

Pūrongo ā-Tau mō te Kanorau Koiora **Annual Report for Biodiversity 2025/26**

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Rārangi kaupapa

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He tīmatanga kōrero

Introduction

This biodiversity annual report summarises non-regulatory biodiversity related work completed by Waikato Regional Council (the council) across multiple directorates for the 2025/26 year.

It complements the Regional Pest Management Plan Operational Annual Report, which is required under the Biosecurity Act 1993.

As this is a non-statutory document, financial information is provided in summary form only.





Tirohanga whānui

Programme overview

Biodiversity management is governed by a complex framework of legislation, regulations, and strategic documents.

Various agencies undertake biodiversity management, and a summary of council-related biodiversity responsibilities is provided in the Appendix.

Waikato Regional Council focuses its effort on leadership and coordination, supporting others by providing information, expertise and funding, and enabling restoration activities that will lead to better biodiversity outcomes. The council takes a portfolio approach to managing biodiversity-related work, and groups this work into seven themes (see Figure 1).

Each council directorate is responsible for delivering its own work programme. This means biodiversity-related work is overseen by several committees, including the Environmental Performance Committee, Integrated Catchment Management Committee and Strategy and Policy Committee.

This annual report summarises biodiversity related work from across the organisation, in one document.



Figure 1: Conceptual overview of the council's biodiversity-related work.

Policy context and strategic alignment

Biodiversity related work has been delivered under the *Strategic Direction 2023–2025* and the *Te Pae Tawhiti I Strategic Direction 2026–2036*. The work profiled in this report aligns with the strategic direction priority “sustaining natural resources”.

Strategic leadership, shared services

Within the region, our iwi partners, stakeholders and communities look to us to provide effective leadership and direction in biodiversity management.

Effective leadership extends beyond transparent decision making, monitoring and reporting. It is also involves working collaboratively with others and empowering them to achieve effective biodiversity and biosecurity outcomes.

Programme

Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy

The *Waikato Biodiversity Accord* was developed as a mechanism to strengthen biodiversity collaboration between signatories. A key component of the accord is a commitment to work together to develop and implement a biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region. The *Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy* will bring people together with a shared vision, clear outcomes and coordinated action to protect and restore biodiversity at a landscape scale.

Key achievements

In September 2025, we released a discussion document, *Te Reo o te Taiao: A Call from Nature*, followed by a series of engagement events where we asked people to share their ideas on biodiversity in the region. The draft *Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy* was completed and released for public feedback in June 2026.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●

Key challenges

Policy and legislative reform being led by central government continues to create uncertainty. Achieving a more integrated and effective regional approach to biodiversity restoration, whilst working within existing funding constraints and balancing differing expectations across partners and communities, remains a challenge.

What’s coming up

Public feedback will be reviewed and used to develop the final *Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy*. This will be completed in 2026/27 with an accompanying implementation plan.

Programme

Waikato Regional Coastal Plan

The proposed *Waikato Regional Coastal Plan* contains provisions that guide the management of activities that may adversely affect ecosystem processes, functions and integrity, and indigenous biodiversity, within the Waikato coastal marine area. It also promotes restoring and enhancing ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity. The Waikato coastal marine area contains a diverse range of ecosystems and habitats, including estuaries, lagoons, coastal wetlands, intertidal zones, rocky reef systems, eelgrass and saltmarshes. These environments support many threatened or at-risk indigenous plants and animals, as well as species that are important for recreational or cultural purposes. The proposed plan identifies and maps areas where these significant indigenous biodiversity values require protection. The proposed plan was notified in 2023, and public hearings were held between February and April 2025.

Key achievements

The council’s decision was notified in October 2025 and 14 appeals were received. Environment Court-directed mediation on the appeals began in May 2026 and will continue until October 2026.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●

Key challenges

Policy and legislative reform being led by central government is creating uncertainty.

What’s coming up

Any matters that are not resolved through mediation or discussion with appellants will be scheduled for a court hearing at a time to be determined.

Delivering restoration with others

The council puts significant effort into supporting and empowering restoration activities across a spectrum of community restoration projects and programmes to build capacity and capability to deliver biodiversity outcomes. It provides advice and support to iwi, hapū, landowners, community groups and individuals through site restoration advice and/or funding, including through the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme.

This section provides an overview of our key programmes of work where we're delivering restoration with others.

Programme

Coastcare

The Coastcare programme is a partnership between local communities, iwi, territorial authorities, the Department of Conservation (DOC) and the regional council aimed at protecting and restoring coastal environments. The programme focuses on dunes but also undertakes restoration activities in estuaries, coastal forests and coastal wetlands.

Coastcare plays an integral part in education by raising environmental awareness and advocating for coastal environments. Community Coastcare groups are active at more than 50 sites across 30 beaches on the east (Coromandel Peninsula) and west coasts of the Waikato region.

Key achievements

The *Waikato Coastcare Operational Plan 2026–2031* was prepared following a review of the programme in 2025. The operational plan sets out clear objectives and outcomes to support improved medium to long term planning and delivery, providing greater clarity and direction for the council (as the lead agency), partners, agencies, and community groups.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●

Commentary

Rising costs (for example, materials, contracted services) have resulted in fewer sites being worked on, but other deliverables have increased because Thames-Coromandel District Council (TCDC) has increased its investment and there was some work delayed from the 2024/25 financial year due to delays in obtaining Wildlife Act authorisations.

Key challenges

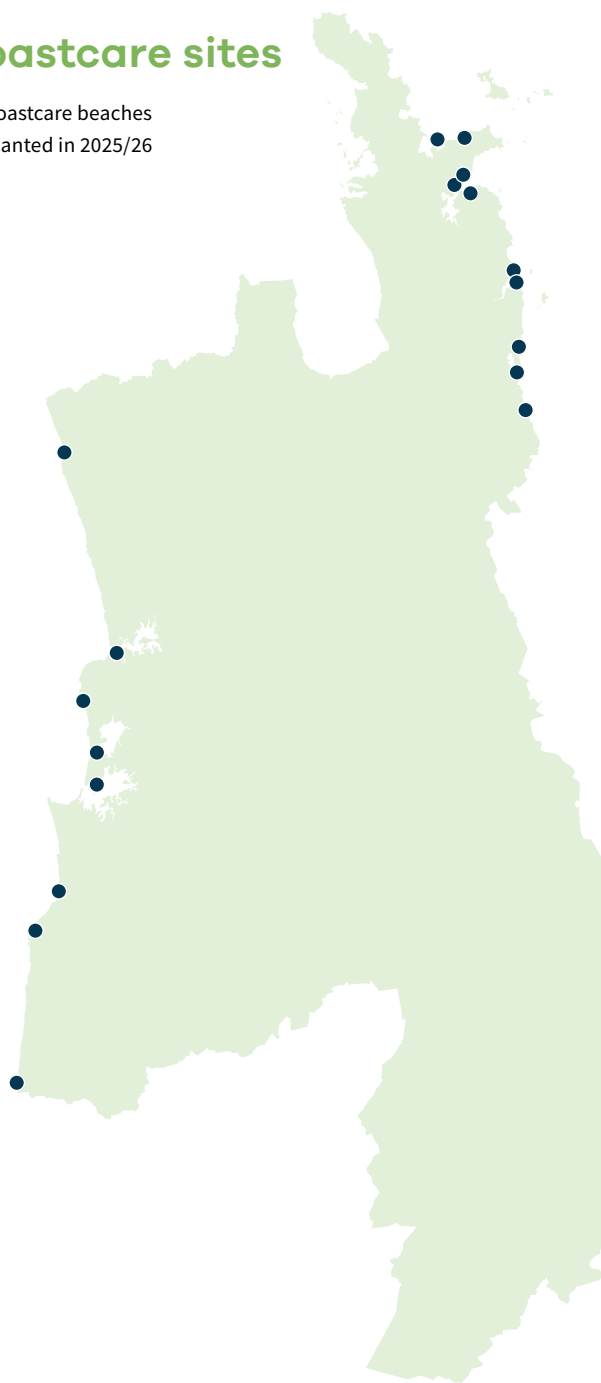
Rising costs continue to put pressure on this programme and service levels will reduce to stay within existing budgets. This is being partially offset by an increasing contribution by TCDC.



Note: These achievements are from the overall Coastcare programme, including work undertaken by the council's partners, primarily TCDC, Hauraki District Council and Waikato District Council.

Coastcare sites

- Coastcare beaches planted in 2025/26



Volunteer effort delivering high impact results at Aotea Harbour

Coastcare groups across the region vary considerably in size and composition. While larger planting events on the more populated east coast can attract upwards of 50 volunteers, activities on the more remote west coast are typically supported by smaller groups of committed locals. This case study highlights how a small team of skilled volunteers can achieve outstanding outcomes.

In June 2026, a planting event was held at Aotea Harbour on the west coast, attended by 10 volunteers. The group included a diverse mix of people – and not all Waikato locals. More than half the group were members of the New Zealand Farm Forestry Association, visiting the Waikato en route to Fieldays. Their combined experience proved highly beneficial. Working efficiently, the group planted 1610 dune plants in just over three hours. This included transporting plants along the beach to a site approximately one kilometre from the road end.

During the event, volunteers identified a sizeable infestation of exotic ice plant. The infestation was linked to illegal dumping of garden waste in the dunes, highlighting the risks associated with improper disposal. Coastal dune ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to invasion by non-native plant species, which can spread through dumped garden material or transferred seeds and root fragments. Other problematic species include agapanthus, wattle, climbing asparagus, and invasive grasses such as kikuyu and buffalo grass.

Priority biodiversity sites

Approximately 300 priority biodiversity sites have been identified on private land across the region, representing a range of ecosystems prioritised for funding eligibility. Priority biodiversity sites include naturally uncommon ecosystems (for example, karst, geothermal, frost flats), threatened ecosystems (for example, kahikatea forest, wetlands) and ecosystems underrepresented on public land (for example, lowland forest).

The priority biodiversity sites programme supports willing landowners, iwi, community groups, agencies and partners to protect and restore indigenous ecosystems and threatened species on private land. Financial assistance is available for work that exceeds regulatory requirements and meets programme guidelines. Many projects are delivered collaboratively, with funding support from both internal teams (such as catchment and biosecurity) and external organisations, including the QEII National Trust, Waikato River Authority, Wairakei Environmental Mitigation Charitable Trust and DOC.

6.2ha
of land retired
across 4 sites 

593ha 
monitored for native
and pest fauna and flora

13.5km
of new and upgraded
fencing across 9 sites 

Pest plant control over
**1752ha at
15 sites** 

Purchase of traps and trap supplies for
1477ha at 23 sites 

Purchase of bait stations and bait supplies for
37ha at 3 sites

Key achievements

The programme supported 35 restoration projects with work across 38 sites and surrounds covering a total of about 2279 hectares.

Restoration and pest control projects were undertaken within coastal, geothermal, karst, freshwater wetland, shallow lake, lowland forest and kahikatea forest ecosystems, including internationally, nationally and regionally significant sites, for example, Whangamarino Wetland, Toreparu Wetland, Tokaanu geothermal and wetlands (southern shore of Lake Taupō), Otahu Estuary (Whangamatā) and Wharekawa Harbour.

A new online mapping system was introduced to capture data and streamline reporting and mapping of project sites.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●
Commentary		
The programme met the council KPI of 20 priority biodiversity sites under management.		

Key challenges

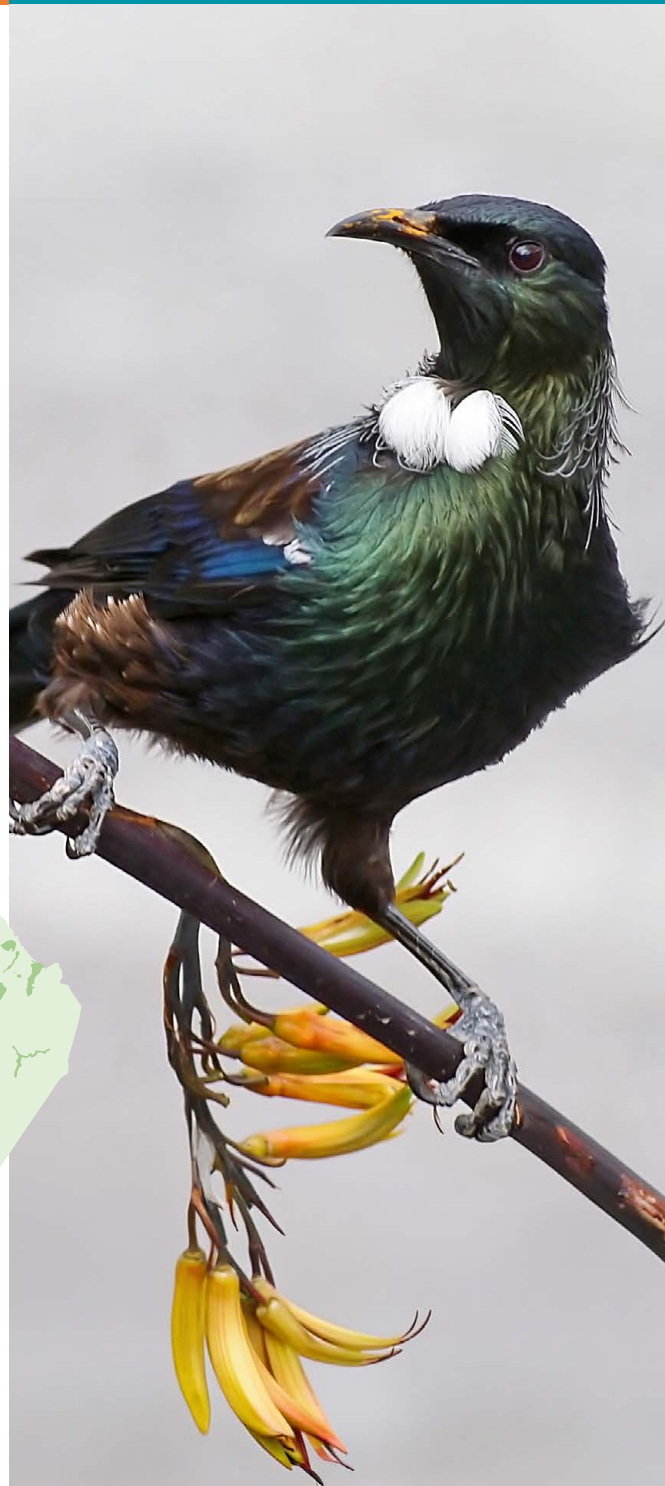
During early 2026, severe storms caused widespread damage across several districts in the region. As a result, eight projects planned for this period were put on hold to allow affected landowners time to respond to and repair storm related damage to their properties and infrastructure. Of these, four 2025/26 projects will now be completed in the 2026/27 financial year.

There is a greater demand for funding than the programme has an annual budget for, meaning some projects must wait until they can proceed.

What's coming up

In 2026/27, two significant projects are planned on Māori land in Taupō-Tongariro and northern Coromandel areas, both which have high biodiversity values.

Priority biodiversity sites



Urban biodiversity through partnership

Biodiversity gains being made in Hamilton demonstrate the value of collaboration between Waikato Regional Council's priority biodiversity sites and Hamilton Halo programmes, and Hamilton City Council's Nature in the City (NITC) programme.

Hamilton Halo was launched in 2007 to increase numbers of tūī (and later bellbird) in Hamilton. Its initial focus was predator control to increase survival and breeding success, but the project has evolved towards a broader ecological focus, including improved habitat quality and expanded pest management across priority biodiversity sites.

Waikato Regional Council provides annual funding of \$30,000 to NITC, which sees the city council partner with landowners and community volunteers to deliver targeted restoration outcomes on priority biodiversity sites on private property.

During 2025/26, collective restoration efforts included two key sites in Mangaonua Gully, focusing on targeted weed control and native planting to improve ecological function. The removal of invasive species, including woolly nightshade, privet, and blackberry, has enabled the release of indigenous vegetation and strengthened connectivity between existing and newly planted areas. Continued landowner involvement remains critical to successful establishment and long-term site stewardship.

Complementary works included a trap and bait line network along the lower Mangaonua, delivered in partnership by Hamilton City Council and community volunteers. The network, which comprises 19 traps and 18 bait stations, recorded 108 pest captures in the nine months to March 2026, including possums, hedgehogs, rats, and a mustelid.

Overall, this restoration of Mangaonua highlights how coordinated investment and community engagement can deliver measurable biodiversity gains while strengthening long-term site management.



1260m
of fencing



6ha
of weed control



7000
native plants



9
lake sites worked at

Programme

Shallow lakes and wetlands restoration

The shallow lakes and wetlands programme focuses on improving specific lake attributes through restoration activities such as weed control, fencing lake buffers and planting native vegetation. The programme also gathers data, including through submerged macrophyte surveys (Lake SPI) and other in-lake surveys where data is deficient. The shallow lakes and wetlands programme is a long running collaborative programme formalised through the Waikato District Lakes and Freshwater Wetlands Memorandum of Agreement and the Waipā Peat Lakes and Wetlands Accord. These agreements have supported iwi and key agencies to coordinate their efforts.

Key achievements

- The council contributed funding towards restoration projects at Lake Milicich on two different properties. The projects included weed control, plant releasing, fencing works and native plantings.
- Yellow flag iris and willow seedling control at Opuatia wetland, building on past investment through the shovel ready programme.
- A multiyear restoration project began at Lake Pikopiko. Progress includes whole lake buffer fencing, aerial willow control, and native planting – coordinating with the three landowners.
- Two data deficient lake surveys were undertaken at Tuahu-Killarney Lakes and Lake Rotokotuku. An underwater macrophyte survey was also carried out at Tuahu-Killarney Lakes.
- In partnership with Ngāti Hauā Mahi Trust, Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust and landowners, we secured co-funding from the Waikato River Authority to deliver a five-year rehabilitation project, Te Hokinga ki Maratoto, at Lake Maratoto.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●
Commentary		
This programme relies on the readiness of landowners, stakeholders and partners to deliver restoration at lakes. The focus this year has been on providing technical and support services to external and internal stakeholders.		

Key challenges

The long running nature of this programme means that many of the easy tasks such as fencing and planting of lake margins have been completed. The focus now is on increasing the size of buffers and working with less willing landowners. The programme relies on all players being ready and able to participate at each site. This requires a true partnership approach and means collaborative projects can take years to come together, or they can stall or accelerate, depending on funding opportunities and the willingness of all involved.

Dealing with in-lake legacy issues due to decades of sediment and nutrient input requires innovation and a whole of catchment approach. Appropriate legislation and policy settings and changes in land management are complex and particularly challenging for shallow lakes.

What's coming up

We will begin to implement Te Hokinga ki Maratoto project at Lake Maratoto.

Programme

Shallow lake level management

Since the beginning of the programme, minimum lake levels have been set for 14 of the 15 peat lakes listed in the [Waikato Regional Plan](#) as requiring a minimum level to be set. The purpose of setting a minimum water level is to promote the sustainable management of peat lakes and their wetlands and to protect them from further degradation. In addition to the lakes listed in the regional plan, a further 11 lakes have had a minimum level set and had a weir or culvert installed to maintain the minimum lake level. The shallow lake level programme oversees the management of the 17 structures that the council is responsible for and provides technical advice to other organisations who manage their own lake level structures.

Key achievements

We renewed resource consents for two lake weirs: lakes Ruatuna and Rotomānuka.

Seventeen council-managed structures were inspected for structural integrity and fish passage, while maintenance to allow for fish passage was undertaken at lakes Rotopotaka and Rotomānuka.

Continuous lake level monitoring was undertaken at nine lakes.

Financial overview

Funding source Programme delivery Finances

General rate



Commentary

Lake Whangape weir maintenance was deferred due to staff resourcing constraints post flood events.

Key challenges

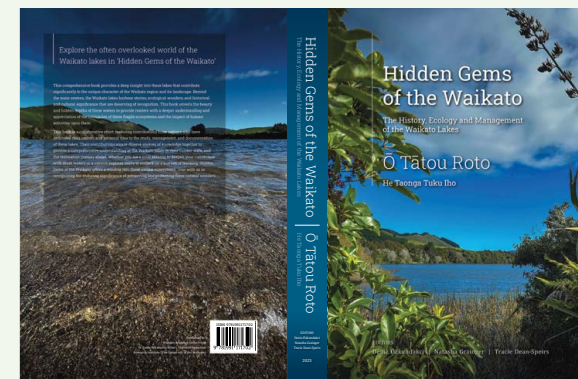
A key challenge remains completing the final outstanding minimum lake level in the *Waikato Regional Plan*. While minimum levels have been established for 14 of the 15 peat lakes, the landowner of the remaining lake has not agreed to council undertaking lake level monitoring required to inform the level-setting process.

Some of our partner organisations do not have the resources and/or expertise required to manage lake levels and rely on regional council staff for technical advice, while others would prefer that we manage these assets.

Managing the requirements of rules in the regional plan alongside expectations of other agencies, while remaining a good partner under the Lakes and Wetlands Accord and Memorandum of Agreement, is a delicate balancing act.

What's coming up

Applications to renew resource consents for weirs at lakes Whakatangi and Tunawhakaheke will be lodged in 2026/27.



Lakes book also a gem

Hidden Gems of the Waikato – the History, Ecology and Management of Waikato Lakes was co-published by the University of Waikato and Waikato Regional Council in July 2025.

This hard-cover book is the culmination of a collaborative project led by editors Deniz Özkundakci, Natasha Grainger and Tracie Dean-Speirs, who brought together contributions from 82 authors across a range of disciplines and organisations to produce the most comprehensive publication on Waikato lakes to date.

Lakes contribute significantly to the unique character of the Waikato region and its landscape

Hidden Gems of the Waikato is an engaging read and a valuable resource. The authors have a wealth of knowledge between them and offer diverse – sometimes personal – perspectives on a range of topics, including lake geology and formation, plants and animals found in lakes, lake restoration and management and policy.

Copies of the book are available from [The Best Little Book Store](#).

Programme

Natural Heritage Partnership Programme

The Natural Heritage Partnership Programme (NHPP) includes a wide range of initiatives and projects, including:

- contestable funding for biodiversity through the Natural Heritage Fund (NHF), the Environment Initiatives Fund (EIF) and the Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund (SSCIF)
- providing technical advice and support to individuals, iwi and community groups undertaking biodiversity projects – large and small
- supporting capacity and capability building for community biodiversity groups and sub-regional hubs
- coordinating the Waikato Bat Alliance, a partnership between agencies, iwi and other interested parties to ensure a more collaborative and strategic approach to bat management and conservation
- leading and coordinating the Collective Impact for Biodiversity in the Waikato project, an initiative to empower communities and support and enhance the effort of many groups, agencies, and other stakeholders to amplify positive biodiversity outcomes at landscape scale (see the Tools and Innovation section for more detail)
- managing the contract of the Waikato Biodiversity Forum coordinator on behalf of all funders (Waikato Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Hamilton City Council, Waipā District Council, Waikato District Council and South Waikato District Council).

Key achievements

We supported a range of valuable capacity and capability building initiatives, reaching a diverse audience across the region.

- Supporting the Waikato Biodiversity Forum to deliver two well-attended field days:
 - Biodiversity from Mountains to Sea in Raglan, attended by approximately 63 attendees.
 - Nature in the City and Beyond at Te Kaaroro Nature Precinct in Hamilton, attended by approximately 47 attendees.
- Supporting sub-regional hubs in central Waikato, Coromandel and Taupō/Tūrangi to deliver 12 local events, including workshops and walk-and-talk sessions, attended by more than 230 attendees. These events were designed to build the skills and knowledge of community groups, foster connections and collaboration, and strengthen biodiversity monitoring capabilities.
- Supporting sub-regional hubs in central Waikato, Coromandel and Taupō/Tūrangi through the provision of a small library of trail cameras, offering a cost-effective tool for community groups to undertake biodiversity monitoring.

We supported 96 community-led projects in 2025/26 through NHPP grants.

- 37 projects through the Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund
- 20 projects funded through community hubs via SSCIF hub funding distribution trial
- 25 projects through the Environmental Initiatives Fund
- 14 projects through the Natural Heritage Fund.

Decisions were made in May and June for the 2026/27 funding rounds of the NHF and SSCIF for 2026/27, while applications for the EIF closed in June 2026.

The Mana Koiora Mana Whenua – Protecting Biodiversity project, funded through the 2024-2034 Long Term Plan, was undertaken to understand whether Māori landowners require support to protect and enhance indigenous biodiversity on their whenua. It found Māori landowners were highly committed and ready to protect and restore indigenous biodiversity on their whenua, however, their efforts are constrained by systemic barriers, including complex and fragmented funding processes, limited technical and governance support, capacity constraints, and a lack of alignment between current programmes and mātauranga Māori approaches. These findings will now be considered through the council's operational programmes.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
Natural heritage targeted rate		
Uniform annual general charge		

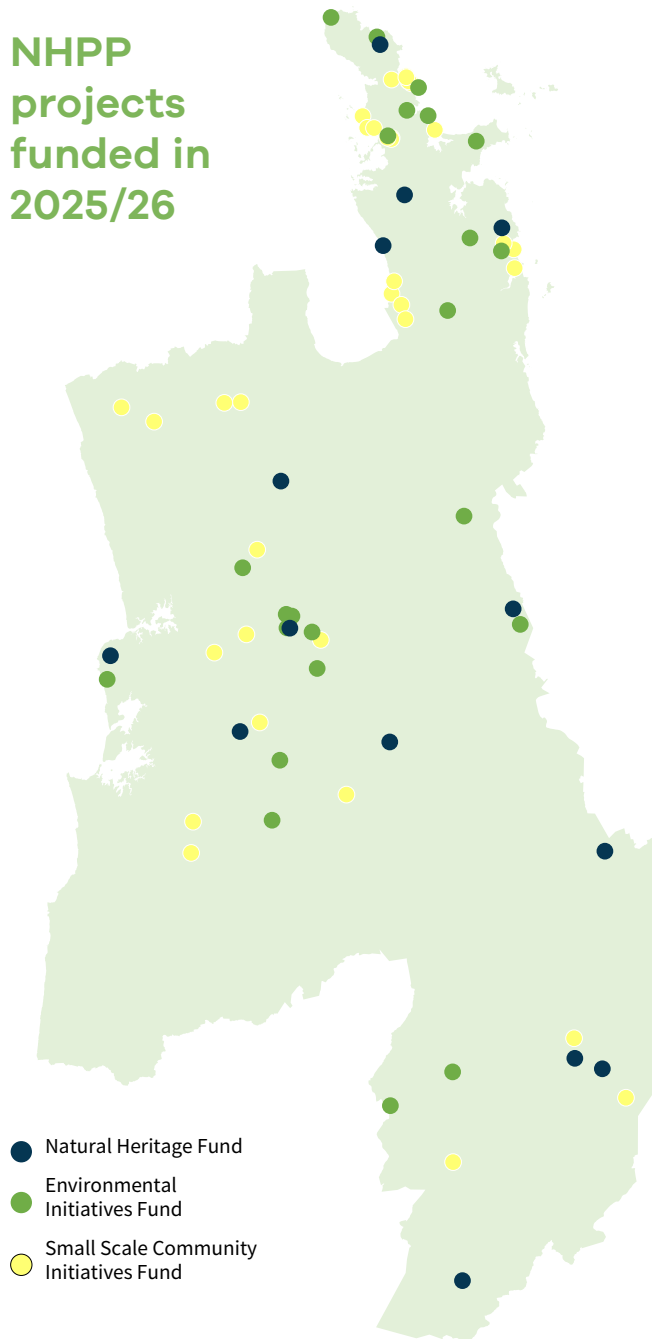
Key challenges

Meeting the needs of community groups as the NHPP funds continue to be oversubscribed.

What's coming up

Finalising the funding deeds of the 2026/27 rounds of the NHF, EIF and SSCIF, and preparing for all three funds to open again in the first half of 2027. The [NHPP Funding Policy](#) will be reviewed.

NHPP
projects
funded in
2025/26



Funding case studies

SSCIF: Huka Trapping

Huka Trapping has a network of 580 traps across three popular cycle trail areas: Waikato River Corridor, Craters Mountain Bike Park and Great Lake Trails.

The community group received \$4876 from Waikato Regional Council's Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund to help maintain and strengthen the network. Funding has supported the purchase of new traps, repairs, lures and wasp toxin.

Around 50 volunteers help service the traps, contributing to thousands of hours each year. By October 2025, the group had removed approximately 18,000 pest animals – with every catch recorded through the TrapNZ app.

Stu Hutchings from Huka Trapping says the work delivers benefits for both wildlife and the local community.

“By trapping possums, stoats and rats, we’re not just helping the birds – we’re providing an enhanced visitor experience for people riding the bike trails, and that benefits both the tourism sector and the wider Taupō community.”

The group’s mission is to restore and protect native biodiversity by creating conditions where native birds thrive. This includes supporting at risk-declining North Island robin (toutouwai) and tomtit (miromiro).



EIF: Haakarimata Restoration Trust

The Haakarimata Restoration Trust was established to protect, restore and enhance the ecological, cultural and social values of the Hākarimata Range.

It received \$36,244 from our Environmental Initiatives Fund to fund a coordinator for two years to build relationships, engage the community and provide pest control training to landowners and volunteers.

Hākarimata Range represents the largest area of lowland forest remaining in the Waikato region and is home to many locally rare species.

The trust was formed out of concern about forest canopy collapse from possum browsing and lack of coordinated landscape scale predator control – although there was work being done by individuals at a local level.

Local resident Greg Townsend, who is the driving force behind the trust, says there were many landowners “doing amazing things, we just needed to connect everyone”.

Predator Free Hākarimata launched the Hākarimata Halo project in May 2025 – attended by 200 people.

“The idea is we want to grow the current project area from 200 hectares to 1000 hectares to create a halo around the bottom of the maunga, in everybody’s backyards.”

“We now have 100 volunteers on the books, ready to help once we have a trapping network set up into the DOC reserve, so there’s definitely a big community push for change out there.”

The EIF funding has helped the trust leverage further support from contestable grants and businesses, enabling it to set up new trap lines and undertake restoration planting, all while working with the community to identify long-term goals.

“And then, who knows, maybe we can even return what’s been lost to Hākarimata, like kōkako and kiwi.”

NHF: Moehau Environment Group

The Moehau Environment Group leads landscape-scale pest control and biodiversity restoration across 16,000 hectares of the northern Coromandel Peninsula. Its work focuses on controlling rats, possums and mustelids, while also targeting feral cats and invasive weeds such as wild ginger.

The group received approximately \$445,000 over three years from Waikato Regional Council's Natural Heritage Fund to support its conservation efforts. The funding helps cover part-time staff costs for pest animal and pest plant control programmes, community and school engagement initiatives, and materials needed to maintain the extensive trapping network.

Even with help from around 90 volunteers, servicing the network is a significant undertaking. It requires the equivalent of 30 person-days each month to check, clear and maintain the traps.

Moehau Environment Group chairperson Lettecia Williams says long-term investment is essential to achieving meaningful conservation outcomes.

“Without the long-term support of WRC, we wouldn’t be able to commit to the landscape scale protection of natural habitats that this funding allows.”



Measuring success

The council has statutory obligations to quantify the state of indigenous biodiversity on private land and monitor spatial and temporal trends. Regional councils are required to report progress towards maintaining and restoring native biodiversity on private land. To achieve this, the council focuses on private land, working with the Department of Conservation which collects similar information from public conservation land. A three-tiered approach has been adopted nationally to describe monitoring.

- Tier 1:** Monitoring at a broad scale for national or regional context.
- Tier 2:** Nationally consistent monitoring of managed places and species to report on management effectiveness.
- Tier 3:** Intensive, targeted monitoring for research and evaluation.

Programme

Terrestrial biodiversity monitoring

The 2024-2034 Long Term Plan provided resources to establish and maintain long-term terrestrial biodiversity monitoring and reporting in the region. To better understand the state and trend of ecosystem health on private land, we're currently undertaking tier 1 monitoring using standardised biodiversity measures, including counts of vegetation, birds, bats and mammal pests (see feature box).

The tier 1 network is a systematic 8-kilometre grid across New Zealand. In the Waikato region, we plan to monitor 115 non-forested sites and 80 forested sites on private land over a five-year return cycle. The Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport collects additional vegetation data at the 80 forested sites. The Department of Conservation collects similar measures at 70 sites on public conservation land in the region. This terrestrial monitoring programme complements our existing wetland, coastal, and freshwater monitoring programmes.

Key achievements

Thirty-nine tier 1 sites were established in 2025/26, with monitoring undertaken between November 2025 and April 2026. Altogether, we have now established and monitored 80 sites across the region.

While official results for the Waikato region will be reported through the council's five-yearly *State of the Environment* report, early findings from monitoring in 2023/24 and 2024/25 have already provided valuable insights into regional biodiversity.

Threatened long-tailed bats were detected at nine of the 41 sites surveyed, across both forested and non-forested habitat in the south and west of the region. Five-minute bird counts recorded 48 bird species, with indigenous species making up half of the total. While most sites supported a mix of native and introduced birds, indigenous species were dominant at all forested sites and at several non-forested sites located near remnants of native forest.

Mammalian pest monitoring showed possums, goats or deer were the most commonly detected pests in forested sites, whereas hares and rabbits were more frequently recorded in non-forested sites and sites with forest fragments. Now in its third year, the programme is operating more efficiently thanks to the introduction of a mobile data collection app and the expansion of the monitoring team to full staffing levels.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate		

Key challenges

Information sharing arrangements between central government, DOC and regional councils are functioning but are yet to be formalised. Challenges in existing data use agreements with landowners and data transfer mechanisms have been affected by changing organisational frameworks. Suitable internal data storage and analysis solutions continue to be developed.

At the same time, budget and staffing constraints required a redesign of the monitoring programme, while still aiming to maintain statistically robust results. This redesign halved the number of non-forested sites to be monitored across the region, from 229 to 115.

What's coming up

Tier 1 monitoring:

Data for the 2025/26 season for 39 sites is being entered, quality checked and summarised. Thirty-six sites are scheduled for establishment and monitoring during the 2026/27 field season.

Tier 2 monitoring:

Preparatory work on implementing tier 2 monitoring has been undertaken, and recruitment will commence if the budget allows.

Tier 3 monitoring:

While funding has been earmarked in the current long term plan for tier 3 monitoring in 2027/28, this will be reviewed as part of the 2027-2037 Long Term Plan process. As it stands, the funding is intended as seed funding or co-funding for research on species that are important in the Waikato region, particularly where better information is needed to identify priority biodiversity sites and guide restoration projects.



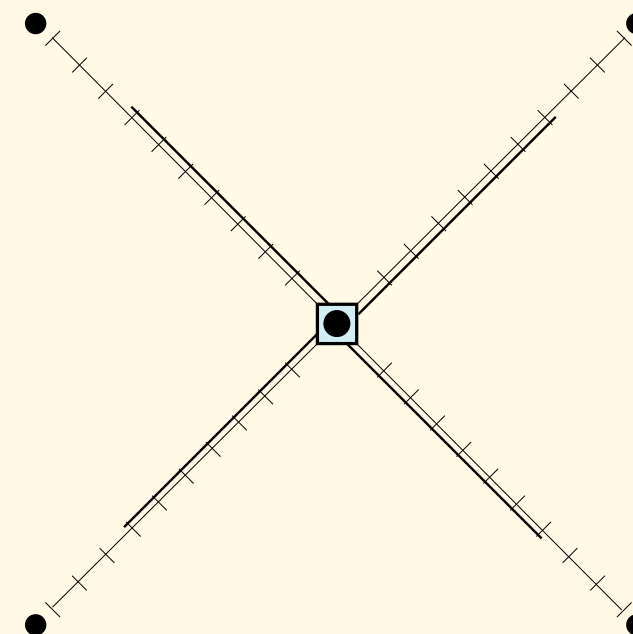
Tier 1 monitoring in a paddock.

Overview of field measurements for Tier 1 biodiversity monitoring

- At each survey site, vegetation data is collected in a permanently marked 20m x 20m area and includes a complete list of plant species present within height and cover classes. Woody seedlings and saplings are counted, and trees are tagged and measured to track diameter growth.
- Birds are recorded from five-minute bird counts at five stations per site. Incidental bird observations are also noted. Acoustic recorders are deployed at each station to record bird calls overnight and in the morning.
- Bat activity is surveyed by acoustic recorders placed overnight adjacent to each of the five bird count stations. These detect both short and long-tailed bat activity.
- Mammal pests are assessed within a 200m radius of the central vegetation plot, along four transects. Possums (and often rats) are detected using chew cards deployed overnight, while goats, deer, rabbits, hares, pigs and others are detected through pellet counts.
- Site characteristics are recorded in detail at the vegetation plot, additionally land use and land cover classes are recorded along animal transects and at bird stations.

The site survey layout shows the vegetation survey plot in relation to animal measure transects and bird/bat stations. This layout follows standardised methods from the Department of Conservation ([Field protocols for tier 1 vegetation plots](#) and [Field protocols for tier 1 monitoring animal surveys](#)).

Site survey layout



Key

- 20 x 20 Vegetation plot
- Bird/bat monitoring station
- 150m ungulate/rabbit/hare pellet transect
- ⊢ 200m possum transect



Programme

Biodiversity inventory

A regionwide biodiversity inventory of vegetation-based ecosystems has been drafted and is now being validated for accuracy. Once completed, it will provide a comprehensive picture of the Waikato region's biodiversity resources and establish a robust evidence base for ecosystem management on private land. The inventory will enable biodiversity priorities to be identified in a consistent, transparent and strategic way. It will support regional scale monitoring, help target conservation investment and restoration efforts, and inform decisions about where management actions will deliver the greatest biodiversity benefits. The information is already being used to help landowners better understand the biodiversity values on their properties and to support industry in meeting regulatory and environmental obligations.

This project is a key component of implementing the *Regional Policy Statement's* biodiversity objectives under Chapter 11. It provides the foundation for strategic engagement with landowners, iwi, industry and other stakeholders, and is a critical step towards identifying, protecting and managing Significant Natural Areas and indigenous biodiversity across the region.

Key achievements

The biodiversity inventory is already being used for numerous internal and external projects, enabling its value to be realised even as validation and ongoing improvements continue. There are currently 79,907 polygons that make up the biodiversity inventory, of which 80.5 per cent (64,302 polygons) have been validated. The inventory will be shared more widely once validation is complete.

We published *Ecosystems of the Waikato Region*, which documents 91 terrestrial and wetland ecosystems identified as occurring in the Waikato. The report took many years of coordinated work by many experienced and well-respected ecologists. The Waikato region has a considerable number and type of ecosystems given its latitudinal, altitudinal, topographical and geological variation. Each ecosystem is described in detail, with distribution, characterising native biota, key processes and interactions, and notable threats presented. It will be useful for researchers, community groups undertaking restoration, consultants, practitioners, academics, scientists and anyone with a general interest in our region's biodiversity. A key driver of this project has been to provide an understanding of our ecosystems from which you can measure success or failure, losses or gains, as well as providing guidance for restoration efforts.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●

Key challenges

Limitations around using dated aerial oblique imagery and retaining skilled contractors are the main challenges in this programme.

What's coming up

We will continue to validate ecosystem types within the region and coordinate with other council work areas, including to develop priority catchment information summaries.



Programme

Coastal science

Long running coastal monitoring has mainly focused on estuaries – looking at shellfish, water quality, sedimentation and contaminants. So far, the biodiversity work has centred on macroinvertebrates (animals living in estuarine sediments) because they are useful indicators of overall estuarine health. This is expanding to include rocky reef mapping and monitoring, as well as mapping intertidal and subtidal estuarine habitats, including vegetation, and eDNA monitoring.

Key achievements

Intertidal: In 2025/26, an intertidal seagrass monitoring programme commenced at seven sites in Coromandel Harbour, Tairua, Whangamatā and Whāingaroa/Raglan estuaries. The condition of seagrass beds and the extent of seagrass will be tracked over time.

Subtidal: A report on subtidal seagrass meadow extent at Slipper Island/Whakahau and Great Mercury Island/Ahuahu was published. Both meadows have remained relatively stable over the last six years. In 2025, seagrass in South Bay (Slipper) covered an area of 0.18 square kilometres, slightly smaller than the estimated cover of 0.19km² in 2019. At Huruhi Harbour (Great Mercury), meadow extent increased to 0.10km² in 2025, up from 0.09km² estimated in 2019. Subtidal habitat mapping commenced in Tairua estuary. Using a camera suspended from the side of a boat, imagery has been captured that will allow the classification of seabed habitats. This mapping will pair with the intertidal mapping to produce a near-complete understanding of benthic habitats in Tairua estuary.

Rocky reef: A rocky reef monitoring pilot was undertaken in 2024/25 and 2025/26 at 11 sites around the Coromandel Peninsula. Chosen sites represent a gradient of wave exposure, freshwater influence and suspended sediment. Monitoring will focus on the state of reef biodiversity by measuring species richness and relative abundance of fishes, kelp and reef invertebrates, like lobster. These will be compared with environmental factors to elucidate influences on reef biodiversity. A mix of survey approaches will be used, such as baited underwater videos, remotely operated vehicles, snorkelling, and light and temperature loggers. Over time, a picture of the trends in biodiversity will emerge.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●

Key challenges

The latest trend report (in press) found that estuarine health is declining in nine of the 20 monitored sites across Whāingaroa/Raglan, Firth of Thames, Tairua, and Coromandel. Only three sites showed improving health. Land and freshwater resource management is linked to estuarine health, but it can be hard to directly attribute the causes of declining estuarine health.

Rocky reef monitoring is challenging in areas with turbid water and large waves. We are investigating the best methods and technologies to support this monitoring programme.

What's coming up

An eDNA biodiversity pilot programme will begin in 2026/27. This programme will describe the diversity of fishes and other species not previously monitored in Waikato estuaries, including the large riverine estuaries such as the lower Waikato, Waihou and Piako rivers.

Intertidal and subtidal habitat mapping will continue, as will the seagrass monitoring that has been established. The rocky reef monitoring programme will be extended to include sites off the west coast, as well as the Coromandel Peninsula.

Tools and innovation

This theme connects our scientific research and data with the staff and communities who use them. It brings together innovative tools, emerging technologies and practical methods to improve efficiency and strengthen restoration guidance, pest management and ecosystem health assessment.

Programme

Collective Impact for Biodiversity

The Collective Impact for Biodiversity in the Waikato is an initiative to empower communities and support and enhance the effort of the many groups, agencies, and other stakeholders to amplify positive biodiversity outcomes at landscape scale. We have highlighted a tool and an innovation as part of this programme.

Tool: Kete Taiao Waikato

Kete Taiao Waikato is a simple, powerful mapping and data management tool designed to support community-led biodiversity projects. It helps community groups record, manage and report on their work and outcomes, all in one place. It also helps us to visualise landscape scale biodiversity outcomes to show what is being achieved across the region.

Kete Taiao is available as a desktop application and as a mobile application that can be used in the field. It enables groups to input and analyse a wide range of activities (for example, trap catches, planting areas, pest plant control, volunteer hours and monitoring) to plan and inform decisions about their projects and report on outputs and outcomes. The tool has integration capabilities with TrapNZ (an existing platform used throughout New Zealand for recording predator control activities). It is currently being piloted by community groups to help us develop support services and training that is efficient and fit for purpose.

Kete Taiao was developed by Waikato Regional Council, with support from Trust Waikato and the Department of Conservation.

Key achievements

- Development and testing of Kete Taiao Waikato completed.
- Seven community groups commenced pilot testing of Kete Taiao Waikato.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate		

Key challenges

- Ensuring Kete Taiao Waikato remains easy to use but also has comprehensive functionality to meet the needs of the varied community groups and projects using it.
- Refining and delivering innovative training and support methods that can be scaled up in a cost effective way as more groups start using Kete Taiao Waikato.

What's coming up

We will start to train and roll out Kete Taiao to other community conservation groups across the Waikato region. Enhancements will continue based on community group feedback.

As a partner of the Collective Impact for Biodiversity in the Waikato – working with Trust Waikato, the Collective Impact Steering Group and the Community Representatives Working Group – we'll explore new ways to maximise collaboration and co-funding opportunities.



\$56,976 funded | 20 groups supporting 480+ volunteers



Hub procurement increased purchasing power by 8.8%.
Value for money



Improved on-the-ground assurance and timeliness.
Delivery



Hubs contributed practical support beyond funding and material distribution.
Value add



Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with ease of process frequently highlighted.
Community response



Reduced administration for council and community groups.
Efficiency



Model could help leverage additional funding partners.
Future potential

Innovation: SSCIF hub funding distribution trial

The SSCIF hub funding distribution trial is one approach the council is taking to support sub-regional hubs to build the capacity and capability of community conservation groups, while improving efficiency and impact to achieve landscape scale biodiversity outcomes. The trial was established to test a new funding distribution model designed to increase the reach, efficiency and impact of biodiversity investment across the Waikato region. In the first phase, two biodiversity sub-regional hubs were allocated 30 per cent of the SSCIF to distribute to small community groups for pest animal and pest plant control activities, with administrative support funding provided by Trust Waikato.

Key achievements

The trial is demonstrating that investing in coordinated delivery through trusted community hubs reduces effort and time for both the council and community groups, while enabling hubs to add practical value beyond funding distribution.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●

Key challenges

- More time is needed to assess the biodiversity impact of this method of funding delivery.
- Bulk procurement offers potential cost benefits but requires suitable storage and delivery arrangements.

What's coming up

The funding hub trial has been extended to three community hubs: Go Eco, Predator Free Hauraki Coromandel Community Trust and Project Tongariro. The results will be evaluated at the end of 2026/27.



Programme

Other tools and innovation initiatives

We're in the early stages of developing the following tools and initiatives.

- A redesign of our online Kahikatea Green Wheel application, which supports landowners to monitor their progress in protecting kahikatea fragments.
- Investigating the feasibility of using soil eDNA as a potential indicator of soil health.
- Investigating the feasibility of using air quality filters to capture airborne eDNA.
- Investigating the feasibility of mapping sub-canopy wetlands using models derived largely from the Topographic Wetness Index.
- Exploring methods to conduct regional threat assessments to support Waikato Biodiversity Strategy outcomes.

Key achievements

Guidance on managing *acid sulfate soils* for landowners undertaking earthworks, to be used in conjunction with our acid sulphate soil predication map. Appropriate identification and management of acid sulphate soils can prevent or minimise acid discharges, heavy metal mobilisation and potential fish kills.

Financial overview

Funding source	Programme delivery	Finances
General rate	●	●

Key challenges

Developing and implementing new methods and technology is sometimes dependent on accuracy and precision of emerging data, council IT initiatives and frameworks. In soil and airborne eDNA monitoring, early methodology may have limitations that mean the resulting data does not yet provide sufficiently reliable or repeatable data for state of the environment monitoring. While implementation of new innovations can be a great opportunity, we need to be sure of their reliability before we incorporate them into our core activities.

What's coming up

We will further refine soil eDNA methods to cater for the special clays present in Waikato soils and further validate the airborne eDNA sample results to understand the potential of this tool.

Policy reform

The Government is progressing significant changes to the resource management system and other associated planning instruments. The council has engaged with these processes, including preparing submissions and working with Te Uru Kahika (the collective for New Zealand's 16 regional councils and unitary authorities) to develop a regional sector approach. The Biosecurity Act and Conservation Act are also under review, and changes could influence biodiversity work programmes.

Compliance monitoring and enforcement

We have deferred investment in a collaborative work programme between local and regional authorities to undertake education, compliance, monitoring and enforcement of biodiversity related policies and rules until the Waikato Biodiversity Strategy is completed.

Pest control/threat management

This work is reported through the Biosecurity Annual Report and is available on our **website**.

Appendix

Legislative and Planning Framework for Biodiversity (as at June 2026)

	Initiative or instrument	Status	Context for Waikato region
International Direction	Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	In effect	The CBD is an international legal instrument for the conservation of biodiversity and New Zealand is a signatory. In response to the CBD, the Department of Conservation (DOC) developed Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 that regional councils have a role in implementing.
	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance	In effect	The Ramsar Convention requires the promotion of the significance of these wetlands and monitoring of any changes to their ecological character, the wise use of wetlands especially through national policy, and wetland conservation. There are seven sites in New Zealand that are listed as wetlands of international importance under the Convention. Three of these are in the Waikato region – the Firth of Thames, the Kopuatai Peat Dome, and the Whangamarino Wetland. WRC coordinates with DOC (lead agency) in the management of these wetlands.
National Legislation	Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)	In effect but will be repealed and replaced	There are specific clauses in the RMA that relate to regional biodiversity management: • Section 30 of the RMA requires regional councils to control land use for the purpose of “maintaining and enhancing ecosystems in water bodies and coastal water”. Regional councils are also responsible for objectives, policies and methods for maintaining biodiversity. • Section 31 of the RMA requires territorial authorities to control “the effects of the use, development, or protection of land, including for the purpose of maintaining indigenous biological diversity.” • Section 62(1)(i)(iii) requires regional policy statements to “state the local authority responsible, in the whole or any part of the region, for specifying the objectives, policies and methods for the control of the use of land to maintain indigenous biodiversity”. The current government has committed to making a range of reforms to New Zealand’s resource management system. This includes amendments to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), as well as ultimately replacing the act with laws premised on the enjoyment of property rights as a guiding principle.
	Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Regulations 2020 (RMA)	In effect (Amended April 2026)	The Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Regulations 2020 established mandatory, nationally consistent rules to prevent specific livestock from accessing waterbodies and degrading water quality. The regulations apply specifically to dairy cattle, dairy support cattle, pigs, beef cattle, and deer, and impact lakes and rivers, setback exceptions, crossing waterbodies and natural wetlands. The requirements were designed to be rolled out in stages. Compliance deadlines varied depending on the stock class and whether the farming activity was a newly established pastoral system, with key deadlines falling on 3 September 2020, 1 July 2023, and 1 July 2025. The April 2026 amendments reduce certain national stock exclusion requirements. Crucially for biodiversity, they alter Regulation 17 by removing the requirement for non-intensively grazed beef cattle and deer to be excluded from natural wetlands that support a population of threatened species (including wetlands in the coastal marine area).

	Initiative or instrument	Status	Context for Waikato region
National Legislation National Legislation	Natural Environment Bill	Under develop-ment	The Natural Environment Bill and the Planning Bill are the dual act structure designed to replace the RMA. Both Bills are due for Royal assent and implementation before the end of this year. This system requires regional spatial plans and combined land use plans to maintain indigenous biodiversity and limit the environmental effects of development. The Bills include a goal of no net loss of biodiversity and require ecosystem health limits to be set and achieved. The Bills also provide for significant natural areas to be identified in spatial plans.
	and Planning Bill	Under develop-ment	Plans must identify each location in the region that is a “place of national importance”. Rules must not allow for activities that would have a “more than trivial” adverse effect on these places of national importance. Additionally, before any activity can commence the council must determine whether the area includes an area of significant biodiversity. Under national direction, local councils must apply standardised plan provisions for indigenous biodiversity, particularly in Significant Natural Areas (SNAs). Regional councils are to be tasked with setting binding environmental limits for ecosystem health within their areas, while maintaining a clear balance between environmental protection and community/economic aspirations.
	The Biosecurity Act 1993 Biosecurity 2025 Direction Statement	In effect but under review	The Biosecurity Act provides a legal framework for keeping harmful organisms out of New Zealand. An overhaul of this legislation is currently underway, led by the Ministry for Primary Industries and Biosecurity New Zealand (as part of the wider Biosecurity 2025 Programme of Work). The Biosecurity Act enables regional councils to monitor and manage harmful organisms within its region. The mechanism for this in the Waikato region is the Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032. Biosecurity 2025 provides the direction that New Zealand’s biosecurity system needs to take over the next ten years. It includes a mission statement, principles, strategic directions, targets for 2025 and initial actions.
	Conservation Act 1987 and related legislation	In effect but under review	The Conservation Act covers the management, advocacy, promotion of land, natural and historic resources for conservation purposes as well as preserving indigenous and recreational freshwater fisheries and freshwater fish habitats. The Conservation Law Reform programme, which is one of the priority actions in Te Mana o te Taiao, is currently being led by DOC and covers 24 separate pieces of legislation. These include a review of: • The Conservation Act, currently the subject of the Conservation Amendment Bill 2026, which significantly reforms New Zealand’s conservation system to streamline planning, enable more activities on conservation land and centralise decision-making; • The Wildlife Act is used to protect wildlife and regulate game bird hunting, including the establishment of wildlife reserves; • Stewardship land in New Zealand. There are significant biodiversity areas in the Waikato region that are classified as stewardship land, including parts of Pureora and large swathes of land on the west coast; • Marine Protected Areas (several laws); • The management of conservation land, including making protection of natural areas easier, charging for access to some conservation land and supporting growth in tourism. • Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000, along with a suite of related planning instruments.
	Climate Change Response Act 2002	In effect but under review	The Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act 2019 substantially added to the Climate Change Response Act 2002, which has: • Established the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (which puts a price on greenhouse gases) which is administered by the Environmental Protection Authority; • Established the Climate Change Commission; • Set a domestic emissions reduction target by 2050; • Created a series of five yearly emissions reduction budgets and plans; Established a range of climate adaptation measures (including a National Adaptation Plan).

	Initiative or instrument	Status	Context for Waikato region
National Direction	National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB)	In effect but under review	The NPS-IB provides direction to councils to protect, maintain and restore indigenous biodiversity requiring at least no further reduction nationally. It requires councils to work in partnership with tangata whenua, provides a strong framework for identifying and managing SNAs; requires biodiversity also to be managed outside of SNAs including habitats for highly mobile fauna; details principles for offsetting and compensation in the effects management hierarchy, and requires regional councils to develop biodiversity strategies to promote the restoration of biodiversity. The NPS-IB is limited to land (terrestrial) ecosystems and some aspects of wetlands and will apply across all land types/tenures, both public and private.
	National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM)	In effect but under review	The NPS-FM provides direction on how freshwater should be managed under the RMA. It requires regional councils to give effect to Te Mana o Te Wai, improve degraded water bodies and maintain or improve all others in alignment with the bottom lines in the NES-FM, map and avoid further loss or degradation of wetlands, create specific targets for fish abundance, diversity and passage, and identify and map habitats of freshwater dependent threatened species (to name a few).
	National Environmental Standards for freshwater (NES-FW)	In effect but under review	The NES-FW regulate activities that pose risks to the health of freshwater and freshwater ecosystems. It lays out a series of requirements and standards to protect wetlands, fish habitat and passage, and rural and urban streams. A change to the Waikato Regional Plan was required in response to the NPS-FM and NES-FW (Plan Change 1). This plan change aims to improve the water quality of the Waikato and Waipa Rivers. Following the Environment Court's Final Decision issued on 8 June 2026, the primary appeal process is now nearing completion. The Court confirmed it is largely satisfied with the 'PC1 Final' provisions, and the Waikato Regional Council is required to submit a final set of targeted amendments within 30 working days. While the Court confirmed no section 293 process is required, the plan change is not yet fully operative as it awaits final Environment Court sign-off and the resolution of an active High Court appeal regarding the land-use change rule (Rule 3.11.4.9).
	New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS)	In effect	The NZCPS provides national direction on the management of the coastal environment. It is the only compulsory national policy statement (with the RMA requiring that there is one in place at all times). The Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS), the Waikato Regional Plan, the Regional Coastal Plan (RCP) and district plans are required to give effect to the NZCPS. In relation to biodiversity management, policy 11 of the NZCPS requires the avoidance of adverse effects of activities on indigenous biodiversity and ecosystems and the habitats of indigenous species.
	National Environmental Standards for Marine Aquaculture (NES-MA)	In effect (Amended April 2026)	The NES-MA provides nationally consistent direction for the management of existing marine aquaculture activities, focusing on improving the efficiency and certainty of consenting processes while ensuring environmental safeguards are maintained. Its primary focus is on enabling the ongoing operation, realignment, and modification of existing marine farms within environmental limits, including requirements for monitoring and best practice. Regional implementation must balance support for aquaculture development with the protection of coastal ecosystems, including managing effects on water quality, habitats, and tangata whenua values. Amendments to the NES-MA aim to support productivity and innovation but include specific biodiversity safeguards. The standards introduce specific decision matters and rules to manage the effects of marine aquaculture on reefs and biogenic habitats. It also introduces a restricted discretionary approach for adding the invasive species <i>Undaria pinnatifida</i> to existing consents, requiring the council to carefully balance biosecurity and biodiversity risks.
	National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards (NPS-NH)	In effect (Issued 15 December 2025, came into force 15 January 2026)	The NPS-NH provides national direction to ensure natural hazard risk to people and property is managed using a risk-based approach. While its primary focus is on risk management, it intersects with biodiversity by requiring decision-makers to consider climate change impacts over at least a 100-year timeframe. Regional implementation must balance these hazard mitigations with environmental impacts, ensuring natural systems that buffer hazards (such as wetlands and floodplains) are considered
	National Environmental Standards for Papakāinga (NES-P)	In effect	The NES-P is designed to enable Māori landowners to more easily develop papakāinga housing on their land, aligning with Treaty principles of active protection. The standards are explicitly designed not to override existing national direction, ensuring that the protection of indigenous vegetation, wetlands, and significant habitats of indigenous fauna are still recognised and provided for during development.

	Initiative or instrument	Status	Context for Waikato region
National Direction	National Policy Statement for Infrastructure (NPS-I)	In effect (Issued 15 December 2025, came into force 15 January 2026)	The NPS-I seeks to enable the efficient operation and development of infrastructure to support community wellbeing. However, it directs that where practicable, adverse effects of new infrastructure and major upgrades on the environment must be avoided, remedied, or mitigated. The NPS-I aligns with but does not override other national direction, meaning protections for values of national importance under the RMA, such as significant indigenous vegetation, must still be considered during infrastructure planning.
	National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry 2023 (NES-PF)	In effect (Amended May 2026)	The NES-CF lays out a set of regulations for maintaining and improving environmental outcomes associated with plantation forestry and exotic continuous-cover forestry (sometimes called carbon forestry) over one hectare. They do not apply to indigenous forestry activities. The NES-CF regulations cover eight core plantation forestry activities that have potential environmental effects, for example, afforestation, harvesting and earthworks. Certain provisions relate to indigenous biodiversity, such as the need to ensure that forestry earthworks plans contain procedures to identify and avoid disturbance of threatened or at-risk indigenous species of birds and fish, and restrictions on clearance of indigenous vegetation associated with commercial forestry. The 2026 amendments to the NES-CF narrow the circumstances where regional councils can apply rules that are more stringent than the national standards. However, it still enables councils to make plan changes and apply stricter rules to manage high-risk situations and “unique and sensitive environments”, which is vital for protecting the region’s Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) and vulnerable aquatic ecosystems.
	National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL)	In effect (Amended in 2026)	The NPS-HPL sets out a structured approach to mapping HPL, primarily based on Land Use Capability (LUC) classes 1–3, alongside criteria such as large and geographically cohesive areas. It also requires consultation with tangata whenua during the mapping process and collaboration with territorial authorities to exclude land already identified for future urban development. The policy framework includes specific exceptions, such as enabling the use or development of HPL where it is necessary for the protection, maintenance, restoration or enhancement of indigenous biodiversity (clause 3.9(2)(e)). More recent changes to the resource management system have altered how the NPS-HPL is to be implemented. While mapping of HPL is still required, it is now expected to be delivered through regional spatial plans under the new system, rather than through regional policy statements. This shift, alongside evolving national direction, introduces uncertainty regarding final mapping requirements and timeframes, but councils are still expected to continue developing HPL mapping methodologies to enable implementation once requirements are confirmed.
	National Adaptation Plan (NAP)	In effect	This plan is required under the Climate Change Response Act 2002 and responds to the risks identified in the National Climate Change Risk Assessment 2020. Safeguarding biodiversity and ecosystems is a key focus of the NAP, which recognises the dual biodiversity and climate crises. The NAP states that the government will prioritise nature-based solutions to climate change and will integrate work programmes to address these crises in a coordinated manner.
	Emissions Reduction Plan (ERP)	In effect	This plan is required under the Climate Change Response Act 2002 and sets out how New Zealand will meet its second emissions budget and transition to a low emissions future. Nature-based solutions feature in the ERP as a way of addressing the biodiversity and climate crises concurrently. The ERP states that the government will prioritise nature-based solutions, investigate the potential of a biodiversity credits market, explore partnerships with the private sector to plant native trees on Crown owned land, and prioritise promising activities/technologies that increase non-forestry removals such as blue carbon, peatlands and riparian vegetation.
	Te Mana o te Taiao: Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020	In effect	The ANZBS is our national strategy for addressing the biodiversity crisis in New Zealand. It outlines how biodiversity will be protected, restored and sustainably used between 2020 and 2050. It is a roadmap driving conservation action happening at national, regional and local levels. To support the biodiversity strategy, the government creates an implementation plan every five years and tracks progress (the current plan is Action for Nature 2026).
	Predator Free 2050 Strategy 2026-2030	In effect	This strategy, led by DOC, sets our New Zealand’s plan to eradicate our most damaging introduced predators – rats, mustelids, possums and feral cats so native species and ecosystems can thrive again. The strategy is supported by an action plan and regular progress reports.

	Initiative or instrument	Status	Context for Waikato region
Regional Instruments	Te Ture Whaimana – the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River	In effect , under review	Te Ture Whaimana is the primary direction setting document for the Waikato and Waipā rivers. It has the same effect as a national policy statement and therefore, district and regional plans and regional policy statements must give effect to it. Te Ture Whaimana requires that the health and wellbeing of the Waikato and Waipā rivers is restored and protected for current and future generations. The direction provided in Te Ture Whaimana influences the management of freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity in the Waikato region. Te Ture Whaimana is currently being reviewed.
	Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS)	Operative	The WRPS is a document required under section 59 of the RMA. They must provide an overview of resource management issues within a region, as well as policies and methods to achieve integrated management of resources within that region. The WRPS is a key document influencing biodiversity management in the Waikato region and outlines key responsibilities and requirements for territorial authorities and WRC. The ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity chapter in the WRPS sets out a series of objectives, policies and methods relating to the protection and enhancement of indigenous biodiversity. This includes methods relating to the establishment and maintenance of a biodiversity inventory (ECO-M6), a requirement for local indigenous biodiversity strategies to be prepared, and requirements for district and regional plans to protect significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna (to name a few). Three plan change processes are underway to give effect to national direction, including the National Policy Statement for Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD), NPS-HPL and the NPS-FM (WRC Freshwater Policy Review).
	Waikato Regional Plan (WRP)	Operative	The WRP implements the WRPS. It sets policies, methods and rules to manage natural and physical resources in the Waikato region. Some provisions within the WRP require that adverse effects on biodiversity are avoided, remedied and mitigated (as a key assessment criteria for activities such as takes of geothermal water). In addition, the WRP sets out specific policies and rules relating to the management of water resources, which have an inherent link to biodiversity values. There is currently one proposed change to the WRP – Proposed WRP Plan Change 1 – Waikato and Waipā River Catchment. This plan change introduces new rules for managing farming activities that may affect the quality of freshwater. It also introduces new objectives and policies relating to activities that may affect water quality. It is currently progressing through the Environment Court appeal process.
	Waikato Regional Coastal Plan (WRCP)	Currently under review	The WRCP contains policies, methods and rules relating to the management of the coastal environment in the Waikato region. The coastal plan recognises water quality, natural hazards and indigenous biodiversity whilst also managing the use of coastal resources. As part of the WRCP Schedule 7 identifies coastal areas with significant biodiversity. Marine protected areas are part of this coastal plan, and a decision version of this map is here. The review is at the mediation stage and appeals process, which is from May - October 2026. After this point there may be more mediation, and then topics scheduled for court hearing.
	Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022 – 2032 (RPMP)	Operative	The Waikato RPMP 2022-2023 has been prepared by WRC under the Biosecurity Act. It is a regulatory plan specific to the Waikato region, that identifies harmful organisms considered to be pests and outlines the process for their management through rules. The management of pests is a key action for protecting biodiversity in the Waikato region and the WRPMP is a key enabler of this. It includes specific provisions for supporting pest management work occurring in high biodiversity value areas, reducing the spread of pests and complementing and aligning pest management approaches in neighbouring regions.
	Joint Management Agreements (JMAs)	Five operative JMAs	WRC has five JMAs with iwi partners within the region (Raukawa, Te Arawa River Iwi, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Tūwharetoa and Waikato-Tainui), created under section 36B of the RMA. These JMAs include the agreed process for input into RMA planning documents, resource consent applications and engagement.
	Iwi Environmental Management Plans (IMP)	Operative	An IMP is a document developed and approved by an iwi, hapū or marae that outlines matters of importance relating to resource management within their respective rohe or area of interest. They are an expression of rangatiratanga to assist iwi, hapū and marae with exercising kaitiakitanga roles and responsibilities. These plans often contain historical accounts, cultural values and narratives, descriptions of areas of interest and the preferred approach for consultation and engagement (in relation to planning and policy processes). IMPs often identify aspirations that the iwi, hapū or marae has for the natural environment and can include provisions relating specifically to biodiversity management and enhancement. The RMA requires local authorities to “take into account” any relevant planning document recognised by an iwi authority (which includes IMPs) (section 66(2A)). A list of IMPs in the Waikato region is available here : Iwi management plans Waikato Regional Council

	Initiative or instrument	Status	Context for Waikato region
Corporate documents	Te Pae Tawhiti I Strategic Direction 2026-2036	Operative	The Strategic Direction identifies five strategic priorities to help lift the region's productivity and prosperity by managing our natural resources sustainably. The biodiversity work the council does delivers the Sustaining natural resources priority which aims to accelerate action to protect and restore the natural resources that make the Waikato nationally significant – our soils, water bodies, native plants and animals, geothermal areas, forests and coastal habitats.
	Waikato Biosecurity Strategy 2022 – 2032	Operative	The WBS sets out WRC's blueprint for operating and maintaining a collaborative, cohesive and comprehensive biosecurity system in the Waikato region over the next decade. It is a non-statutory strategy that integrates WRC's regulatory and non-regulatory biosecurity functions (including the RPMP) with other biosecurity activities such as monitoring and surveillance, research and collaborative action. The strategy recognises that positive biodiversity outcomes are dependent on effective biosecurity measures and actions.
	Waikato Regional Energy Strategy 2026 – 2050	Operative	The strategy provides a roadmap for transitioning the Waikato region to a low-emissions, affordable, and resilient energy system that reduces reliance on fossil fuels and strengthens the regional economy. In the absence of a national energy strategy, it acts as a guiding regional document that coordinates action through the proposed establishment of a regional energy forum, integrating the efforts of local government, iwi, industry, and communities across seven strategic pillars (pou). The strategy recognises that while the shift to renewable energy is essential, positive biodiversity outcomes rely on a “protection-first” approach. It highlights that renewable developments (like hydro altering river habitats or wind farms affecting birdlife) must be spatially planned and managed in ways that safeguard local biodiversity, sensitive ecosystems, and culturally significant taonga.
	Waikato Freshwater Strategy - Te Rautaki Waimāori Mō Waikato	Operative	The Waikato Freshwater Strategy is a non-statutory strategy that provides a road map for freshwater use over the next 50+ years. It identifies three key themes – advocacy, smarter methods and better information to assist WRC with managing fresh water more effectively. The strategy informs WRC's 2018-2028 long term plan and identifies a key programme of activities that need to occur to reach the goal of effective long term freshwater management. The Strategy recognises the importance of freshwater ecosystems for biodiversity. It also recognises that habitat restoration and biodiversity enhancement activities led by community groups gives the best return on investment for freshwater enhancement and signals the importance of providing funding support for this.
	Climate Change Roadmap – Te takatū o Waikato rohe	Operative	The Climate Change Roadmap is a discussion document that identifies nine key pathways for emissions reduction and climate change adaptation in the Waikato region. These pathways will inform the way WRC operates in the future, but will depend on sustained, collaborative engagement from all sectors of society to achieve mutually agreed targets. Ongoing engagement with iwi partners, territorial authorities, sector industries and other key stakeholders is occurring to inform WRC of gaps and opportunities for collaboration. There are two pathways that relate to biodiversity – Pathway 3 (biodiversity and biosecurity) and Pathway 6 (afforestation and planting).
	Zone Management Plans	Operative	Zone management plans (ZMPs) are the primary tools for implementation of all river and catchment management activities in the Waikato region. They are non-statutory strategic documents. ZMPs outline a series of actions to be taken to enhance biodiversity throughout each catchment.
	Catchment and Harbour Management Plans	Operative	Catchment and harbour management plans are non-statutory strategies that set out the vision for a specific catchment over 10-20 years that can support and inform statutory documents (e.g., district and regional plans). Catchment and harbour management plans often identify biodiversity values within a catchment and any associated threats and outline key methods for enhancing biodiversity and ensuring that land use activities in the catchment minimise effects on ecosystems.
	Waikato Region Shallow Lakes Management Plan	Operative	This plan draws together information on the shallow lakes of the Waikato region, a framework for their management and any associated management challenges and opportunities. It is a non-statutory, technical report/plan.



He taiao mauriora ▲ **Healthy environment**

He hāpori hihiri ▲ **Vibrant communities**

He ōhanga pakari ▲ **Strong economy**

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