

WAIMATA RIVER REPORT-BACK MEETING WITH GDC & DOC, 5 November 2018

Anne Salmond

Hello one and all – tena koutou!

Please share this report-back with anyone else who is interested. It will be posted under 'Waimata River' in the Waikereru Ecosanctuary website: <https://www.waikereru.org>

If you're willing to play a role in the next step in the process - ie. towards the February meeting - it would be great if you can let us know: a.salmond@auckland.ac.nz;
Laura.Savage@gdc.govt.nz

A. MEETING WITH COUNCIL AND DoC STAFF

As promised at our jam-packed community meetings on Sunday to discuss the future of the Waimata River, we're reporting back on the outcomes of our meeting on Monday 5 November with staff from Gisborne District Council and the Department of Conservation.

This meeting was extremely interesting. **First, the Te Awaroa team reported** to our colleagues in these agencies on the research we've carried out on the Waimata.

We also reported on the two Sunday 5th meetings about the future of the Waimata, the high numbers of community members who attended and their determination to take practical action to protect the future of the Waimata River, with all of us working together.

At the meeting with GDC we were joined by John Ruru and Ian Ruru, who expressed a heartfelt concern for the future of the Waimata. There is a strong desire that all parties come together in enhancing the ora (health, abundance and well-being) of the Waimata, which runs through the heart of our community.

Second, our colleagues in DoC and GDC reported on the work they've been doing in the Waimata catchment.

1. **DoC:** Charles Barrie of the Department of Conservation has initiated the restoration of Donner's Bush in Riverside Road, working with EIT horticulture and native tree planting programmes, and the home school community in Gisborne.

Don McLean of DoC has carried out a survey of the Protected Management Areas along the Waimata River, gaining a close understanding of the current state of biodiversity in the catchment.

2. **GDC:** We learned that a new Catchment Management Team headed by Murry Cave was formed by Council just one week ago. We were told that at present, the Waimata River is not on Council's priority list for catchment management planning, although applications for work on the river have been made to the Freshwater Fund and the Hill Country Erosion Fund.

After that, **the question of priorities was debated.**

Prof Gary Brierley advised that unlike other major rivers in Tairāwhiti, the Waimata acts as a 'chute,' so that in high rainfall events, any material such as sediment or slash that enters the river is rapidly carried downstream. With climate change, high rainfall events are increasing in frequency and severity.

In the Waimata catchment, a number of plantation forests upstream are due for harvest. With the removal of large areas of vegetation from steep, highly erodible headwaters, large scale erosion, sedimentary deposits on the Waimata river floor, banks and in the sea, damage from logs and increased water flows is highly likely.

The Waimata catchment is densely inhabited, running through farms and forests, lifestyle blocks and suburbs into the heart of Gisborne city, the port and the bay, beside roads and under bridges that carry vital community infrastructure such as water and power. As a result, the potential costs of failing to properly manage these risks are exceptionally high.

Given this risk analysis, it seems that planning for the Waimata River catchment should be a high priority for GDC. There does not seem to be a rationale for the low priority given to the Waimata in GDC's current planning.

B. WHAT NEXT?

During the community meetings, a number of key suggestions were made about what should happen next.

1. Change the Priority Ranking of the Waimata River

From the numbers of people who attended the community meetings, and the strong views expressed, it seems clear that the **current low ranking** of the Waimata River in Council's catchment management priorities **is not acceptable** to the wider community.

This will be taken up with Councillors and senior management, who were not present at our meeting with GDC and DoC staff.

2. Farm & Forest Plans

At the meeting in Waimata Hall, it was suggested that **farm plans** would be one positive step in taking practical action to restore the river. **Forest plans** also gained very strong support from the meeting.

We are fortunate that Laura Savage, who farms with her family in the upper Waimata and is a member of GDC's new Catchment Management team, will work on farm plans as a first step in a project to revitalise the Waimata river, from the mountains to the sea.

At our meeting with GDC, it was confirmed that Laura Savage will initiate this project, which is terrific.

3. Community-Led Strategic Planning for the Project

At the community meetings, it was suggested that a **community-led strategic approach to revitalising the whole of the Waimata catchment** (from the mountains to the sea) is vital, and that this should get under way as soon as possible.

At our meeting with GDC, this suggestion was strongly supported. Staff pointed out that catchments with active community engagement are much more likely to attract funding and support, including from Council.

This will require a **steering group** to be formed. At the community meetings, many people indicated that they would like to be involved in and informed about this stage in the project.

At our meeting with GDC, staff indicated that they are happy to give infrastructural support (communications and help with organising meetings etc) to such a group, which is excellent.

At the Waikanae meeting, it was suggested that a **meeting should be called in February** to start the process of strategic planning.

At our meeting with GDC staff, it was agreed that such a meeting is an excellent idea, and they will give it infrastructural support. This meeting will take place, and we'll keep you posted.

At both community meetings, people were keen to **reach out to forestry, iwi, farmers, residents and those who use the river for recreation** so that all those who care about the river have a say. We agree, and this will happen.

At the Waikanae meeting, the question of **communication** was raised to allow the wider community to share in this discussion. Lists of emails were collected, and it was suggested that a Facebook page should be set up.

We are sending out this report-back to those who supplied their emails, plus others who have expressed an interest in staying in touch. We will discuss who might set up a Facebook page over the next week or so.

4. An MOU between GDC and the School of Environment at University of Auckland

At the community meetings, it was suggested that a **partnership be forged between the new Catchment Management Group and the School of Environment** at the University of Auckland, to allow continued collaboration with this team of researchers and their students.

Murry Cave agreed to take this discussion forward.

5. A Process for Community-Led Strategic Planning

At the meeting with GDC, Prof Gary Brierley offered a set of key principles for successful community-led catchment management. These are follows:

1. LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF THE RIVER.

- If we focus on the river itself, and the challenges it is facing, the process is likely to succeed. If it focuses on private interests, it is likely to be divisive, and fail.
- The process should not be institutionally framed. Its about people getting together to make good things happen.

2. THE ORA OR WELL-BEING OF THE RIVER

- Let the river be a river.
- What would a healthy Waimata look like? Define the health of the river / people / plants / animals. Work with the things that matter.
- An authentic process, distinctively local and community led.

3. CATCHMENT-FRAMED, A SYSTEMS APPROACH

- Think of the river as a living community of plants, animals and people. Work with the river as a whole. Manage from source to sink; from headwaters to the sea.
- Look after the land to look after the river. The river is the lifeblood of the land.

4. FUTURE-FOCUSED

- Learn from the past, stop repeating past mistakes.
- Take a long-term view, adopt a precautionary approach. Don't wait for disasters to happen.

5. STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Adopt a conservation approach – identify and take care of the good bits first, and work from there.
- Tackle causes, not symptoms
- Address threatening processes, identify tipping points
- Look for simple, positive actions with big impacts; then scale up
- Seek to avoid harm and negative impacts down-stream, off-site. Think of the whole river system.
- Scenario planning – look at possible futures, make informed choices.
- Visionary yet realistically achievable

All those present at the meeting with GDC and DoC are keen to work together in this way to enhance the ora of the Waimata River; and some first steps have been taken.

We'll be grateful if you can share this report-back with anyone else who is interested.