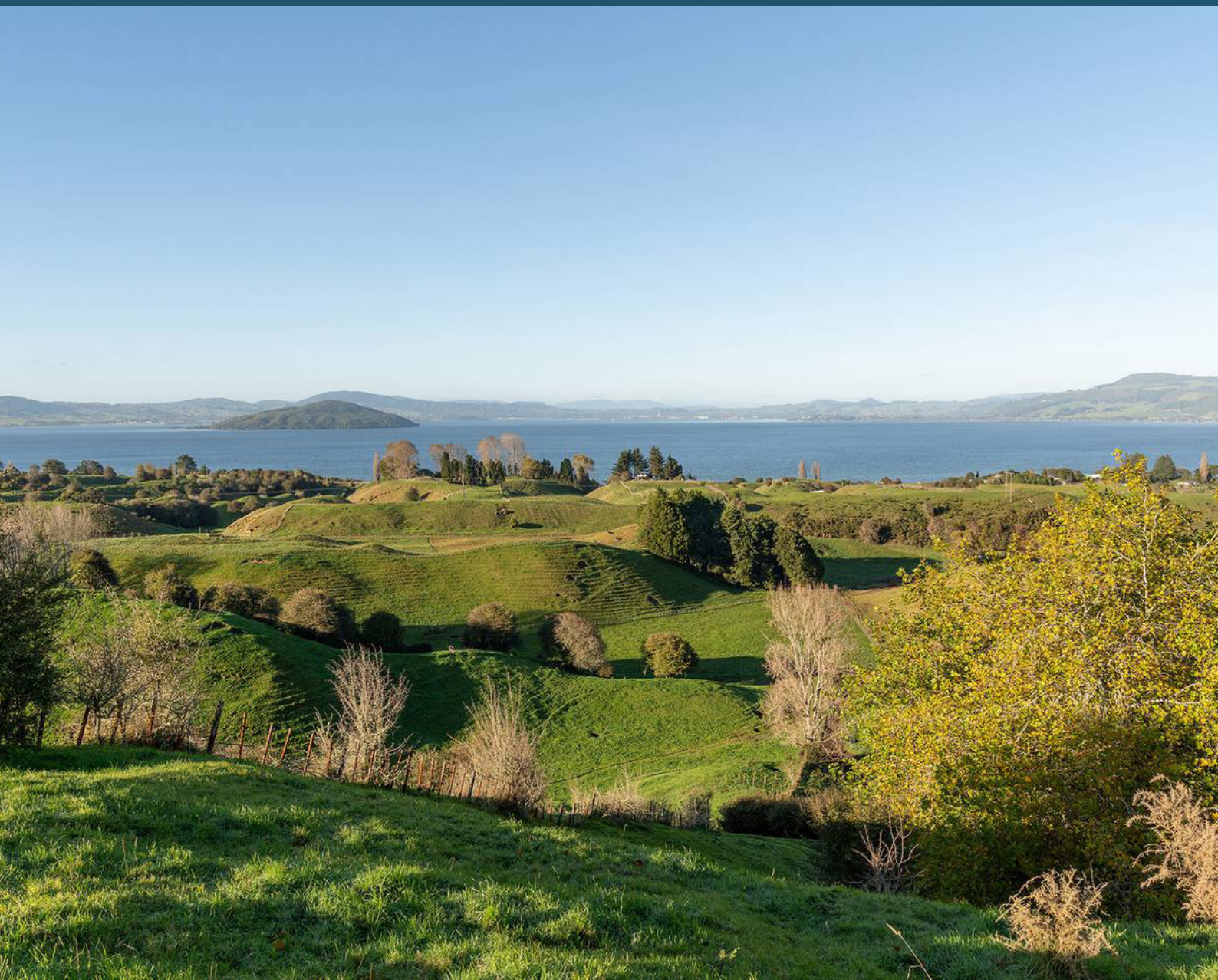
JOBS FOR NATURE | MAHI MŌ TE TAIAO

Accelerating Freshwater Improvement in the Bay of Plenty

Project Profile



Purpose of this review:

To highlight the positive social, environmental, and community benefits resulting from the Accelerating Freshwater Improvement in the Bay of Plenty project.

Accelerating Freshwater Improvement in the Bay of Plenty

Region	Bay of Plenty
Recipient	Bay of Plenty Regional Council
Start date	2/11/2020
End date	30/06/2023
Approved funding	$3,000,000
Co-funding	$4,197,488 (cash contributions and other sources)
Intent	Ecosystem restoration, freshwater restoration, recreation enhancement, regulatory implementation
Funder	Ministry for the Environment

Accelerating Freshwater Improvement in the Bay of Plenty region is focused on helping the community improve water quality in sensitive catchments, by supporting new protection fencing and planting works in priority areas. These catchments are experiencing high levels of contaminants from intensive land uses such as agriculture and horticulture. This is impacting negatively on ecosystem health and activities such as swimming and kai (food) gathering.

The main catchments covered in the project are the Waihī Estuary, Maketū Estuary/ Kaituna River, Ōhiwa Harbour, and the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes, all of which are suffering from an excess of either nitrogen, sediment, phosphorus or bacteria.

The project aimed to construct 174 kilometers of fencing and plant 450,000 native plants along waterways, wetlands, steep erodible land and native forest remnants, creating new areas to help protect and improve water quality.

Why is the project important for the region?

The Bay of Plenty has some key challenges for managing freshwater. Economic development, land use and climate change all affect the increasing demands, placing pressure on the water in the region.

The project aimed to employ approximately 135 individuals over two years. Workers were tasked with constructing new protection fences on private properties and planting native plants to safeguard the region's water resources and boost native biodiversity. This initiative created jobs for local residents and supported the region's economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

What difference is the project making to people?

The project is delivering significant social benefits to the local community. It is working with Bay of Plenty mana whenua (land rights) and local landowners to improve the health of freshwater ecosystems.

Community engagement and capacity building

Over 200 people worked on this project with 71,564 hours worked and invested in activities led by local communities, allowing them to take charge and care for their waterways. This approach has strengthened the region's ability to manage freshwater resources.

The project provided support to 76 landowners, including assessing the condition of their land and identifying risks to freshwater, establishing new protection fences in key areas, controlling pest plants and animals, and planting new native vegetation. These activities helped improve the condition of the waterways but also empowered landowners, by giving them the tools and knowledge to manage these resources effectively.

How is the project contributing to the wellbeing of Māori?

These waterways and catchments are living, breathing parts of the Māori culture and way of life. Protecting them both preserves the environment and safeguards the cultural heritage and wellbeing of the local iwi and hapū (kinship groups).

The Pongakawa River is a cultural cornerstone for local iwi, hosting several Māori marae (meeting places). The river and its surroundings offer opportunities for kayaking, fishing, and other outdoor activities, which are integral to the local culture.[1]

The Waihī Estuary contains culturally significant shellfish beds and is a popular area for shellfish gathering among the iwi, who have recently formed a new initiative called Te Wahapū o Waihī - Waihī Estuary, Catchment and Community.[2]

The Kaituna River holds great cultural significance to the local community and iwi. It is a source of food, such as tuna (eel), and is used for ceremonies.[3]

The Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes are culturally significant. The lakes and their surroundings have been home to the Te Arawa people for generations, and the lake beds are vested to the Te Arawa Lakes Trust. The lakes are also associated with cultural and spiritual practices.[4]

Impacts on the environment

Improved freshwater quality

The project has installed 234.4 kilometers of fencing to safeguard waterways (174 kilometers was targeted), wetlands, lakes, and biodiversity areas from livestock intrusion and planted 663,819 native plants (550,000 was targeted).[5]

This was well above target outputs and will help to reduce the high levels of contaminants currently impacting ecosystem health and activities such as swimming and kai gathering in these catchments.[6]

Improved biodiversity

Healthy catchments support a wide range of flora and fauna, contributing to increased biodiversity. They provide habitats for plants and animals, and support ecosystems where various species can thrive.

These catchments often feed into sensitive ecological areas downstream, like wetlands, estuaries, and harbours. By managing and protecting areas upstream, the project is creating a better environment downstream for native flora and fauna.

Flood risk and pollution reduction

Restoring catchments helps manage flood risks and reduce pollution. Reconnecting watercourses to their floodplains and implementing broader catchment measures can improve soil structure and manage nutrient inputs, thereby reducing the risk of floods and pollution.

Economic benefits

Freshwater catchments in the Bay of Plenty have significant economic value, contributing to various sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, tourism, recreation, and power generation.

Data from international studies showed that river catchments are the second most valuable land type, with wetlands being the most valuable.[7]

Catchment restoration can lead to cost savings in water treatment and infrastructure maintenance in the long term. It can also support sustainable agriculture and industry, potentially saving money on farm operations and creating more valuable land.

References

1. Have a Good Trip. (2023). Discover the Natural Beauty and Attractions of Pongakawa - Guide.
2. Land Air Water Aotearoa. (1 December 2023). Waihī Estuary.
3. Tapuika Iwi. (n.d.). The Kaituna River Document Summary.
4. Lake Rotoiti Community Association Inc. (n.d.). Te Arawa Lakes Cultural Significance.
5. Ministry for the Environment. (July 2023). Public Waterways and Ecosystem Restoration Fund Project Closure Report.
6. Bay of Plenty Regional Council. (Decmber 2020). Jobs for Nature funding accelerates freshwater improvement in Bay of Plenty.
7. Department of Conservation. (March 2022). Environmental economic assessment for Ngā Awa Northland catchments.

INFO 1249

Jobs for Nature: Project Profile

Published in May by the Ministry for the Environment on behalf of the Jobs for Nature Secretariat.

Photo credits: Accelerating Freshwater Improvement in the Bay of Plenty via Rotorua Daily Times

JOBS FOR NATURE | MAHI MŌ TE TAIAO