REIMAGINING MATAURA

Annual Report FY24/25

1 July 2024-30 June 2025

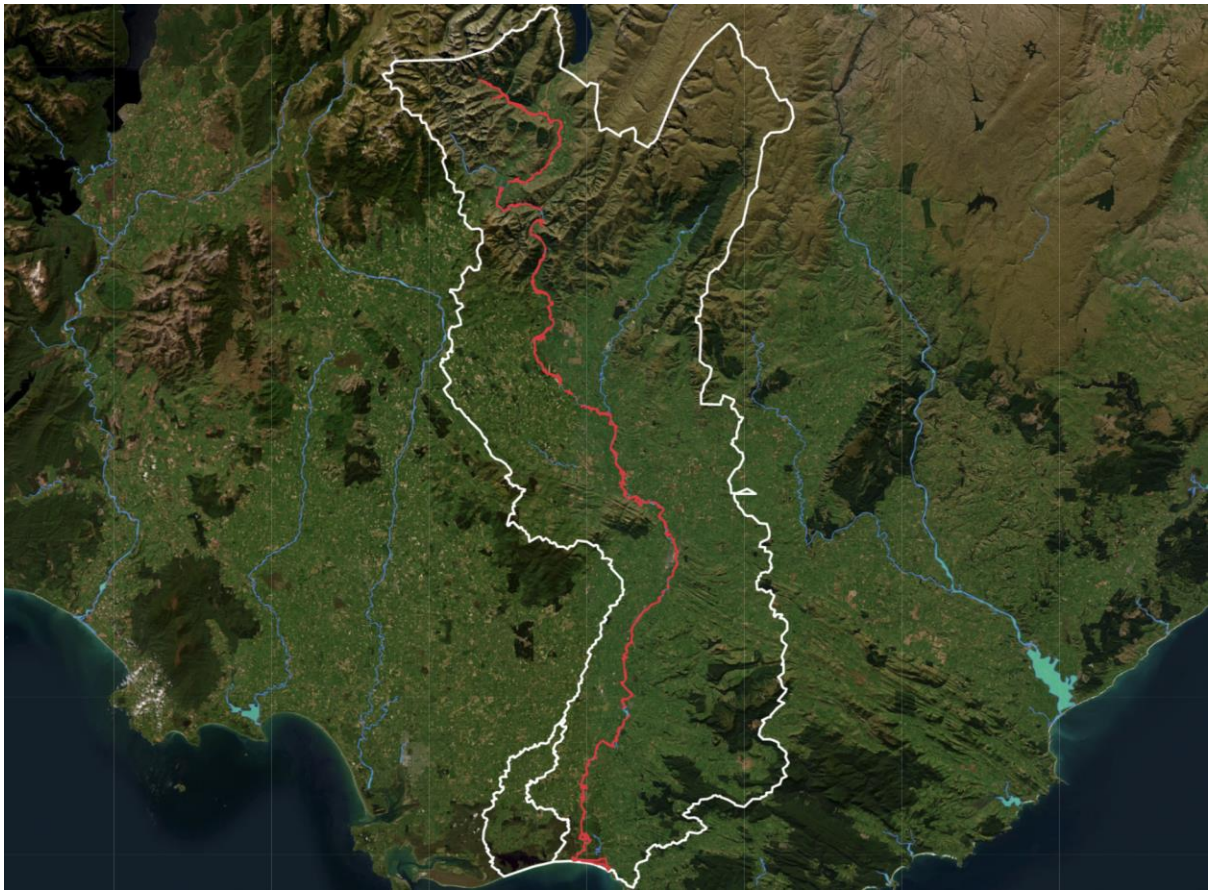
To reimagine the Mataura River system by bringing together catchment by design methodologies and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) in order to build cultural, environmental, and economic resilience in the catchment.

Background

The Mataura River is found in the Murihiku Southland region and is approximately 240km long. The river's headwaters are located in the Eyre Mountains to the south of Lake Whakatipu. From there it flows southeast towards Gore, where it turns southward. It then passes through the town of Mataura and enters the Pacific Ocean at Toetoes Bay on the southern coast of the South Island. Much of its channel was braided.

Prone to flooding and ad hoc responses by local Government, there is a need to reconsider the current flood investment and flood plain management to move towards a climate resilient platform in support of enhanced cultural, economic, biodiversity and community outcomes.

Since 2022, Hokonui Rūnanga, Awarua Rūnanga, and Waihopai Rūnanga and Ōraka/Aparima Rūnanga have worked together with Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Fonterra and Toitū te Whenua |LINZ to consider a re-imagined Mataura River system, based on the bringing together of catchment design methodologies and Mātauranga Māori (Māori Knowledge).



Description: Mataura awa catchment (white) and Mataura Statutory Acknowledgement (red) in Murihiku.

Key Objectives and Goals

To ensure that effective planning and research informs future investment across the Mataura River system, the following goals/ objectives provide focus for project development:

- Improve the current Mataura River system management and re-establish natural buffers
- Reduce the intensity of flood peaks in downstream bottlenecks such as Gore and Mataura townships
- Enhance mahinga kai, cultural values and taonga species
- Reintroduce mid-system wetlands
- Restore riparian habitat
- Provide alternative livelihood pathways for ngā rūnanga and communities.

Reimagining Mataura Project Governance

The project is governed by a Project Steering Group with representatives from:

- Hokonui Rūnanga
- Awarua Rūnanga
- Waihopai Rūnanga
- Ōraka/Aparima Rūnanga
- Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu
- Fonterra

The Project Steering Group meets monthly to provide project direction and oversee delivery of the work programme.

FY24/25 Summary

In FY24/25 a major focus for the project has been on developing a formal governance structure, with a range of stakeholder activities carried out to explore what a future governance entity could look like.

This included:

- Stakeholder Wānanga in September 2024 to update the community and stakeholders about the project and discuss governance options, with over 130 attendees (see Wānanga programme in Attachment 1)

- Follow up online hui in October 2024 for interested parties to further discuss the shape of a governance structure for the project (outcomes from hui in Attachment 2)

Mataura River Place-Based Partnership & Restoration Programme

- ### Wilkins Family and Reimagining Mataura Project Steering Group

  The relationship between the Wilkins family and members of the Reimagining Mataura Project Steering Group (PSG) has been steadily developing since April 2025, following initial engagement after a stakeholder wānanga held at the Ascot in September 2024.

  In April 2025, PSG members participated in a whanaungatanga hui at the Wilkins Farm, marking the beginning of a collaborative relationship. During this hui, the Wilkins family shared their economic and environmental aspirations, including recent initiatives focused on environmental data collection. PSG members reciprocated by outlining the broader social and environmental aspirations of the rūnanga for the Mataura Catchment. A guided visit across the Wilkins property provided PSG members with valuable insight into the scale and scope of the family's landholdings.

  Following this initial engagement, the PSG identified opportunities to build a high-trust, long-term relationship with the Wilkins family. In June 2025, PSG members, accompanied by kaimahi from the Office of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, returned to the Wilkins Farm to further explore the potential for an intergenerational partnership between Papatipu Rūnanga and the Wilkins family. During this hui, the PSG extended an invitation to collaborate on a restoration project, which the Wilkins family agreed to consider.

  Subsequent engagement between PSG members and the Wilkins Farm's environmental advisor provided deeper insight into the family's environmental priorities and potential areas for collaboration. The Wilkins family expressed strong interest in riparian management at a farm scale, with existing efforts underway across a 1km stretch of land encompassing approximately 3 hectares. This work is focused on improving water quality and enhancing biodiversity. Complementing this, they are actively involved in monitoring and mapping at both farm and catchment levels, aiming to support informed decision-making and build water quality capability.

  The concept of a native corridor has resonated strongly particularly given ongoing native planting efforts. A site containing degraded swamp and eroding riverbanks has been identified as a potential pilot site for restoration, noting the farming challenges associated with poor drainage and erosion. While there is interest in addressing larger-scale issues, the PSG recommendation is to start with smaller, manageable projects to build momentum and test collaborative approaches. Both parties acknowledge a shared

interest in the cultural and historical narratives of the Mataura Catchment, recognising that this partnership represents not only a long-term environmental initiative but also an intergenerational relationship.

The Wilkins family's recommendation is to consider that tributaries may offer the most strategic starting point, and this was supported by PSG members, who agreed that addressing issues at the tributary level could yield significant downstream benefits for the Mataura River. This alignment of values and vision has laid a strong foundation for a collaborative restoration project and a meaningful, enduring partnership.

At the most recent hui in August, the PSG formally proposed the Mataura River Place-Based Partnership & Restoration Programme, a two-phase initiative designed to establish sustainable, trust-based stewardship of the Mataura River frontage. The proposal was well received by the Wilkins family, who later confirmed their support for the approach and expressed enthusiasm for progressing the partnership.

Phase 1 focuses on shared learning, site discovery, and project planning, with joint field visits, cultural and ecological knowledge gathering, and the development of draft restoration concepts. Phase 2 will translate these plans into tangible restoration actions, including riparian planting, erosion control, wetland restoration, and culturally informed monitoring.This programme integrates mātauranga Māori, ecological science, and sustainable farming practices to revitalise key sections of the river. It also provides a framework for collaborative governance, adaptive management, and community engagement, ensuring that restoration efforts are both environmentally effective and culturally meaningful. The PSG and Wilkins Farming are committed to progressing this partnership with transparency, shared purpose, and a long-term vision for the health and mauri of the Mataura River.

Other activities completed in FY24/25 are detailed below.

- Takiwā Ltd has provided mapping and data-storytelling services to Reimagining Mataura / Hokonui Rūnanga via an established Hokonui Rūnanga workspace on the Takiwā platform, where ongoing data collection and curation ensure the catchment strategy remains data-driven. A specific output was a presentation at Awarua Marae during the Harakeke Hub Hīkoi to "build a shared understanding" of the Mataura River and catchment among diverse stakeholders, using existing datasets and visualisations from the Hokonui Rūnanga workspace on Takiwā.

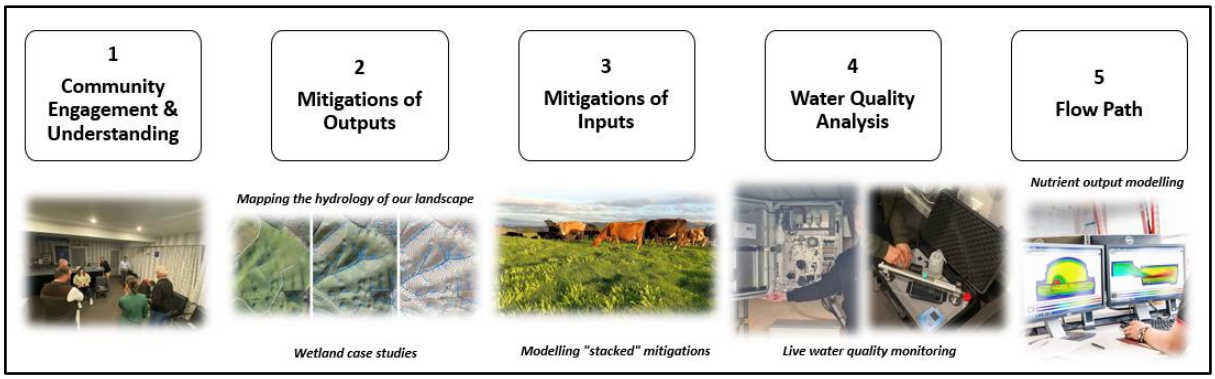
- Hokonui Rūnanga continues to provide coordination, leadership and administration functions for the Project Steering Group (PSG) on behalf of Murihiku Rūnanga. The PSG meets monthly to monitor and review the project budget and workplan.

Edendale Aquifer Group (EAG)

The EAG formed in 2024, in response to community concerns around high nitrate levels in the shallow aquifers in the Edendale area. EAG is a sub-group of the Three Rivers Catchment Conservation Trust (TRCCT) which is a legal entity and registered charity. Funding for the EAG is held by TRCCT and administered by way of a legally binding MOU between the two parties.

Nitrate issues had been identified in bores around the Edendale area, some of the levels were approaching NZ drinking water standard limits. People wanted to understand the causes of high nitrate in some bores in the catchment to inform changes on farm that could be taken to reduce nitrates in the aquifer and meet future environmental limits.

The foundation project for the EAG was understanding the movement, interactions and monitoring of nutrients, particularly nitrogen, through the Edendale Catchment. The project is split into five workstreams:



1. Community Engagement

In FY24/25 the EAG ran several well attended community events as well as the regular nitrate testing event every 3rd Friday. In July 2024 the EAG purchased a portable real time nitrate sensor to support community engagement and to help build up a better understanding of water quality within the catchment.

Key community events:

- 24th September 2024 – Presentation of the project at the Re-imagining Mataura stakeholder hui.
- 10th October 2024 – Understanding Our Water – Community presentation at Seaward Downs Hall on the work Land and Water Science had been undertaking for EAG on why we see different nitrate levels in bores across the catchment and the significant influence landscape plays in determining water quality outcomes.
- 31st March 2025 – Drop Your N but not Your Profit – Community presentation at Seaward Downs Hall looking at different strategies to reduce nitrogen loss on farm and their financial impacts.

2. Mitigations of Outputs

The workstream focused on capturing and treating nitrate lost from farms within the catchment as well as understanding the key pathways in which nitrate gets to water, moves through the landscape and the types of interventions that will be most effective.

Phase 1 commenced in 2024 and investigated the landscape and contaminant flow paths within the catchment. The catchment is unique as it has a long (42km) terrace running along its western boundary with numerous seeps discharging high nitrate groundwater into waterways on the floodplain (mainly historic drains put in to drain the original wetland areas) and ultimately into the Mataura River.

Land and Water Science developed a high-resolution hydrological network for the catchment identifying water sheds, drainage networks, different stream types, and used airborne radio metrics to find former and degraded wetlands. The landscape was found to have a significant role in determining water quality. Water in the upper terrace was low in nitrate due to its interaction with lignite (carbon), compared to the lower terrace where free draining soils allow nitrate to pass rapidly into the underlying aquifer and lignite deposits are much deeper resulting in minimal interaction with water in the aquifer.

A final piece of work is due to be complete in early in FY25/26 looking at the distribution of nitrate within the flood plain drainage network to help finalise locations for potential interventions.

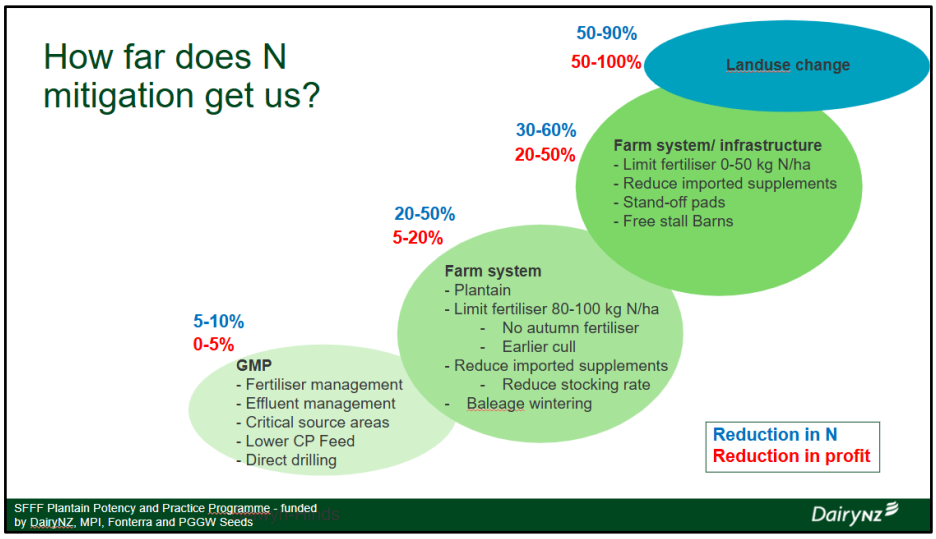
Phase 2 of the workstream will commence in FY25/26 and will use the information from Phase 1 to pilot mitigations, such as wetlands. Mitigations will be trialled at a farm scale and potentially at a catchment scale if suitable sites are found and landowners are supportive. Re-imagining Mataura has put $70,000 towards this wetland creation mahi.

McRae Demonstration Site (550 Natives Planted)

Two demonstration sites were started in FY24/25 but were delayed due to resource consent requirements and winter weather. These are due for completion in summer 2025.

3. Mitigation of Inputs

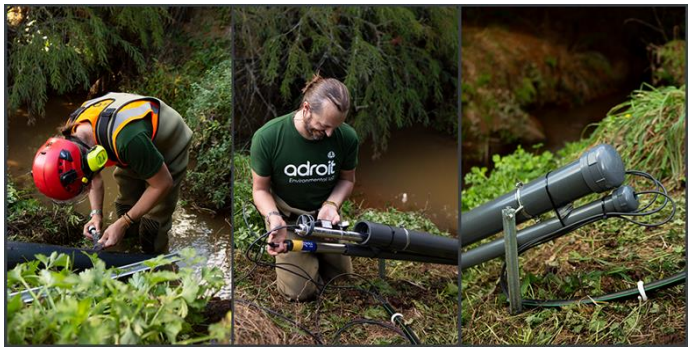
Four case study farms were modelled in Overseer and Farmax, highlighting how stacked mitigations, including plantain, fertiliser efficiency, reduced stocking rates, low nitrogen fertiliser use and off paddock facilities impact profit and nitrogen leaching.



4. Water Quality Analysis

The project seeks to build community engagement through real time water quality information and provide confidence that mitigations are working (or not!).

An Eco Detection unit was installed on Oteramika Creek. This collects four samples per day and anal these for nitrogen and phosphorus. In addition to this, two Adroit nitrate sensors will be installed in early FY25/26, within the Fonterra demonstration site. These will measure inflows of nitrate from a nearby spring and subsequently nitrate levels of the water once it has passed through a woodchip filter and small wetland.



5. Flow path

Data from the EAG real time monitoring is being used by Professor Tony Pleasants and others to build a more accurate model for predicting nutrient losses from land use and the impact this will have on water quality. Using advances mathematics and regression models, the model will continuously adapt and improve its accuracy over time.

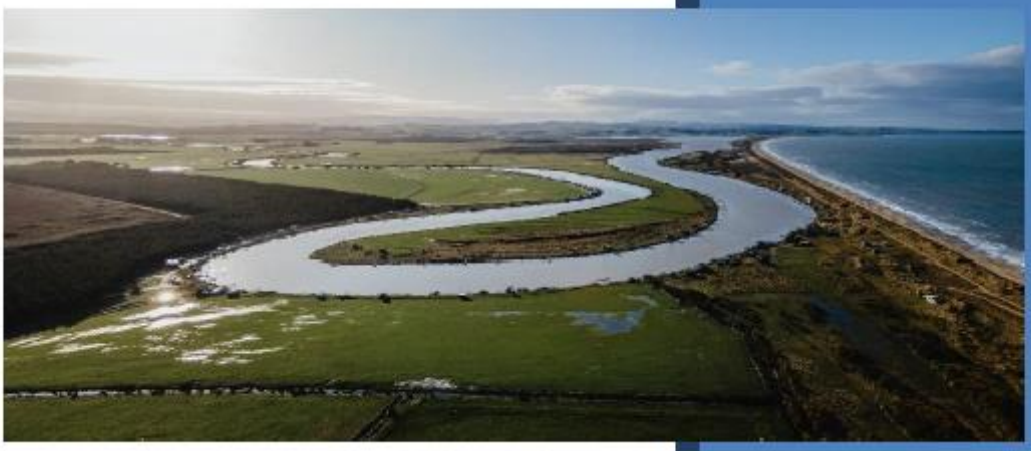
Attachment 1 – Wānanga Programme

REIMAGINING MATAURA

Reimagining Mataura Stakeholder Wānanga

Tuesday 24 September 2024
Ascot Park Hotel, Invercargill

Detailed Agenda with Presentation Overviews and Guest Speaker Information



To reimagine the Mataura River system by bringing together catchment by design methodologies and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) in order to build cultural, environmental, and economic resilience in the catchment.

9:30am	**Registration, Tea and Coffee**
9:45am	**Welcome and Introductions -** Terry Nicholas (Chair PSG) H&S Briefing (PSG)
9:50am	Background and current Programme update - PSG
10:00am	**A History of the Mataura River** The Mataura River runs ki uta ki tai, was once abundant in mahinga kai, and, also an important ara tawhito (traditional travel route) for southern Māori. Presenters: Jacqui Caine and Takerei Norton
10:30am	**Edendale Aquifer Group (EAG)** *"Understanding the movement, interactions and monitoring of nutrients, particularly nitrogen, through the Edendale Catchment"* The presentation will focus on establishment of the group, building partnerships and the key components of the initial project. Presenters: Tim McRae, Birgit Pemberton and Cain Duncan.
11:00am	**Morning Tea**
11:15am	**TOHA** Bridging the gap between finance and environmental action by providing a platform that facilitates the flow of funding to projects addressing climate and environmental challenges. See more at Toha Network. Presenters: Mike Taitoko and Tasman Gillies.
11:50am	**Slow the Flow – Environment Southland** Piloting a collaborative approach to nature-based solutions to reduce the impact on high flood risk areas and support the health and well-being of waterbodies within Murihiku, Southland. Presenter: Dr Ella Lawton.

12.20pm	**Fonterra - Environmental Partnerships and Local Initiatives** Key initiatives they have undertaken at their Edendale site to reduce water consumption as well as their on-farm environmental support programme for farmers. Presenters: Jamie Callahan, Bruce Allan, Cain Duncan
12:40pm	**Lunch**
1:15pm	**Waimea Catchment Project - Dairy NZ** A project involving farmers, rural professionals and scientists working together to support implementation of on-farm system changes and catchment interventions that can further improve water quality. Presenter: Justin Kitto
2:00pm	**NIWA** NIWA, in collaboration with Victoria University of Wellington, conducted pilot research on catchment-level modelling to explore alternative water allocation regimes beyond the current static allocations. The mid-Mataura catchment in Southland, characterised by intensive agriculture, was selected as the study area Presenter: Channa Rajanayaka
2:30pm	**Establishing a Reimagining Mataura River Trust (PSG)** A proposal to establish a Reimagining Mataura River Trust to reflect and include catchment-wide participation of Industry groups, Local Government, Crown, Iwi, Recreation Fishers, Tourism and river communities of interest. Presenters: PSG
3:00pm	**Tea & Coffee** **Future direction, next 12 months and beyond**
Housekeeping:	
3:15pm	**Summary and Closing – Chair** Terry Nicholas
3:30pm	**End of full wānanga**

Attachment 2 – Online Hui October 2024

Reimagining Mataura Follow-Up Hui 31 October 2024

REIMAGINING MATAURA

Attendance:

Terry Nicholas, Bob Penter, Cain Duncan, Tasman Gillies, Havana Caine, Cyril Gilroy, Tāne Tamati, Sarah Yarrow.

Sarah Crooks, Paul Duffy, Ben Febery, Jason Herrick, Robin Wilks, Alistair Gibson, Justin Kitto, Richard Kyte, Jeremy McPhail, Josh Cumberland, Julie Keast, John McCarroll, Glenys Dickson.

KEY POINTS

Welcome

Terry welcomed everyone to the hui and noted the importance of working together. He asked Bob to introduce himself as the facilitator of this hui.

Purpose of hui

Bob discussed the purpose of the hui noting it was to build on what he understand to be the very successful September workshop regarding the Mataura River catchment. He set out the purpose of this hui was therefore to share:

- Feedback following the workshop;
- Ideas of potential structure; and
- Challenges that we may encounter in the governance structure.

Bob noted the Reimagining Mataura:

- Vision statement;
- Overview in PowerPoint; and
- Work to date.

He indicated that good progress had been made because everyone here wants to support the health and wellbeing of the catchment. It appears a Trust model, which has been effective elsewhere in his experience, is a good fit given the broad support across iwi, industry, landowners, local government, Crown agencies and NGOs. Bringing the wider community support on is essential and while this workshop wasn't going to decide who would be on the Trust, it was to discuss how best to let everyone see themselves represented.

Feedback Session

1. Changes to farming/land use changes
2. Communities and people
3. Finances and resourcing
4. Governance and future strategy

Bob reiterated the importance of spending public funding properly, and funding longevity. The river Trust model stacks up as the most sensible option and is one that will attract funding.

Bob was asked for his thoughts on statutory body vs a Trust. Bob noted that:

- This is something everyone needs to consider.
- Processes to have stat body are a slow burn – this will take time. It also required a lot of political time.
- A river Trust model gives you the right baseline structure to get the work underw.ay
- Trust model is simplest way to start gathering up everyone who wants to put effort and time into the river catchment.
- River Trust will attract funding if you have it supported with quality governors including people with credibility, support from major landowners and local industry.

The Trust model was agreed as the best way forward. The Trust will be what talks to the statutory agencies working in the catchment.

Bob showed the strawman structure:

- PSG is the operational aspect of the Trust – give effect to the direction that trustees set.
- PMO is the administrative aspect of the Trust. They feed up to the PSG and the Trust.
- He indicated in his experience roughly 10 trustees are ideal.
    - Open to thoughts on how to appoint trustees – needs to be representative of the people and communities in the catchment.

A question was asked that if we are looking at a treasury bid and ongoing funding – when working in a Trust like this, where do you think this sources of funding come from. Bob said there are basically two sources:

- In kind funding – where project partners make some of their inhouse staff time, products and/or expertise available (at no cost to the Trust). For example, they have people apply for external funding, or provide support in other aspects in setting up the Trust.
- Cash, which for example can be used to buy plants, contractors time etc.

Several attendees emphasized that, for this project to be successful community, the community needs higher standing and visibility within the model.

- Without community you don't have support.
- As trustees, there's a number of Trustees that is enough to do the mahi, but not too many that no work gets done. 10 – 12 works well.
- Tempting to load the trust up with lots of people from different parts of the catchment but need to ensure we are picking people to be most effective in this community – governance space.

It was asked if there other parties that aren't on this call that should be?

It was noted that a lot of landowners aren't aware of this project going on. This is something they need to understand and there appears to be a sense of urgency with setting up a governance structure. We need to communicate this mahi out to the wider community so that that the trust can get started without a big upheaval. Good things take time but this needs to be communicated out.

- Bob agreed noting this was a key point to get right at the start and not try to fix later. We don't want to give the impression that we are coming in on top of locals. We should socialise the idea of the trust a bit more broadly. Stops people being surprised about the development.

It was noted that the comms around this when talking about freshwater management in rural areas needs to be carefully thought out because some landowners will think the government is going to sort it out and they will oppose the idea. It was also noted that Environment Southland will soon be releasing the Mataura catchment summaries; they won't be looking good.

- It was agreed that it is important to think about who carries the comms forward and make sure that everyone is delivering the same key message is important in small communities – everyone talks, and we don't want messages to get mixed up.

It was noted that there are a lot of different elements in the communities along the river i.e., small town residents v. landowners, which reiterates the importance of consistent, cohesive comms.

One of the challenges, there seems to be a lot of expectations around what the Trust will be doing especially considering the Trust hasn't even been developed yet. Who in the room is wanting to play a part in making actual changes in the river.

Bob noted that:

- There is significant value of a trust as the coalition of the willing at this point.
- Government funding for things partially run by council is almost impossible.
- A separate entity could be more valuable to bring community together and form something separate.

The importance for the need to be transparent with community was highlighted and to show that this is the right move for the catchment. This is going to be huge, if you want to get this over the line, you need to get the whole community in the catchment in the game.

The Trust could be a voice for the River and needs to take an enabling approach for the community.

It was noted that the upper catchment has said they haven't heard of the project. There is support for the Trust model and people with similar experience in the nearby Waiau catchment.

Terry concluded the workshop noting this Trust approach is a no brainer. Mātaitai application got through with no complaints because community was on board and we need to do the same here. This project is about assisting one another. You can't do this in silos.

<u>Next steps</u>

- Send PowerPoint.
- Send strawman Trust structure.
- Set up next hui
    - Thursday 5 December around 12pm (lunch provided)
    - In-person, hosted at Hokonui Rūnaka
    - Invite Waiau Trust to present on their experiences
- Agenda to be developed (attendees are invited to send in ideas)