    - Lessons from PC1: lack of specificity, scope limitations (e.g. limited coverage of aquatic life and ecosystems, water quantity, lakes, wetlands).
- Concerns were raised about a blanket approach to target-setting without a foundation of clear values, outcomes and their spatial context.

Meeting 2: Attributes, Outcomes, and Targets

- The Group expressed strong support for:
    - Linking attributes to environmental outcomes.
    - Including temperature, dissolved oxygen (DO), metals (in urban streams), habitat measures and wetland extent as attributes.
    - Importance of measures of habitat and hydrological alterations – often critical drivers of ecosystem health.
    - Using narrative targets where data is limited.
- The Group was critical of blanket approaches to target setting (e.g. "one band up" or 20% reductions).
- There was support for defining/refining/quantifying environmental outcomes at FMU/sub-catchment/site scale.
- It was felt that outcomes like "ensure healthy ecosystems" are not particularly useful to guide target setting because they don't explain the level of "healthy" being sought or what it means for the specified monitoring site / sub-catchment / stream type.
- The Group recommended an emphasis on spatial variability, achievability, and making use of prioritisation frameworks.

Meeting 3: Sensitive Receiving Environments (SREs)

- The Group indicated that all freshwater ecosystems respond to anthropogenic nutrient enrichment, so should be considered nutrient-sensitive to varying degrees.
- Furthermore, it was highlighted that inputs of nutrients and sediments can have impacts on both immediate receiving environments and those connected downstream.
- For the Freshwater Policy Review, there was support from the Group for the view that estuaries, lakes, and wetlands, should be considered Sensitive Receiving Environments with respect to nutrients and sediment.
- The Group recommended that WRC:
    - Prioritise high value and vulnerable systems (e.g. lakes at risk of flipping, degraded and sensitive wetlands).
    - Define lake-specific targets and management plans.
    - Exclude farm ponds unless ecologically significant (or having other significant values, e.g. recreation).
    - Consider karst systems flagged as sensitive but data-poor; the potential for sediment, nitrate and dissolved organic carbon (DOC) impacts were noted.
- The Group also recommended that scenario modelling would be useful to support target setting, particularly where data might be limited (e.g. unmonitored lakes).

Meeting 4: Firth of Thames and Estuarine Management

The Group was informed by WRC staff that:

- There is evidence of degradation (hypoxia and acidification) in the estuarine and coastal areas of the Hauraki Gulf and growing concerns about the system reaching an ecological tipping point. Not all CSAG Members agreed with this assessment.
- An interim target of 20% load reduction target for Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), and sediment to the Firth of Thames is being considered.

The Group comments included:

- Significant concerns about the blanket application to all estuaries of an interim target for all 4 contaminants.
- Support for a harbour-by-harbour analysis and target development.
- A recommendation that climate change must be factored into analysis.
- Recognising the need for a clear understanding of the 'natural' baseline state, not to imply that is necessarily the desired endpoint, but to ensure we aren't setting an unrealistic trajectory of change.
- Use of the Scenario Builder [1] tool was endorsed, but mitigation assumptions need refinement. This might be a valuable task for a subsequent Farming Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

Meeting 5: River targets, hydrological modification of lakes and wetlands, and Integration

- The Group reiterated the view that river ecosystems are sensitive to sediment and nutrients.
- There was a general view that hard-bottomed streams should be included in target setting where relevant. This would recognise the potential for issues with periphyton and other enrichment issues at place, while also recognising the need to manage downstream nutrient sensitivity (including in large, non-wadeable, soft-bottomed rivers).

[1] https://www.freshwater-scenario-builder.co.nz/waikato

- The Group highlighted that headwater streams are important because they represent 70-80% of the stream network and are the entry point for a high proportion of contaminants in a catchment. As such, they should be considered in policy approaches to address contaminant loading.
- The Group also reinforced their support for catchment-specific targets and typology-based approaches.
- There was a consensus view that hydrological alterations (e.g. drainage) are a key driver of degradation of streams, lakes and wetlands. These alterations need to be considered in policy frameworks seeking to improve freshwater outcomes.

Summary of CSAG Advice to WRC Policy Team

Target Setting

- Overall, CSAG advised a significant re-think of the approach used for defining outcomes and setting targets for the Freshwater Policy Review.
- The CSAG considers that applying blanket percentage reductions in contaminant concentrations (e.g., 20%) as target attribute states (TAS) is not a sufficiently robust approach, as it fails to account for the specific drivers of degraded ecosystem health and the environmental outcomes sought across different systems.
- Instead, site-specific TAS should be developed using the best available information to ensure consistency with what is most likely to achieve the desired ecological endpoints.
- Target setting should focus on the critical issues for ecosystem health in a given system, with the aim of meeting specific outcomes at place as determined in consultation with iwi partners and community, including justification of the need for change and using best available information.
- Targets should also consider factors beyond contaminant management, e.g. habitat degradation, hydrological alteration, and ecological processes (e.g. dissolved oxygen, temperature).
- WRC should prioritise vulnerable systems (e.g. lakes at risk of flipping, degraded wetlands).
- Scenario modelling is suggested as a valuable tool to predict mitigation effectiveness and restoration trajectories.
- WRC should include interim targets and adaptive review cycles.

Sensitive Receiving Environments (SREs)

- CSAG recommended the WRC Policy Team consider treating estuaries, lakes and wetlands as Sensitive Receiving Environments.
- The Group also suggested that WRC map and prioritise SREs for setting nutrient and sediment load targets using vulnerability, ecological state, and connectivity.
- Policies to support/enable constructed/enhanced wetlands, riparian management and other restoration activities (e.g. restore hydrological connectivity) were seen as important elements to consider in the FPR.
- The Group also highlighted the importance of ensuring upstream limits are linked to downstream outcomes (Clause 3.13 NPSFM).

Attributes and Monitoring

- CSAG recommended consideration of an expanded list of attributes to include:
    - Temperature, dissolved oxygen, habitat and hydrological parameters (e.g. lake levels), metals (particularly for urban streams), wetland extent, lake levels, sedimentation effects.
- The Group was comfortable with the potential use of narrative targets where data is lacking.

- The importance of headwater streams as key contributors to catchment loads should be recognised in policy.
- Finally, monitoring programmes should be designed to support policy effectiveness and freshwater outcome evaluation at relevant spatial and temporal scales.

Hydrological Management of lakes and wetlands

- CSAG recommended that WRC explicitly consider impacts of hydrological alteration (e.g. drainage, flood control) in wetlands/lakes, and rivers (e.g. altered flows/geomorphology).
- The Group also considered that lake-by-lake and wetland-specific management plans should be enabled and clearly linked to regulatory methods (i.e. give teeth to plan implementation).

Karst ecosystems

- CSAG recommended that WRC recognise karst ecosystems as Sensitive Receiving Environments.
- The Group highlighted the paucity of information on groundwater ecosystems (a component of karst), indicating the need for research into potential impacts of nutrient, sediment and carbon enrichment.

Planning

- CSAG highlighted the importance of integrating technical, policy, and planning teams early in the plan-development process.
- The Group recognised the need to ensure policy is spatially-nuanced, communicable, and technically robust.

Climate Change and Lag Effects

- CSAG recommended that WRC seek to incorporate climate change scenarios into modelling and planning.
- WRC should also consider how best to account for lag times, vulnerable species and habitats, and ecological hysteresis[2] in degraded systems.

[2] Hysteresis - Wikipedia

Background

- WRC has been working through its Freshwater Policy Review project, including its requirements under the NPSFM.
- Tangata whenua, community and sector engagement have all been informing the direction for freshwater management, along with science, investigations and monitoring.
- WRC are at a stage now to test current thinking and have sought expert science input from the CSAG.
- Feedback from the CSAG will assist as a testing ground for ideas related to the development of science-based freshwater policy and its potential impact (both positive and negative).

Objectives

- Provide a robust, science-based test of WRC's draft thinking to support development of effective options for the Freshwater Policy Review.
- This includes highlighting potential actions, issues and solutions, with proposed approaches based on the technical knowledge and experience members bring.
- Review and critique the body of science-based knowledge available to inform the Freshwater Policy Review and identify gaps in WRC's science knowledge base.
- Share insights and experience on technical aspects covered during the PC1 process and other regional planning processes.
- Share insights on aligning regional plans with technical requirements of the NPSFM and, specific to Waikato River, the requirements to give effect to Te Ture Whaimana.
- Deliver a report summarising advice to WRC Policy team resulting from the CSAG process.

Disclaimer

- This report serves as a record of discussions over a series of five meetings. It represents the views of CSAG members based on what was presented to them by WRC staff.
- This report does not represent a formal council position on topics covered in the report.

Summary Notes from Each Meeting

Meeting 1: Friday 1 August 2025

Freshwater Policy Review

- Integrating Water Quantity and Hydrological Alteration of lakes, rivers and wetlands
  - PC1 Limitations: Ecological functions of wetlands and lakes were largely excluded from PC1. CSAG raised concerns about how water quantity issues—especially hydrological aspects—will be integrated into the FPR.
  - Current Work: A full review of flows and levels is underway across the region, including the PC1 catchment. Variation 6 provided a foundation for water allocation, but lake level management and groundwater require further work.
  - Policy Scope Expansion: Beyond allocation, the policy team is considering land drainage and diversion, particularly in relation to Whangamarino Wetland.
- Policy Development and National Direction
  - Uncertainty ahead: the December 2026 draft policy deadline may be impacted by RMA reform and potential replacement of the NPSFM with new national standards.
  - Government has committed to upholding existing Treaty settlements, including Te Ture Whaimana (Waikato/Waipā awa catchment), Te Kaupapa Kaitiaki [Lake Taupo catchment], and Te mana tuku iho o Waiwaiā in [Area M of Maniapoto settlement].
- Values, Targets, and Spatial Application
  - Target Drivers: Concern was raised by CSAG members about setting targets without clear understanding of the values they aim to protect. CSAG suggested WRC understand and apply values spatially across the catchments/sub-catchments.
  - Ecosystem Health: A compulsory national value assumed to apply region-wide, but its scope and implementation need clearer definition to avoid repeating issues with PC1's narrow scope (i.e. four contaminants, rather than addressing all drivers of degraded ecosystem health).
  - Prioritisation Frameworks: Some members suggested using WRC's existing biodiversity prioritisation work to guide spatial targeting and ensure ecological relevance[3].

Science-Policy Interface and CSAG's Role

- Science Contributions: Significant work has been done linking freshwater science to NPSFM attributes and targets. If national policy shifts, WRC will still rely on core values and scientific understanding of issues, drivers and methods.
- CSAG's Function: Members expressed discomfort with being drawn into cost / benefit (Section 32) evaluations. Instead, CSAG should focus on providing advice, and identifying knowledge gaps.

Key Issues and Recommendations

- Firth of Thames: Nutrient targets for Hauraki Plains are based on the Firth's vulnerability. Evidence presented by WRC suggests it is near a tipping point, requiring urgent nutrient load reductions.
- Multi-Stressor Approach: CSAG emphasised the need to move beyond single-contaminant targets. Ecological outcomes (e.g., macroinvertebrate health) require integrated approaches.

[3] https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/services/publications/tr201612/ And https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/services/publications/tr201019/.

- Koi Carp and Other Stressors: Suggested further investigation into invasive species like koi carp and their role in sediment and cyanobacteria issues.
- Values-Based spatial planning: Recommend identifying core values (e.g., ecosystem health) and layering additional factors (e.g., water levels, habitat, invasive species) to guide policy and restoration.

CSAG Member Learnings from PC1 (Waikato-Waipā)

Many of the CSAG members were directly involved in PC1 processes.

- Limitations and Concerns expressed by CSAG members
  - Environmental Outcomes: There was concern from some CSAG members that PC1 will not deliver meaningful environmental improvements within the next decade.
  - Lakes and Wetlands: These were underrepresented in PC1. Key hydrological aspects—such as water retention in perched systems—were excluded from scope and are not well addressed in the NPSFM.
  - Scope Constraints: PC1's narrow focus on contaminants overlooked cumulative effects like river morphological and hydrological degradation.
  - Critical habitats not addressed (eg inanga and other species spawning).
- Policy Process Challenges
  - Shifting Goals: The policy process has been slow and inconsistent, with changing rules and unclear bottom lines.
  - Comparative Insight: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers model was cited as more outcome-focused, with independent panels assessing whether plans meet goals rather than just legal compliance.
- CSAG Recommendations for Future Planning
  - Outcome Clarity: More specificity is needed around environmental values and desired outcomes, and where they apply, before setting targets. Current outcomes are not sufficiently detailed.
  - Target Relevance: Targets must be meaningful—e.g., a 20% reduction in ammonia concentrations may make no discernable difference to ecosystem values, or where current concentrations are on the boundary of the A and B attribute states, or where relative changes are very small. All targets need a 'sense' check to ensure they are meaningful at the site or sub-catchment scale.
  - Hydrological Focus: Future planning should better integrate water quantity and hydrological function, especially for lakes and wetlands.

CSAG Insights from Other Regional Planning Processes

Most CSAG members have been active participants in freshwater policy processes throughout New Zealand.

- Rotorua Lakes (Bay of Plenty)
  - Extensive research and policy efforts have been made, especially for Lake Rotorua.
  - A nitrogen trading scheme was introduced but faced implementation challenges due to low stakeholder buy-in.
  - Adaptive management frameworks exist but are not well integrated into rule changes.
  - Improvements in lake health have been largely due to aluminium sulphate treatments, not policy-driven reductions in catchment nutrient loads.
  - PC10[4] focused more on specifying science programmes than debating outcomes; targets are now being examined in more detail.
- Taranaki

[4] Lake Rotorua Nutrient Management - Plan Change 10

- Historically focused on practical implementation rather than planning.
- Over 6,000 hectares of riparian land converted to native planting; 8.5 million trees planted.
- Driven by collaboration between councils and Fonterra, with strong advocacy from Fish & Game.
- Emphasis on reducing negative impacts and enhancing positives using available levers.

- Modelling and Planning Efficiency
  - Complex environmental models tend to be costly and several examples were provided of apparent under-utilisation of these models in planning processes (e.g Auckland Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council)
  - The CSAG generally supported the use of models but translating them into simple language to support effective and efficient policy can be challenging.
  - Environment Canterbury (ECan) achieved high efficiency with commissioners, completing seven plan changes in five years.
  - Without commissioners, ECan's delivery has slowed.
- Southland
  - The Environment Court directed scientists to define thresholds of degradation for all waterbodies in Southland. This was for a pre NPSFM 2020 plan change.
  - After 8 months of collaboration, agreement was reached on 16–18 attributes across wetlands, lakes, and rivers.
  - 2020 Plan process is applying catchment models to look at the gap between current state and desired objectives[5] based on most sensitive receiving environment, called the 'critical catchment load'.
- Canterbury
  - Known for fast, technically driven processes under commissioners
  - Outcomes were achieved quickly, though not always ideal and outcomes not being met in some places (eg Ashburton lakes[6]).
  - Political processes slow down progress when commissioners are absent.
- Lake Taupō (Waikato)
  - Variation 5 was a success story with clear nitrogen targets and financial fallback mechanisms.
  - Historical changes in land use (e.g., forestry planting) also contributed to lake protection.
- Waikato PC1 Learnings
  - Collaborative stakeholder group delivered draft Plan, supported by Technical Leaders Group.
  - Environment Court caucusing was valuable for expert-driven problem solving.
  - PC1 included blanket approach to target setting across four contaminants (e.g. 'Up a band').
  - Targets in PC1 were defined site by site, with poor longitudinal integration at catchment scale.
- General Insights
  - MfE's statutory review of ECan highlighted Commissioners' success in speeding up plan implementation (average 2.5 years from notification to operative)[7].
  - Integration of policy and science workstreams was key to success in Canterbury.
  - Political processes often hinder progress; commissioners enable efficiency.

[5] Snelder T, Plew D 2024. Nutrient Load Reductions to Achieve Target Attribute States in the Rivers, Lakes and Estuaries of Southland. Prepared for Environment Southland LWP Client Report Number: 2024-03. 126p.

[6] https://environment.govt.nz/publications/otuwharekaiashburton-lakes-lessons-learnt-report/

[7] Statutory review of Environment Canterbury | Ministry for the Environment

- Regardless of changes in political directions/policy approaches to environmental management, scientific foundations remain valid and should remain a fundamental of evidence-based decision making.

Meeting 2 – Friday 22 August 2025

Current State and Trends

- Discussion on approaches to current state and assessment of trends was limited as there was not time for CSAG to delve into detail.
- However, concerns were raised by members about interpreting the cause of trends, especially for shorter trend analysis periods (5-10 years).
- In particular, the importance of climatic cycles and variability on many river water quality trends implies the need for caution when interpreting trends[8].
- Trends can only tell us what has occurred and extrapolation of trends to the future is highly risky.
- Often there is insufficient data over an adequate time period to robustly explain the cause of a trend. For example, we have not collected land use information at a resolution useful to attribute trends to land use practices at this time, particularly given climate influences.
- Suggestions raised by CSAG included:
    - Considering multiple trend analysis periods.
    - Interpreting trends with caution – degrading or improving trends may not reflect actual changes in anthropogenic pressure.
    - Using narrative descriptions when communicating with the public to avoid misinterpretation.
    - Exploring boxplots and moving medians as ways of showing change that are easier for non-experts to interpret.
    - Including caveats when presenting trend information.
    - Using appropriate methods to account for the influence of climate variation on water quality trends.

Lakes FMUs

- CSAG discussion focused on whether lakes are sufficiently identified and provided for, including consideration of lake typology.
- In some planning processes, lakes are treated within wider FMUs, but this may not capture their unique management needs.
- Managing lakes requires considering hydrological regimes alongside contaminants, as modifications to water flows (including extensive drainage networks) often drive ecological outcomes.
- Reference was made to the usefulness of existing work on hydrological regimes and diversions/damming in defining issues for lakes.

Environmental Outcomes

- There was a general view from the CSAG that the draft Environmental Outcomes lack specificity, and this, in turn, constrains the ability to set specific TAS.
- Comment was made that specific references to the state of ecosystem health sought in each part-FMU would be helpful for setting consequential TASs (e.g., excellent, good, fair, poor).
- Water clarity in aquatic ecosystems was highlighted as both a recreation value and an ecological health attribute[9].

[8] Snelder, T.H., Fraser, C., Larned, S.T., Monaghan, R., De Malmanche, S. and Whitehead, A.L., 2021. Attribution of river water-quality trends to agricultural land use and climate variability in New Zealand. *Marine and Freshwater Research*, *73*(1), pp.1-19.

[9] Some CSAG members commented that the Clarity attribute in NPSFM is not fully fit-for purpose for either recreation or ecosystem health.

- Some outcomes (e.g. habitat extent, wetland condition) were noted as being limited in scope or definition and may need further evaluation.
- A tension between aspirational versus achievable outcomes was noted, with questions about how to balance ambition with practicality where this is needed.
- Discussion included how to ensure that feedback loops track whether outcomes are genuinely improving. See recent work on assessing policy effectiveness[10].

Scale of Change Required

- Lack of comprehensive information on riverine eutrophication was raised, with current measures seen as incomplete (e.g. periphyton in hard-bottomed streams missing).
- Suggestions included:
    - Considering wider indicators of eutrophication / primary production (e.g. macrophyte cover, dissolved nutrients, dissolved oxygen).
    - Making better use of existing monitoring data to understand pressures on waterbodies. For example, see work by Pingram et al. on drivers of ecosystem health[11].
    - Acknowledging that in some cases nutrient loads are many times above targets, raising questions about whether systems may be irreversibly damaged.
- Questions were asked about how intervention/mitigation modelling and integrated solutions could help define the scale of change that can be achieved vs. what is required to meet the targets?

Attributes and Indicators

- CSAG discussion covered the potential use of modern tools such as eDNA to help fill gaps in ecological monitoring.
- The idea of typology-specific limits (different limits for different river types) was raised.
- Members noted that Councils are not precluded from adding additional attributes beyond the compulsory ones under the NPSFM and that it is open to WRC to use non-compulsory attributes and TAS in a Plan (rather than just a non-regulatory action plan) if these attributes would be the best way to achieve environmental outcomes.

Contact Recreation (Human Health)

- It was noted that a wide range of attributes / indicators (not just *E. coli*) were relevant to contact recreation, such as accessibility, periphyton, slime, visual clarity, and cultural values.
- Observations included:
    - Current monitoring may not always reflect human health risk in all places where people actually swim, or interact with water
    - High flow events complicate meeting guidelines. Some regional plans (e.g. Horizons One Plan) exclude high river flows from recreational water quality targets to better reflect when people are actually likely to swim / use the water body for primary contact
    - Both primary and secondary contact recreation (and other interactions including cultural uses) are relevant considerations.
- Questions remain about what interventions are most effective for reducing *E. coli*.
- Points raised included the need for a multi-tool approach (e.g. riparian management, stock exclusion, land use change).

[10] Ausseil O., Snelder T., Milne J. and McDowell R. (2025) Freshwater policy Plan effectiveness monitoring. How do we measure the success of our freshwater plans? Report prepared for: Otago Regional Council.

[11] Pingram, M.A., Collier, K.J., Hamer, M.P., David, B.O., Catlin, A.K. and Smith, J.P., 2019. Improving region-wide ecological condition of wadeable streams: risk analyses highlight key stressors for policy and management. *Environmental Science & Policy*, *92*, pp.170-181.

Target Setting and Bands

- CSAG members questioned the usefulness of band thresholds (A–D) in target-setting, particularly where some bands are unachievable (i.e. under reference / fully natural conditions) in certain environments.
- CSAG noted the importance of taking into account the "natural" or "best achievable" state of each attribute in each catchment to avoid setting targets that cannot be biophysically achieved (e.g. setting DRP targets lower than natural /reference levels in areas with volcanic geology).
- Different tools / approaches were mentioned, including modelling scenarios simulating 100% native vegetation - not as realistic scenarios, but to avoid setting targets that cannot be met.
- Concerns were raised that averaging across FMUs could mask poor outcomes in some catchments and not achieve environmental outcomes at place.
- There was general agreement on the need for site-specific targets, rather than generic FMU-wide ones.

Achievability and Policy Integration

- CSAG noted there are limits to what can realistically be achieved within the life of a plan.
- Questions were raised about whether 20% improvements are meaningful enough to achieve outcomes, or conversely whether 20% is needed in catchments with better water quality.
- The need for a clear framework or method for setting targets was discussed, including how deviations from these methods should be handled.
- There was a view that policy settings should be communicable, while having a clear logic (linked to outcomes) and retaining technical robustness.
- CSAG considered that robust policy making requires WRC be able to demonstrate that the “interventions” required by the plan are plausibly able to meet the water quality targets, and that the associated economic, social and cultural costs and benefits are understood.

Final Reflections

- CSAG questioned some of the ‘vague’ wording from earlier policy documents (e.g. “maintain or improve”, “halt and reverse degradation”), highlighting a need for clearer definitions.
- The importance of defining terms like “degrading” and “degraded” at site or catchment scale was noted.
- Feedback from CSAG indicates a need for further work by WRC to refine definitions of SREs.

Meeting 3 – 10 September 2025

Sensitive Receiving Environments (SREs)

- CSAG considers wetlands, lakes, and estuaries to be nutrient-sensitive, implying they should be treated as SREs under the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPSFM) 2020.
- Discussion around NPSFM Clause 3.13 emphasised the need for WRC to consider upstream nutrient and sediment management to protect downstream environments.
- CSAG were concerned with blanket statements, such as "all lakes and estuaries are sensitive" because this may imply other waterbodies are not.
- Consensus among CSAG: Adopt a nuanced approach recognising variability in sensitivity across waterbody types and locations.

Wetlands

- Sensitivity: CSAG agreed that all wetlands are nutrient-sensitive, including bogs and artificial systems. In addition, hydrological alterations (e.g., drainage, flood control) were recognised as important factors in exacerbating wetland degradation.
- Data Gaps: CSAG identified there is limited data on nutrient thresholds and groundwater catchments. This has implications for target-setting as reliance on non-measured data for clawback approaches is problematic.
- Restoration: There was support for policies to enable constructed wetlands and restoration of wetlands at margins of other waterbodies. CSAG considered that wetlands should be prioritised similarly to lakes and estuaries, and must be integrated into catchment-level planning
- Policy Implication: CSAG's view was that narrative targets may be necessary where numeric thresholds are unavailable.

Lakes

- Target Setting:
  - A proposed 20% reduction in anthropogenic loads (TN, TP, sediment) being considered by WRC Policy Team was debated by CSAG.
  - Some CSAG members viewed it as arbitrary; others saw it as a starting point for cost-benefit analysis.
  - There was a general view that broad-brush approaches risk over- or under-protection.
- Prioritisation:
  - CSAG recommended a focus on lakes that are still in good condition and also to prioritise action where lakes are at risk of "flipping" (e.g., moving from macrophyte- to phytoplankton-dominated state).
  - There was a general view that lake-specific management plans are preferred over FMU-wide targets.
- Classification:
  - CSAG considered that, in a policy context, grouping by current trophic state and/or ecological vulnerability is likely to be more defensible than geomorphic type.
  - There was a consensus view that artificial lakes and farm ponds should generally be excluded unless they have ecological, cultural, or recreational significance.

CSAG Comments on Modelling:

- Scenario-based approaches are favoured to assess feasibility and outcomes.

- Probabilistic monitoring networks (e.g. WRC's monitoring programme) support extrapolation to unmonitored lakes.
- There is a communication challenge relating to setting specific targets for unmonitored systems.
- Throughout the planning process to come, some parties may have limited confidence in extrapolated estimates of current state in unmonitored lakes.

Karst Systems

- Sensitivity: Sediment is a primary concern for management of caves in the Maniapoto Karst; nutrients (especially nitrate) and dissolved organic carbon also impact stygofauna.[12]
- Challenges: Limited research and understanding of karst systems makes it difficult to include karst systems in SRE frameworks, but there is a requirement under TTW to take a precautionary approach.
- Recommendation: Further research is needed to define thresholds and develop protection strategies. Policy should consider applying a precautionary approach.

Modelling and Data Gaps

- Tools: CSAG supports the use of models like the Scenario Builder and Estuary Trophic Index (ETI).
- Uncertainty needs to be explicitly mentioned: Acknowledged in model outputs; transparency in assumptions is critical.
- Groundwater Catchments: Understanding these is essential for effective nutrient management, especially for dune lakes.
- Narrative Targets: Useful where numeric data is lacking; Wellington's Natural Resource Plan (NRP) cited as an example.

Policy and Planning

- CSAG referenced the following frameworks:
    - Te Mana o te Wai and Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato guide freshwater management.
    - Lakes and wetlands connected to the Waikato River are considered under Te Ture Whaimana.
- CSAG considers Lake Management Plans to be important tools:
    - Seen as essential for collaborative and targeted restoration.
    - Should include both regulatory and non-regulatory pathways.
- Restoration Guidance:
    - CSAG suggests policies should enable restoration activities (e.g., easier consenting).
    - Catchment groups and community involvement should be encouraged.

Key Questions Raised by WRC policy team

- SRE Identification: Has WRC captured all nutrient-sensitive environments?
- Wetlands: Which should be prioritised? Are upstream targets sufficient?
- Lakes: Is 20% reduction appropriate? How should lakes be grouped and managed?
- Karst: What indicators are suitable? How can thresholds be set?
- Modelling: How do we reconcile modelled targets with observed outcomes?

[12] Reid, D.J., Scarsbrook, M.R., Wright-Stow, A.E., van Houte-Howes, K.S.S. and Joy, K., 2012. Water quality and benthic macroinvertebrate communities in karst landscapes of North Island, New Zealand: influences of water sources, habitat type and anthropogenic disturbances. *New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research*, *46*(2), pp.263-277.

Meeting 4 – 24 September 2025

Key Summary Points

- WRC staff presented information on the state of the Firth of Thames (FoT):
  - The FoT is a nationally significant and degraded water body showing signs of acidification, hypoxia, and ecological stress.
  - Approximately 80% of N entering the FoT is from anthropogenic sources; sediment is also a major concern.
  - Evidence suggests the FoT has passed a tipping point for sediment impacts but not yet for nutrients.
- Target Setting:
  - WRC is considering a 20% reduction in Total N, Total P, and sediment loads from anthropogenic sources by 2047 to halt decline and initiate gradual ecological recovery.
  - The CSAG agreed this is a reasonable starting point, but not a blanket solution for all harbour catchments.
  - CSAG recommended a harbour-by-harbour and contaminant-by-contaminant analysis to check whether a default 20% reduction target is reasonable / justifiable / defendable and / or whether tailored targets based on local conditions and data is more effective.
- Scenario Builder Tool:
  - CSAG supported this model as a useful tool for assessing management options and engaging communities.
  - Concerns were raised about the realism of the "default" mitigation effectiveness numbers in the model; more detailed and clearly defined mitigation bundles (e.g., low/medium/high) are preferred.
  - CSAG recommended that climate change scenarios and land use intensification should be incorporated into modelling.
- Integrated Management:
  - CSAG voice strong support for integrated catchment-to-coast management, avoiding artificial boundaries between freshwater and coastal environments.
  - It was considered that the delineation of the FoT and its interface with rivers (e.g., Piako and Waihou) needs clearer policy direction.
- Monitoring and Modelling:
  - Long-term monitoring is essential to validate models and track progress.
  - Models must account for potential effects of climate change (e.g. increasing temperature effects on respiration and hypoxia; more intense rain events increasing sediment input).
  - Incorporate legacy effects. For example, lag times for groundwater nutrient transport vary from 10–80 years, influencing the timing of observable improvements.

Policy and Scientific Considerations

- Thresholds and Guidelines:
  - The presentation from WRC staff on FoT usesd ANZECC guidelines[13] and Coastal Plan standards. Some CSAG members questioned their defensibility and relevance, suggesting the need for review.

[13] Water Quality Guidelines Home

    - CSAG suggested that the RAMSAR status of Miranda and other ecological designations should inform limit setting.
- Contaminants Beyond N, P, and Sediment:
    - DO is considered a critical attribute, especially in estuarine and tidal zones.
    - Other indicators by CSAG members: toxic algae, bacteria, pH, macrofauna, macroalgae, Total Organic Carbon (TOC), sediment oxygen profiles, and eutrophic zone proportions.
- Legacy and Peatland Impacts:
    - It is recognised that legacy sediment from historical mining and peatland drainage contributes significantly to current degradation.
    - CSAG suggested that peatland rewetting and tailored mitigation for ammonia leaching should also be considered.
- West Coast and Coromandel Estuaries:
    - Data is limited; CSAG recommended the use of the ETI tool for initial assessments[14].
    - CSAG;s view was that blanket 20% reductions are not defensible without supporting data; site-specific checks and/or investigations are needed.
- Community Engagement and Communication:
    - CSAG reiterated that clear articulation of environmental outcomes and the rationale for targets is essential.
    - Community values and ecological resilience must be also be considered in planning and implementation.

Recommendations by CSAG

- WRC should consider undertaking harbour-by-harbour contaminant assessments using ETI and other tools.
- WRC needs to clarify the scope and meaning of the 20% reduction target (total vs. anthropogenic load).
- WRC should consider strengthening monitoring frameworks, including to better measure policy effectiveness and integrate climate change into modelling.

[14] ETI Tool 1: Determining susceptibility of estuaries to eutrophication

Meeting 5 – 17 October 2025

CSAG Advice on Rivers as Nutrient Sensitive Receiving Environments

- Hard-bottomed streams must be included in nutrient-sensitive classifications due to their potential for nuisance periphyton growth.
- The NPSFM 2020 Dissolved reactive phosphorus (DRP) attribute state thresholds are not set specifically for the management of periphyton; nutrient criteria need revision as per Clause 3.13 NPSFM.
- Support for a nuanced classification: periphyton for hard-bottomed streams; DO and macrophytes/epiphytes for soft-bottomed systems.
- Use of NIWA river app and substrate/mud maps to determine where rivers are hard or soft-bottomed is helpful, but ground-truthing remains essential.
- General support for setting site-specific endpoints rather than blanket "one band up" improvements.

Hydrological Modification in Lakes and Wetlands

- Lake and wetland hydrology should be managed at the catchment scale, considering climate change and ecological function, and effects of drainage schemes.
- There was CSAG support for lake-by-lake management plans and enabling restoration activities.
- Permitted water takes and drainage are impacting lake levels; some CSAG members suggested monitoring and control are needed.
- Lake Waikare modelling by University of Waikato under contract to WRC has showed lake level management is critical for controlling eutrophication.
- Restoration examples like Waituna Lagoon and peatland rewetting were discussed and suggested as sources of valuable insights.

Setting Target Attribute States (TAS)

- CSAG voiced strong support for catchment-by-catchment and river-type approaches to target setting.
- Some CSAG members noted that site-specific setting of TAS was the most defensible approach.
- It was stressed that targets should reflect realistic ecological potential, not idealised A-band states.
- DO is a concern in several catchments; multi-driver approaches are needed to address these DO issues.
- CSAG recommended the use of reference scenarios, modelling tools, and mātauranga Māori in target setting.
- Expert panels were suggested as a method to contribute to reviewing defensible target setting and sub-catchment analysis and to input local knowledge and expertise to the process.

Defining and Mapping SREs

- WRC should invest in spatially defining SREs and link nutrient sources to receiving environments.
- Wetlands must be included in SRE mapping and target setting.

- CSAG recommended that targets should align with limiting ecological factors (catchment critical load concept – set TAS for most sensitive outcome) and be defensible.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management

- There should be an emphasis on monitoring to clearly and robustly measure policy effectiveness.
- WRC should consider building adaptive monitoring frameworks into the plan right from the start.
- Farm plan and land use data collected as part of these plans should be available to WRC to enable analysis of policy effectiveness.
- Modelling is a valuable tool, especially where monitoring is limited.
- Recent publication by Ausseil et al (2025) identifies approach for assessing plan effectiveness[15].

CSAG Recommendations on Lake Hydrological Management

- Groundwater and surface water systems should be integrated for setting lake levels.
- Consider legacy drainage impacts and enable restoration of hydrological regimes.
- Consider narrative rules for lake level management instead of numeric targets.
- Review consents to reflect ecological values and support nature-based solutions.

CSAG Roundtable and Next Steps

- Recommend WRC proceeds with a sub-catchment by sub-catchment assessment of values, outcomes, current state/issues and target setting.
- This might mean that attributes are different on a sub-catchment basis in some cases, and that attributes may be additional to those in the NPSFM but should be relevant to the outcome sought.
- Support for a sixth CSAG meeting to review progress on SRE mapping, target setting, and hydrology.
- CSAG considered the ongoing value of their input to building a defensible policy framework and avoiding 'failings' of previous policy processes.

[15] Ausseil O., Snelder T., Milne J. and McDowell R. (2025) Freshwater policy Plan effectiveness monitoring. How do we measure the success of our freshwater plans? Report prepared for: Otago Regional Council.

Appendix 1: CSAG Terms of Reference

Purpose of this Document

1. Define the Terms of Reference for the Collaborative Science Advisory Group (CSAG)
2. Propose membership of the Group
3. Draft topics/questions for discussion by the CSAG

Background

- Waikato Regional Council has been working through its Freshwater Policy Review project, including its response to the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPSFM) 2020.
- Tangata whenua, community and sector engagement have all been informing the direction for freshwater management, along with science, investigations and monitoring.
- We are at a stage now to test our thinking, and we are seeking expert science input from a Collaborative Science Advisory Group (CSAG).
- CSAG feedback will assist as a testing ground for ideas related to the development of freshwater policy and its potential impact (both positive and negative).

Terms of Reference

Objectives

- Provide a robust, science-based test of WRC's draft thinking to support development of effective policy options for the Freshwater Policy Review.
- This includes highlighting potential actions, issues and solutions with proposed approaches based on the technical knowledge and experience members bring.
- Review and critique the body of science-based knowledge available to inform the Freshwater Policy Review and identify gaps in WRC's science knowledge base.
- Share insights and experience on technical aspects covered during the Proposed Plan Change 1 (PC1) process and other regional planning processes.
- Share insights on aligning regional plans with technical requirements of the NPSFM and, specific to Waikato River, the requirements of Te Ture Whaimana.
- Deliver a report summarising outcomes from the CSAG process.

Membership

- CSAG will be made up of up of 10-12 members, with 2-3 Observers.
- Members will have >10 years' experience in relevant fields of environmental science
- Members will provide independent input based on their technical expertise, not the perspectives of any sector organisations they may align with.
- Members should be able to apply a broader perspective to provide input consistent with the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), NPSFM, and other obligations.
- Members are mindful that the work of the group will be guided by the Environment Court's Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses.

Roles and responsibilities

- The function of the CSAG is to give high level overviews of substantial topics but not to provide answers.
- CSAG members will provide free and frank advice to WRC in good faith. Participation will be respectful towards other members and WRC staff.
- This process will provide one of many streams of input into the Freshwater Policy Review project.
- CSAG members will engage in discussion and provide expert views and perspectives seeking consensus or agreement. At the least CSAG will:
    - identify areas of agreement;
    - record areas of disagreement so that they can progress to address the issues; and
    - narrow the points of debate.
- Participation in CSAG does not preclude individuals from also taking part in other forms of engagement (e.g., TAG meetings upon invitation) or the formal submission processes under the RMA.
- WRC will identify a suitable Chair for the CSAG [decision to be made by SPI Director with input in accordance with JMA's with River Iwi]. The Chair will run the meetings and will also be the primary author of the summary report.
- CSAG members will be active contributors to the summary report, providing input where appropriate and reviewing the report prior to finalisation. Observers will also review the report and add comments to the document for advice/suggestion only. Specific scientific information will not be altered by the observers. We expect the summary report will be published as a WRC Technical Series Report, so it is publicly available as an output of the Freshwater Policy Review.
- WRC will provide administrative support (as and when required) to support the process.
- WRC will make all relevant information available to members 5 working days prior to each meeting (including information required to inform meetings, and any follow up information post-meetings).

Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs)

- Further engagement will be undertaken with TAGs by WRC to support exploration of specific topics, including farming systems, farm animal effluent management, and Commercial Vegetable Production (CVP). TAGs will build upon the strategic direction and high-level perspectives provided by CSAG, enabling more technical and focused discussion. TAG meetings may be scheduled to run in parallel with CSAG meetings where appropriate however, TAG and CSAG meetings will not conjoin for meetings.

  Relevant outputs and insights from CSAG discussions will first be checked and approved by CSAG before being made available to TAGs to aid in alleviating any misinterpretation and vice versa (where practicable) to inform deliberations and facilitate further testing and refinement of key issues.

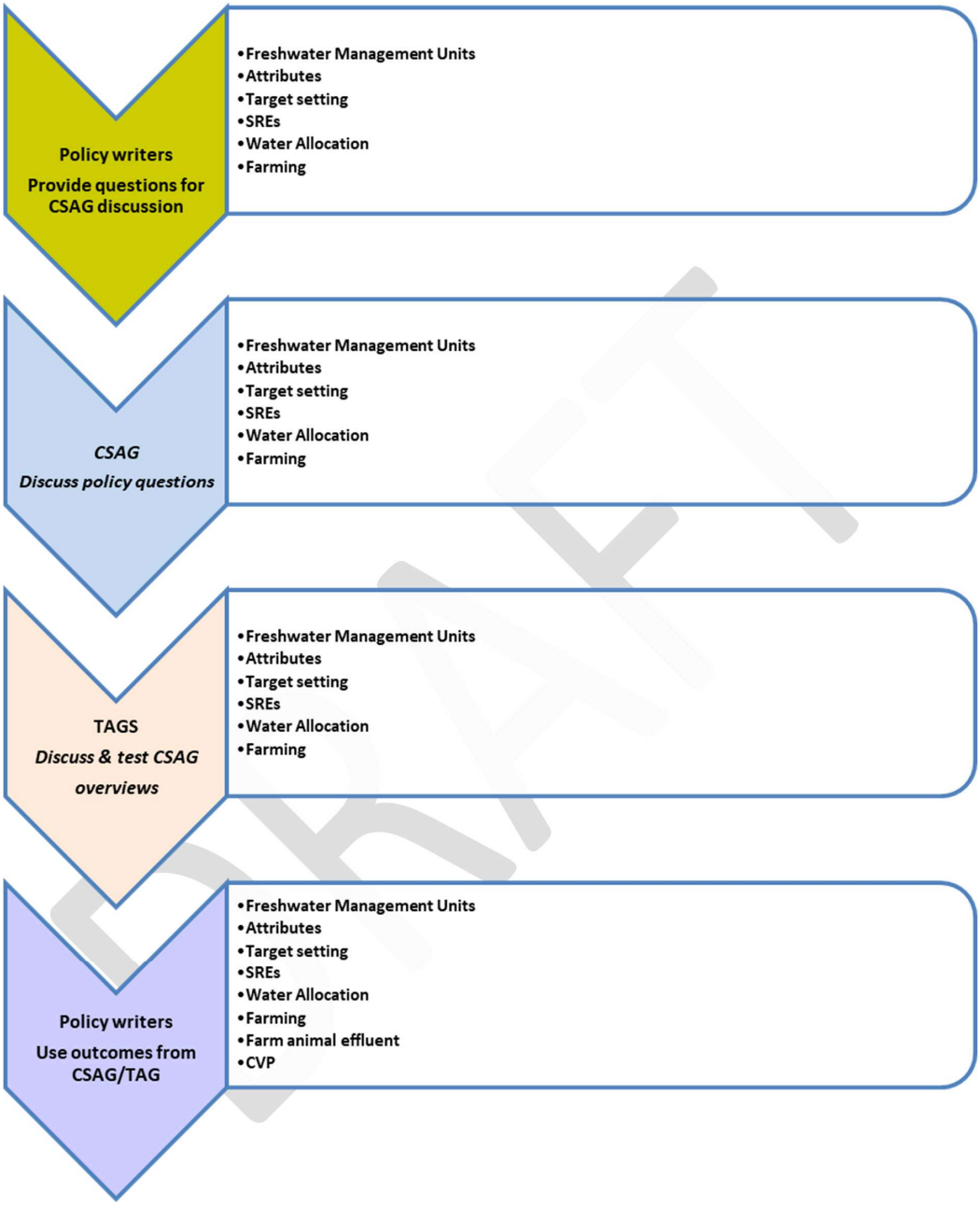


Figure 1: Linkages between CSAG and TAGs

Timeframe and process

- The CSAG will be stood up in August 2025 and operate over a two-month period (i.e, August – September), with an option to extend the group beyond this period. Additional meetings may be required (refer to bullet point 6 below).
- An initial face-to-face meeting will be held in August at Waikato Regional Council, with following meetings being hybrid (in-person and on-line) to minimise travel. The first meeting will include confirming the terms of reference and setting ground rules for working together as a group. There are likely to be four meetings in total. There will also be an opportunity to use an online forum/workspace for ongoing dialogue and document review.
- The total time commitment required from CSAG members is likely to be >30-40 hours depending upon the number of topics and their substantiveness.
- There will be a maximum of up to three (3) active observers present at meetings of the CSAG. These observers will include at least one member of the WRC Policy Team and a River Iwi Advisor. Their role is to clarify policy implications. Being 'active' observers they can contribute to discussions and their contributions will be noted as "Observer" in the notes from each meeting however, their views won't necessarily be recorded in the final summary report.
- Feedback gained from CSAG meetings for inclusion in the final summary report may be integrated with findings from other stakeholder inputs for use by policy writers to inform policy documents pertaining to freshwater.
- Meeting period and dates

  From Friday 1 August 2025 the CSAG will convene for a period of eight weeks with the group's termination date being Friday 26 September 2025 unless all participants agree that further work is required. Further meetings may be convened on an 'as required' basis with the agreement of all CSAG members to enable further topic/s discussion.

  Meeting dates:

  - Friday 1 August, 9am – 1pm
  - Friday 22 August, 9am – 1pm
  - Wednesday 10 September, 9.00am – 1.00pm
  - Wednesday 24 September, 9.00am – 12.30pm

Date options will be sent via email to determine which dates are most suitable for CSAG members.

Summary Report due date and outline

- **Summary Report** completion: 28 November 2025,
- **Final Report** completion: 10 December 2025
- **Report writers**

  Mike Scarsbrook will write the summary report.

  - The draft report will be put onto the Sharepoint CSAG page with a deadline for comments/amendments to be made.
  - Notification of report's availability will be by email. Each CSAG member will commit to actively participating in the revision of draft report.
  - Track changes will be used by all CSAG members when making any comments/amendments to any of the draft reports.
  - Areas of consensus or disagreement will be included in the report.

Confidentiality

- We ask that group members respect the confidentiality of views shared by individuals in the group when communicating with others regarding any insights or information from the process.
- As this is a regional council project, it falls under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act, as well as the Privacy Act. This means that material generated through the process may be requested by members of the public and released to them. Any information that is appropriate to be shared will not be publicly attributed to individual participants unless legally required. If any information is being considered for release under these Acts, WRC may consult with the person who provided the information before making a final decision on release. It is noted that the format of the CSAG is such that the conversations during meetings are considered free and frank. The meetings will operate under Chatham House Rules.
- CSAG meetings will not be recorded as per an agreement reached during CSAG meeting #2.
- CSAG members will not make media statements or comment on any social media platforms about the CSAG and/or policy processes without prior agreement of WRC.

Conflicts of interest

- CSAG members will be required to declare conflicts of interest relating to the work of the CSAG at the time of their appointment or as soon as possible if a conflict of interest arises. All conflicts of interest shall be notified using WRC's Conflict of Interest form. Conflicts may be real, potential or perceived.
- Any declared conflicts will be assessed by WRC to determine and appropriately manage such conflict.
- Conflicts of interest do not need to be declared regarding a CSAG member's employer, who a CSAG member may perform work for, or if a CSAG member is a ratepayer in the Waikato region.

Membership of CSAG

CSAG Members	Organisation	Expertise/Justification
Mike Scarsbrook	Waikato Regional Council	Land-water interactions, PC1, science-policy interface
Michael Pingram	Waikato Regional Council	Freshwater Ecology
Thomas Wilding	Waikato Regional Council	Hydrology, ecohydrology, water allocation
Craig Depree	DairyNZ	Aquatic Chemistry, PC1, science-policy interface
Dave West	Department of Conservation	Fish Ecology
Hugh Robertson	Department of Conservation	Wetland Ecology, PC1
Adam Daniel	Auckland/Waikato Fish & Game New Zealand	Aquatic Ecology, PC1, introduced fish

CSAG Members	Organisation	Expertise/Justification
David Klee	Auckland/Waikato Fish & Game New Zealand	PC1, introduced waterfowl, science-policy interface
Paul Le Miere	Beef & Lamb	Land-water interactions, PC1, science-policy interface
Deniz Özkundakci	University of Waikato	Lakes, ecosystem modelling, Waikato context
Olivier Ausseil	Traverse Environmental	Aquatic Ecology, PC1, iwi advisor, science-policy interface
Kate McArthur	KM Water	Aquatic Ecology, water quality, PC1, science-policy interface
Michael Greer	Torlesse Environmental	Aquatic Ecology, Land-water interactions, science-policy interface
Active Observers		
Naomi Crawford or Angela Fenemor	Waikato Regional Council	Expertise in science-policy interface
Billy Brough	Waikato River Iwi	PC1, iwi advisor, expertise in science-policy interface

Topics to be covered by CSAG

1. Freshwater Management Units
2. Attributes – relevance of attributes; testing additional attributes (much as was done pre-Court hearings for PC1)
3. Baseline vs Current state and dealing with trends. Also, how do we deal with catchments where we have limited data (e.g West Coast FMU).
4. Target Setting – testing the proposed target setting approach (including setting targets that provide for our sensitive receiving environments) and identifying alternative approaches
5. Learnings from PC1 in terms of attributes, targets and direction from Environment Court – e.g. how do we provide landowners with information on the magnitude of reductions required to meet long-term targets.
6. Water allocation
7. Consider the proposed approach to Sensitive Receiving Environments (e.g. lakes and estuaries)
8. Defining Outstanding Waterbodies in the region.
9. Review modelling undertaken in the Hauraki FMU and provide feedback on scenarios we may want to model (emulator).
10. Narrative attributes
11. Hydrological alterations/water quality interactions/ecosystem health/cultural value interactions and policy options/ramping for hydro lakes.

7 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA

Unuhia, unuhia	**Draw on, draw on,**
Unuhia mai te uru tapu nui	**Draw on to the supreme sacredness**
kia wātea, kia māmā,	**To clear, to free**
te ngākau, te tinana, te hinengaro,	**our heart, body and soul**
i te ara takatū	**Our pathway prepared**
Koia rā e Rongo	**Lo, there is peace**
e whakairia ake ki runga	**suspended high above**
kia tina! TINA!	**manifest!**
Haumi ē, hui ē, TĀIKI ē!	**draw together!**
	Affirm!