

TAIAO (NATURE) IN THE WAIKATO

**STRATEGY
DOCUMENT**

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This document has been prepared using the Special Consultative Procedure, Section 83,
of the Local Government Act (2002).

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CONTENTS



GLOSSARY	01
INTRODUCTION	02
What is Taiao?	03
VISION, GOALS, TAIAO	04
Vision	04
Goals	04
Potential methods to achieve Taiao	04
The benefits of protecting Taiao	05
Council and Crown Reserve/Land (SNA's) showcase best practice	07
Categories of Taiao	08
Restoration Opportunities	09
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	10
Strategic context	11
Elements of the Waikato district and Taiao	12
OUR DISTRICT	14
State of the Environment	15
Opportunities for improving Taiao	16
Significant Natural Areas	17
BRINGING IT TO LIFE AND CONSIDERATIONS	18
Taiao and partnership with iwi/hapuu	18
Collaboration	19
Biosecurity and other tools	20
ACCESS	21
Esplanade reserves	21
Esplanade strips	22
Access strips	22
Summary on access	23
ACHIEVING OUR VISION AND GOALS THROUGH ACTIONS	24
Focus Area 1	24
Focus Area 2	25
Focus Area 3	26
Focus Area 4	27
Focus Area 5	28
MONITORING AND REVIEW	29
Report Card (Example)	30
Resources	31

GLOSSARY

Bioveg2

Is an example of the Waikato Regional Council's initial satellite imagery-based layer identifying Indigenous Forest remnants.

Carbon Sequestration

Carbon Sequestration is the process by which carbon dioxide is absorbed during photosynthesis and is stored as carbon in biomass (trunks, branches, foliage, and roots).

Engineering with Nature (Native Engineering)

Engineering with Nature is defined as the intentional alignment of natural and engineering processes to deliver economic, environmental, and social benefits efficiently and sustainably through collaborative processes.

Restore (ecology)

The active intervention and management of modified or degraded habitats, ecosystems, landforms and landscapes in order to reinstate indigenous natural character, ecological and physical processes, and cultural and visual qualities.

Significant Natural Areas (SNAs)

Any area that, on the commencement date, is identified in a policy statement or plan as an area of significant indigenous vegetation or significant habitat of indigenous fauna (regardless of how it is described).

State of the Environment (SOE)

State of the Environment monitoring helps with policy development and informs decision-makers of the consequences of actions and changes in the environment. It involves setting targets, monitoring, analysing, and interpreting data, then reporting findings, and continuing this process over time.

Taiao

Is Maaori for nature, consisting of natural resources; it speaks to the natural environment that contains and surrounds us. It encompasses all of the environment and its offspring.

Ecosourced

Refers to the propagation of native plants from local areas and the planting of them back within the same geographical area.

Conservation Covenant

A covenant is a legal agreement between the landholder and the covenanting agency about how an identified area's natural values will be protected.

Indigenous Biodiversity

Means the living organisms that occur naturally in New Zealand, and the ecological complexes of which they are part, including all forms of indigenous flora, fauna, and fungi, and their habitats.

INTRODUCTION

This Strategy identifies broad priorities for protecting and enhancing Taiao, including indigenous biodiversity values, to improve conservation and ecosystems.

This Strategy encompasses and links to Waikato district's open spaces, reserves, esplanades, private land, wetlands, peat bogs, the Waikato and Waipaa Rivers, and tributaries. The rivers and some tributaries originate outside the district and at Ngaaruawaahia, the Waipaa and Waikato Rivers converge all the way downstream to Port Waikato. Waikato District Council partners with Waikato Regional Council to sustainably manage natural resources.

The Waikato district once contained large areas of forest and wetland. The dominant forest species were typically kauri in the north, podocarp in central locations and a combination of rimu and

tawa in the south. Variations of forest species were seen between coastal and inland areas. The major wetland areas were northeast of Hamilton and around the lower Waikato River. Indigenous lowland vegetation was modified by Maori and then primarily replaced with exotic pasture by European settlers to establish the district's social and economic foundation.



What is Taiao?

Taiao is “nature” and much more; it is the earth, the natural world, the environment, and our country. Taiao speaks to the natural environment that contains and surrounds us. It encompasses all the environment, its offspring and mauri.

BECAUSE WE ARE BORN OF THE EARTH, AND IT IS BORN OF US, WE HAVE AN ETERNAL CONNECTION TO TAIAO - THE EARTH, SKY, AIR, WATER, AND LIFE ARE ALL INTERDEPENDENT.

Taiao is about finding our way forward by forging an interconnected relationship with the environment based on respect.

That interdependency lies at the heart of our Taiao methodology. Te Whakapakari I Te Taiao towards environmental enhancement is the goal of Waikato-Tainui. The enhancement approach aims not to maintain but, through our actions, to improve the quality of the environment for future generations.

Waikato Regional Council (WRC) have mapped indigenous biodiversity at a regional level. The Waikato District Council spatial overlay is a subset of the regional data set. WRC used a comparison study of indigenous ecosystem cover, both historical and current, and this has provided an overview of what we have today.

Discussions about biodiversity have also tended to revolve around protecting Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) (as dictated by Section 6 Resource Management Act 1991), rather than about how to maintain biodiversity across the landscape. While SNA sites are critical dimensions in biodiversity management, sites seldom operate in isolation from their surrounding environment (flora and fauna moves in and out of such areas). The Waikato District Council needs to look at the entire role Taiao plays and its interactions with the wider environment.

Significant Natural Areas cover a total of 70,692.9 hectares (ha) over 697 sites. This is a mixture of international, national, regional, and locally recognised sites.

Department of Conservation (DOC) land, regional and local terrestrial sites total 25,317.69 ha which equates to 35.8% of SNA cover. A subset of the above was investigated by Leathwick (2016) and identified 127 priority sites as high-value indigenous biodiversity within the lower Waikato region zone.

Key examples of Taiao area types include:

Mangataawhiri; Managatangi; Whakapipi;

Waikato River at Tuakau Bridge; Awaroa (Waiuku);

Whangamarino at Jefferies Road Bridge;

Whangamarino at Island Block Road; Lake Opuatia (Peat Lake);

Waerenga;

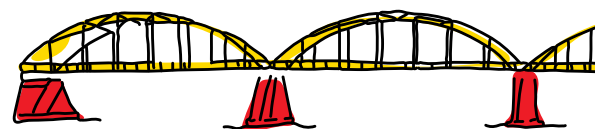
Lake Waikare;

Matahuru; Waikato River at Rangiriri; Whangape; Managawara Stream

Awaroa at Harris/Te Ohaki Bridge;

Awaroa (Rotowaro) at Sansons Bridge;

Tane Mahuta Reserve, Huntly.



VISION, GOALS, TAIAO

Vision

To foster a liveable, thriving and connected environment where the people of the district value and understand the importance of our natural systems and Kaitiakitanga.

We all work together to protect, sustain, and improve our natural ecosystems, so all can enjoy and share the benefits as the foundation for Taiao in Waikato.

The full range of New Zealand's indigenous ecosystems and species thrive from the mountains to the sea.

Goals

1. Maintain, create and improve a full range of natural habitats and ecosystems to a healthy functioning state across their natural range and genetic diversity; and
2. Support actions to conserve, maintain and restore healthy ecosystems and their ecological linkages and promote sustainable natural resource use and emissions reduction.

3. Seek collaboration opportunities to work with others, including mana whenua, to achieve the Taiao in the Waikato vision.
4. Unlock native bush and esplanade areas through access agreements and landowner support to provide for pest and weed control, walking and cycling where possible.

Potential methods to achieve Taiao

Many methods can support indigenous biodiversity and biosecurity action. These include:

- Research and monitor indigenous biodiversity, native plants, animals and other organisms and the ecosystems that sustain them.
- Funding – multiple streams (local and central government, community, iwi, NGOs, business).
- Cultural – sites containing indigenous biodiversity and taonga identification.
- Wildlife corridors – between SNAs and Council reserves.

- Biosecurity – preventing or reducing the spread of pest plants, animals and other organisms that might negatively impact natural ecosystems.
- Protected areas – Council-owned, private covenants, DOC, iwi and hapuu.
- Additional plantings adjacent to regional riparian protection areas.
- Land acquisition and bequeaths.
- New technologies – satellites, network traps, Internet of Things (sensors and cameras etc).
- Integrated planning – opportunities to enhance Taiao and manage land.
- Enabling landowners – knowledge and understanding of the benefits of Taiao and how to get started.
- Education – teaching our communities and young people the benefits of Taiao Resource Management Act tools – investigate the simplified version of protection covenants.
- New indigenous biodiversity initiatives.

**IMPROVE OUR
NATURAL
ECOSYSTEMS**

The benefits of protecting Taiao

It is more cost-effective to conserve ecosystems or stop degrading our environment than to start from scratch creating new ones in rural or brownfield areas.

Conservation and current protection (see District Plan) are no longer enough to arrest the loss of Taiao.

Investment needs to increase in maintenance/monitoring and restoration of Taiao for long-term sustainability (Proposed National Policy Statement – Indigenous Biodiversity). This means a focus on protection, maintenance, and monitoring of what you have. This can be done as non-statutory efforts through fencing and pest control while keeping tabs on the environment. Alternatively, regulatory protection can be put in places that legally require conservation and restoration.

Restoration sits on a continuum from improving ecosystems through to full recovery, as set out in Figure 1. It takes many forms, depending on the ecosystem, whether pristine or degraded. Restoration and letting nature take back what it needs on its own is passive.

ACTIVE RESTORATION SPEEDS UP THE PROCESS AND MINIMISES INVASIVE PESTS AND WEEDS.

The Restorative Continuum

Improving biodiversity, ecological health, and ecosystem services.

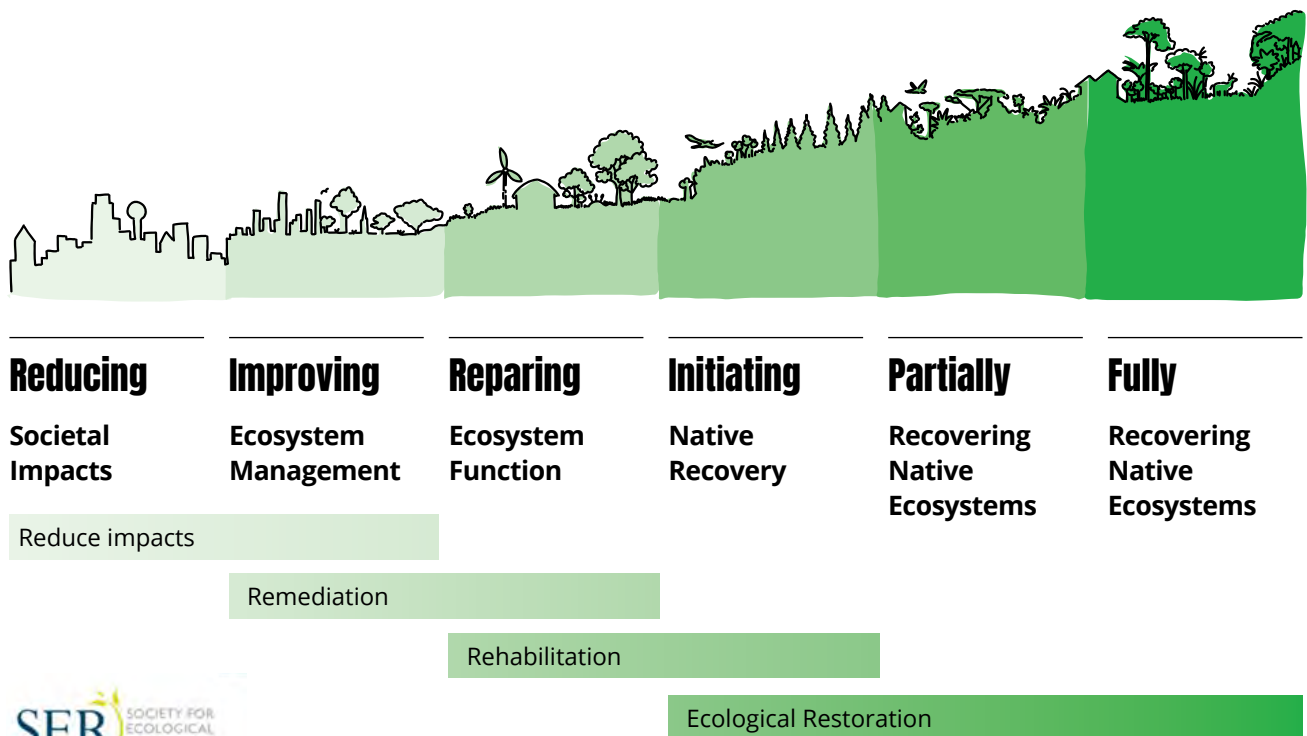


Figure 1: Restorative Continuum (restorative activities aimed at improving ecosystem functions).

An example is the United Nations Environmental Protection initiative to restore 3.5 million square kilometres of land over the coming decade.

Investment in ecosystems can accrue an environmental benefit of \$1 invested in biodiversity returning between \$3 and \$75 of economic benefits from the

subsequent ecosystem goods and services. Valuing the environment and better identifying its benefits are a critical step to protecting and restoring what we have.

Nature-based solutions are a smart investment now more than ever. (see Figure 2 below).



Nature-based solutions can deliver big economic benefits

Solution: Protect and restore forests to store carbon, stabilise soil, and slow water runoffs during intense rainfall.

Economic Benefits: Every dollar invested in restoring degraded forests would create \$7 - \$30 in benefits.

Solution: Restore wetlands to absorb and filter flood waters, store carbon, and provide clean water.

Economic Benefits: Wetland ecosystems provide services worth up to \$15 trillion including flood protection, fisheries habitat, and water purification.

Solution: Restore degraded agricultural land to produce more food for more people.

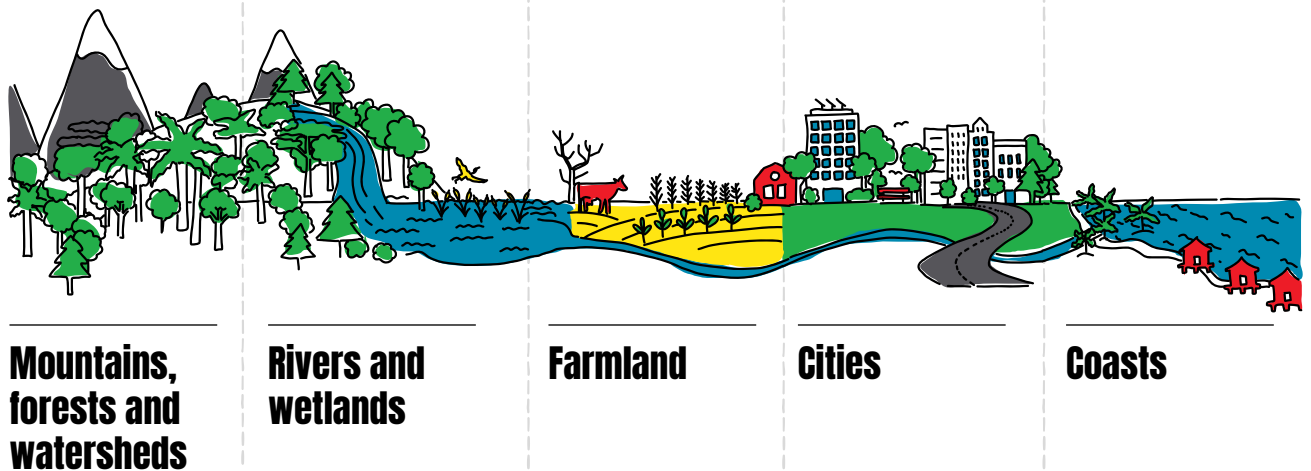
Economic Benefits: Restoring 160 million hectares of land would create \$84 billion in annual economic benefits globally.

Solution: Expand green spaces and restore forests and watersheds in and around cities to lower heat and reduce flood risks.

Economic Benefits: Restoring upland forests and watersheds could save water utilities in the world's 534 largest cities an estimated \$890 million each year.

Solution: Protect and restore mangroves, marshes, and reefs to buffer coasts from storms, absorb floodwaters, and capture carbon.

Economic Benefits: Protecting and restoring mangroves could create \$1 trillion in net benefits globally by 2030.



Source: Verdone and Seidl, *Roots of Prosperity* (Forests); Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Rivers & Wetlands); A. Wu, *How Can Restoring Degraded Landscapes Deliver Financial Returns?* (Farmland); The Nature Conservancy, *Beyond the Source* (Cities); Global Commission on Adaptation, *Adapt Now* (Coasts).

Figure 2: Nature-based solutions.

Council and Crown Reserve/ Land (SNAs) showcase best practice

The Council will showcase best practices in maintaining, managing, monitoring, and restoring Taiao in the Waikato. Where possible, these areas will also be used for education and research to enhance Taiao.

We need to embrace and create more of the stories in our district like:

Community Group example (SNAs) showcasing best practice:

From Pukemokemoke Bush Trust:

"The most recently planted area seems to be doing incredibly well, although the recent drought has taken out a few species, particularly perhaps akeake and maybe mahoe, and they'll need to be replaced, but otherwise, this area is doing very well.

The next area is a very wet area and was planted in flax some three years ago and could well do with interplanting with particularly kind kahikatea and pukatea, again the two well-established wetland plants of the area."

Private landowner example Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII) covenant, (Mt Karioi area) showcasing best practice July 2022:

From Landowner:

"We are very encouraged by the regeneration in the covenants on the farm. White maire is coming up along one of the ridges, and Puriri, which is great because Wayne Bennett (Forest Flora) is finding them difficult from seed. Last month, a representative from Waikato Regional Council (WRC) walked through the areas with us and commented on the good health of the canopy.

We spotted Hinau seedlings, never seen them regenerating before; rata flowering and kohekohe fruiting in March (as right). Over the summer, we picked up the sound of a bat at dusk. The WRC rep pointed out that the mature Puriri would be good bat roosts, so we are trying to trap and bait near those trees. The WRC are contributing towards the plants, and our problem is getting enough plants. So, we asked Waikato district Could if they could contribute towards the planting preparation. In the open areas at the edges of the forest, we need to spray or cut down kikuyu grass to make planting plots."



**PHOTOS:
KOEKOHE
FRUITING AND
RATA FLOWERING**



Categories of Taiao

Conserving indigenous biodiversity and restoring ecosystems will have a positive knock-on effect on the climate. Specific economic capture of tangible benefits might include sustainable wood, improved agricultural yields and eco-tourism revenues.

Non-valued elements include clean air, water, pollination, pest control, nutrient recycling, carbon sequestration, reduced animal-transmitted diseases and greater resilience to extreme weather and

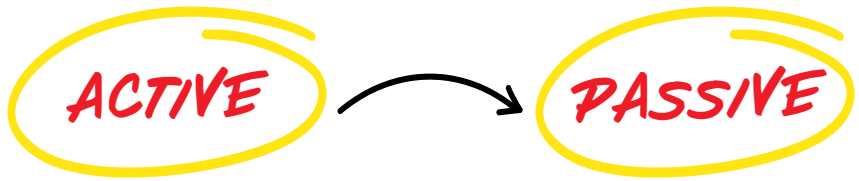
natural disasters. In comparison, roads and bridges don't generate returns themselves, but they are foundational to increased economic benefits through the movement of goods and services. We value this infrastructure but do not apply the same principles to Taiao.

- **Forests - Threats:** encroachment from urban development and agriculture, pollution, invasive pests, and wildfires.
- **Restorers:** Replanting native trees; conserving plants and animals, and restoration areas. There are also economic benefits from controlling pests through better native bush retention and protection of native fauna.
- **Wetlands - Threats:** Irrigation, dams, canalisation and agricultural drainage, pollution
- **Restorers:** Controls on water extraction, restoring water flows to wetlands, wastewater treatment.

- **Peat bogs - Threats:** Peat extraction, drainage for agriculture, infrastructure, fire, overgrazing and pollution.
- **Restorers:** Re-wetting, conservation and stock exclusion.
- **Cities/towns - Threats:** Urban sprawl, waste, and emissions from industry and traffic.
- **Restorers:** Better policy and planning, cleaning up waterways and former industrial sites, tree planting, and creating green spaces and urban wetlands.
- **Protect pockets of native vegetation and waterways during development.**



Restoration Opportunities



Passive Restoration - leave things alone and nature does its own thing. The contrast between fencing, pest and weed control and non-fencing native areas that have been grazed.

Active Restoration - where sites are actively weeded and pests controlled, protecting areas (fencing) and adding new native plantings to increase diversity.



Contrast between native areas fenced (some regenerating ground cover) and unfenced (mature trees and no ground cover).

Restoration is actively engineering nature:



New plantings adjacent to mature vegetation.

We actively enhance this by fencing, weed and pest control, planting and maintenance. Both options include assessing the area, soil and water conditions, tree and bush plantings and maintenance-plans over time.

It must be the right place with suitable species that are native and eco-sourced, with a variation in the types of plants including trees, bushes and grasses. WDC wants to encourage native vegetation (protection and restoration) over exotic vegetation and transition exotic forests to indigenous bush.

Planting a monoculture species is easy, and building indigenous ecosystems is challenging but more rewarding from a biodiversity perspective and more adaptable over time.

Further research is needed, but wetlands and peat bogs all have carbon-sequestering species. Where it can, the Council will help

facilitate reasonable solutions in different places and show best-practice examples on its reserves.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

The 17 SDGs are integrated — they recognise that action in one area will affect outcomes in others and that development must be a balance of social, economic and environmental sustainability. United Nations – Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 15 – “Life on the Land” sets out the importance of plant life on land.

“Human life depends on the earth as much as the ocean for our sustenance and livelihoods. Plant life provides 80 percent of the human diet, and we rely on agriculture as an important economic resource. Forests cover 30 percent of the Earth’s surface, provide vital habitats for millions of species and are important sources for clean air and water, as well as being crucial for combating climate change.”

Economy

Society

Biosphere



All SDGs are interlinked, but SDG 15 sits at the base of the biosphere.

Strategic context

The Strategy is about maintaining and enhancing the natural environment

while achieving the best community and economic outcomes.

Emphasis should be placed on strengthening indigenous biodiversity and protecting native bush, wetlands, peat bogs and quality soils. The Taiao in the Waikato Strategy fits with New Zealand's international

obligations and the upcoming legislation, including the Resource Management Act (RMA) and Proposed National Policy Strategy - Indigenous Biodiversity.

A SUMMARY OF THE LINKAGE IS ILLUSTRATED BELOW:



Elements of the Waikato district and Taiao

The Waikato district covers 418,893ha, a strategically significant land area between two of the fastest-growing metropolitan centres in New Zealand – Hamilton and Auckland.

It is also located in the heart of the ‘golden triangle’ - the economic zone encompassing Auckland, Hamilton, and Tauranga, which generates over 50% of New Zealand’s gross domestic product (GDP) and is home to over 50% of NZ’s population.

The district therefore makes a critical contribution to the country’s economy in terms of contribution to revenue generation and GDP.

The district is also home to large areas of significant indigenous vegetation. DOC is administering specific sites of significance, e.g. the Haakarimata Ranges near Ngaaruaawhia.

The Waikato River (NZ’s longest river) flows through the district. It is a critical waterbody, contributing to the region’s biodiversity, providing potable water for the area and neighbouring population centres. It has significant cultural

value to iwi, hapuu and Maori (Waikato Tainui and Maniapoto). The Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010 recognises the river as a living entity with its own legal rights.

Some examples of well-managed reserve areas in the Waikato district:

- Waingaro Reserve – WRC recently reviewed this in a Biodiversity Monitoring report on this reserve that used an adaptation of the Kahikatea Green Wheel monitoring tool as developed by WRC.
- Coastal reserves around Raglan and Port Waikato (Whakaupoko West Franklin Landcare group, Port Waikato and Raglan Community groups) are managed well, particularly in restoration activities, and there is good community consultation in these areas.
- Haakarimata Ranges.
- Hakanoa Reserve Management Plan.
- Mount Karioi.
- Pukemokemoke Reserve.
- Taupiri Range.
- Whangamarino wetland.
- Wainui Reserve (Bush Park).

The Waikato district contains some of the country’s most highly-productive soils, which are vital contributors to the country’s agricultural and horticultural sectors.

Taiao in Waikato and the rest of New Zealand is under pressure. At the same time, little deliberate felling of the indigenous forest takes place, and the main threats to forests are stock browsing and plant and animal pest infestation, with climate change having more ongoing influence over time.

Drainage continues to pose a threat to wetlands and peat bogs. Large areas of rimu and tawa forest remain on the hill country, most of which is publicly-owned and legally protected. Most of the internationally-recognised Whangamarino Wetland is also legally protected. These areas and the lower Waikato lakes form a semi-continuous band of indigenous habitats from the northeast (Miranda) to the southwest (Aotea Harbour).

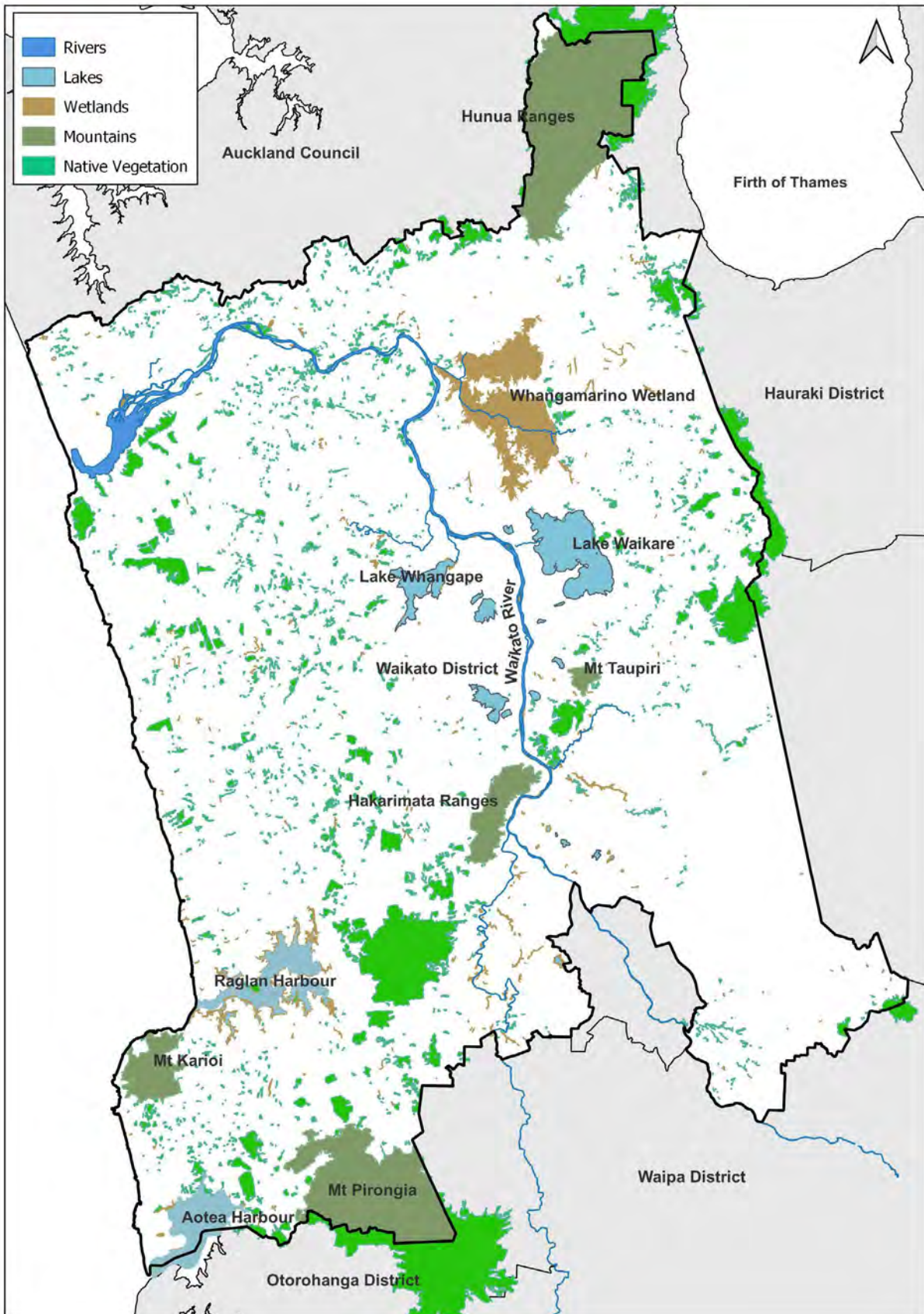
Outside of this band, indigenous vegetation and habitats have been significantly depleted; in some cases only small remnants remain. Few of these remnants are formally protected (Map 1), unless they have been covenanted as part of a subdivision (Council covenant) or through a QEII covenant initiated by a willing private landowner.



THE DISTRICT IS ALSO HOME TO LARGE AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT INDIGENOUS VEGETATION

Haakarimata Summit Track [image credit Department of Conservation].

13 TAIAO (NATURE) IN THE WAIKATO STRATEGY DOCUMENT



Map 1 - Waikato District Council Natural Environments.

OUR DISTRICT



Where we come from

The district's natural environment is one of the natural features and constraints that creates Waikato's identity and makes it a special place to live, work and play

Essential features of the natural environment include the Waikato River and its tributaries; the Waipaa River; numerous lakes and wetlands; coastlines; steep hill country and inland range landscapes; and distinctive gully systems.

Areas of particular value are identified as outstanding natural features and natural landscapes, including significant amenity landscapes.

Those with particular terrestrial ecological value are identified as Significant Natural Areas (SNAs), and the district is taking measures under the District Plan to provide and protect these areas. Through targeted restoration efforts, there is an opportunity to promote, protect and enhance these ahead of and during development.

Ecological enhancement such as restoration planting and pest control can enhance amenity values and is supported through Taiao in the Waikato.

The district's rural environment contains rural land and villages and will continue to be a central focus and integral part of our district. The rural environment and rural villages significantly contribute to the district's economy. It is vital to continue to protect the rural economy and the soil that supports activities within the rural environment.

Waikato 2070 (Waikato District Council's Growth and Economic Development Strategy) promotes sustainable farming practices by protecting outstanding landscapes, Significant Natural Areas, and rural amenities. Lifestyle opportunities are also provided within the rural environment in the Waikato district.

THESE MUST BE MANAGED CAREFULLY WITH AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH IN THE FUTURE TO HELP BETTER MAINTAIN AND SUSTAIN THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT.



Links to key documents

- [National Policy Statement – Indigenous Biodiversity \(NPS-IB\) \(draft\)](#)
- [National PA Pest Management Plan \(NPAPMP\)](#)
- [Waikato Regional Plan and Coastal Plan](#)
- [Iwi Management Plans: Waikato-Tainui Environmental Plan - Tai Tumu, Tai Pari, Tai Ao, Maniapoto Environmental Plan; See WRC links for other iwi documents\)](#)
- [Waikato Proposed District Plan \(Appeals Version\)](#)
- [Department of Conservation – Biodiversity Strategy \(Kauri Dieback, Copper Skinks and Mudfish\)](#)
- [QEI – Map of Protected Land](#)
- [Protecting our natural ecosystems’ carbon sinks – Forest and Bird report: <https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/resources/climate-change-and-introduced-browsers>](#)
- [Waikato District Council Reserves Management Plans](#)

State of the Environment

As in all countries, land of high value for agricultural production is the first to be cleared of native vegetation. In New Zealand and the Waikato, the trend is for more marginal land to be removed, often for non-native forestry or development.

These pressures have led to the degradation of Waikato district native ecosystems through the loss and fragmentation of indigenous biodiversity.

Today, less than 10 percent of the indigenous forests and less than four percent of wetlands that once dominated the Waikato district remain. Pressures leading to land clearance within the district include

reclamation of land for agricultural and horticultural purposes, meeting the growing population’s housing demands and industrial/commercial development.

The region’s land area covered in indigenous terrestrial vegetation has decreased from 94 percent in 1840, to 27 percent in 2018. Since 1840 six local authority areas have lost over 80 percent of their indigenous cover (Hamilton City, Matamata-Piako district, Rotorua district, South Waikato, Waikato district and Waipaa District).

The rate of vegetation loss reduced from an average of 85 hectares per year between 1996 and 2012, to 60 hectares per year between 2012 and 2018 across the Waikato region. The most significant losses between 2012 and 2018 occurred in the lowland bioclimatic zone. Much of the recent clearance happened in the less-threatened environments (areas with greater than 20 percent indigenous cover left), with gains in the two most threatened environments (areas with less than 20 percent cover of indigenous vegetation).

Therefore, the baseline is low for the Waikato region and by extension the Waikato district. This means the importance of protecting what we have cannot be over-emphasised. Protecting remnant areas will help us sustain the Taiao while restoring our new sites. This is supported by SDG 15 – Life on the Land and where human life depends on our earth and its plants, which is becoming even more critical in the climate change era. There will continue to be emerging threats from climate-related impacts e.g. weeds and pests invading into new areas.

Climate change will increase pressures on natural systems, but we do not yet know how to respond adequately to this threat. What we do know is that the predicted climate change impacts in the Waikato could include (and the timeframes will vary):

- Warmer air and water temperatures (lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands), sea level rise.
- Changes in rainfall patterns.

- Increases in the frequency of storms and droughts.
- Ocean acidification of coastal waters increasing impacts on inshore coastal ecosystems: aquatic flora and fauna.

These changes will adversely affect our rural areas and natural indigenous biodiversity. The conditions may allow existing and new invasive pests to impact different habitats. This could mean that native species struggle to adapt to climate changes. We also know that healthy soils, native plants, wetlands, and peat bogs can capture carbon and inhibit it from driving climate change (although this is a global issue).

While Taiao is the key focus, it will be improved by restoring the connectivity of natural areas that have become fragmented in an overwhelming dominance of the exotic landscapes. This will help increase natural resilience to climate change and our rural areas. It is integrating climate change into the Strategy where it impacts indigenous biodiversity, e.g. sea-level rise, droughts and flooding.

Opportunities for improving Taiao

Research and evidence:

- Land protection with covenants.
- Vegetation protection through community and restoration led projects.

- Fauna protection with targeted pest control.
- Waterways and esplanades through good urban management and a joined-up approach with the WRC.
- Urban (residential/commercial/industrial), low-impact design for stormwater and recognition of urban trees.
- Rural promotion of information on pest control and help to facilitate fencing bush blocks and native fragments.
- Our culture is one that values Taiao and the importance of indigenous biodiversity.
- An economy that steadily maintains and restores Taiao-based activities.

Protection and management of native flora and fauna

The Council will regularly report on the outcomes of conservation covenants partnering, providing education, and supporting (non-financial) landowners to protect native bush and waterways.

Restoration - empower (skills, knowledge and education) iwi, hapuu, communities and landowners

Set up a portal on the Waikato District Council website to help iwi, hapuu, landowners, restoration groups and community groups access restoration information.

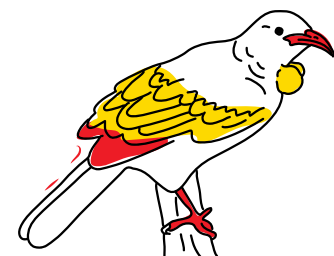
Include a range of technical information about the different areas within the Waikato and the types of vegetation present. Have critical links to other information and other organisations that can help, e.g. the Waikato Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Tai Tumu, Tai Pari, Tai Ao, Waikato Biodiversity Forum, Predator Free groups and Trees for Nature.



Propagation Table.

Coordinate with QEII for more significant-high-quality native areas where possible

Investigate a reduced covenant-costing regime for QEII covenants within the Waikato district. Map these areas and coordinate monitoring initiatives with QE II staff.



Significant Natural Areas

Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) are recorded in the Proposed District Plan (Chapters and Maps): Appeals version. Indigenous Biodiversity and its life-supporting capacity in SNAs are protected or enhanced.

The SNAs of the Waikato district: "Terrestrial and Wetland Ecosystems data" were derived from analysis and interpretation of aerial photography, along with information from ecological reports and data (where available), local environmental knowledge and limited field surveys. The data comprises an extensive yet provisional inventory and assessment of SNA of terrestrial and wetland ecosystems of the Waikato district.

The SNA layer was received as a dataset from the WRC and used in the proposed District Plan. It is noted that the information was based on a desktop assessment (aerial photography) or knowledge of significant native areas. A small percentage of landowners made submissions to the Proposed District Plan, and these areas were assessed as to whether they would meet the criteria of an SNA. These sites were either retained or removed from the SNA layer, which

now provides guidance rather than a specific rule framework.

The initial desktop analysis for the SNA layer identified 697 sites. These units could capture more than one property and, comprising an area of 70,692.9 ha (16.87%) of the Waikato district, as SNAs. The SNAs were comprised of indigenous vegetation approximately 61,292 ha (85.9%) of the total area of SNAs. The indigenous vegetation in SNAs must be protected to ensure the ongoing biodiversity in a district.

The public consultation process revealed that most landowners were motivated to protect and restore SNAs identified on their land. However, while formal protection of natural areas (e.g. conservation covenants) is ideal, the ongoing management of these SNAs (including weed and animal pest control, fencing and restoration) is a focus point for the Strategy. Currently, as drafted, the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity exposure draft and other legislation must consider incentives for landowners to protect and restore indigenous biodiversity.

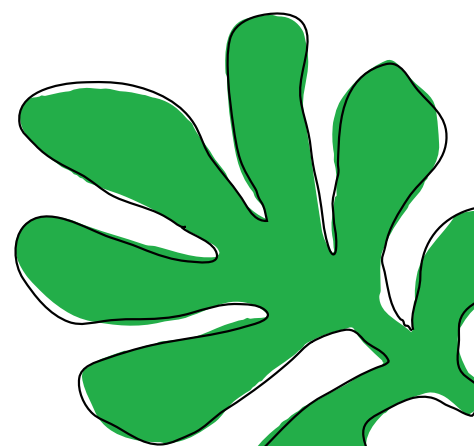
The identified SNA layers on the Council's planning maps let landowners know they have Significant Natural Areas that could be protected with opportunities for further help with restoration. The previous conservation fund provided a small contribution to applicants who undertook improvements to protect areas of high-value indigenous vegetation.

This has included support for fencing, plants, weed and pest control. Although this funding has

been redirected to community-led projects (inclusive of conservation-focused products), WDC will still provide support and education on Taiao in the Waikato Strategy.

Waikato District Council will continue to update the SNA layer on the Council planning maps in conjunction with the Waikato Regional Council. This will be an ongoing process and likely to be undertaken with meaningful engagement with property owners and ground-truthing. This is to be augmented by land-based ecological assessments as and when they can be arranged, e.g. linked to land development applications.

Non-regulatory policies discussed in this document include investigating assistance around establishing protective covenants, education, and funding ecological assessments to establish whether unmapped areas of indigenous vegetation meet one or more of the criteria in APP2: Criteria for determining significance of indigenous biodiversity within the proposed District Plan and therefore being identified as being an SNA on the planning maps. This may be undertaken in conjunction with WRC, also with an advocacy role when managing the threats from Kauri Dieback and loss of habitat to Long-Tailed Bats.



BRINGING IT TO LIFE AND CONSIDERATIONS

Taiao and partnership with iwi/hapuu

Where restoration relates to the Waikato River, the Waikato District Council recognises the signed Kiingitanga Accord and will work as a Treaty partner.

Any decisions affecting the Waikato River, its waters or management over its waters, will maintain the principle of Te Mana o te Awa. Taiao in the Waikato seeks to improve the terrestrial environments, and this will have

a corresponding improvement on the aquatic environments. Waikato District Council will work with Waikato Tainui and Waikato Regional Council to indirectly improve the Waikato River and its surrounding tributaries.

By 2025 Treaty partners, iwi, hapuu and Te Ao Maaori organisations involved in Taiao and environmental management as mana whenua and kaitiaki will be sufficiently supported. Waikato District Council aims to support them to secure appropriate resourcing to help protect and manage indigenous biodiversity, particularly taonga species in their place and associated with local Marae. Co-governance roles ensure that the Treaty Partnership is honoured through Tino-rangatiratanga, fulfilling the promise of Te Mana o Te Taiao Aotearoa, the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy, that Treaty partners are mana whenua and kaitiaki.

The Joint Management Agreement (JMA) is Waikato District Council and Waikato Tainui's response to the co-governance of the Waikato River and Taiao in the Waikato can be used to protect and restore the land adjacent to Te Awa. Waikato District Council also has a JMA with Ngaati Maniapoto. Waikato-Tainui has signed the Kiingitanga Accord to work with the Crown as a Treaty partner in the development of legislation, policies and any other decisions affecting the Waikato River, its waters or management over its waters, with importance placed over the principle of Te Mana o te Awa.

Both agreements support the conservation and Kaitiakitanga of the district's indigenous biodiversity. Taiao in Waikato should be viewed with this lens. Where each party can help manage and restore Te Awa and Taiao through conservation, it should be progressed as an ongoing partnership as part of Taiao implementation. This will include cultural areas of natural significance so the effects of current and future pressures can be mitigated.



Collaboration

Working with private landowners/businesses

By 2026, new programmes are in place to support landowners, businesses, resource users/owners and industry in delivering more Taiao. If appropriate, incentivise or seek sponsorship to protect and restore indigenous biodiversity as a standard part of business within the Waikato district. It should not fall only to landowners - identifying opportunities for those supportive businesses will create dual benefits.

Partners

Waikato District Council explores partnership opportunities to provide funding and education to manage and restore native habitats (flora/fauna). Taps into government and regional funding where possible to accelerate restoration. Considers whether Waikato District Council could be a platform for helping groups manage the logistics of conservation work using Council systems and website to manage their efforts e.g. track investment in labour time, flora (plants) and materials (fencing, traps, fertiliser) over time.

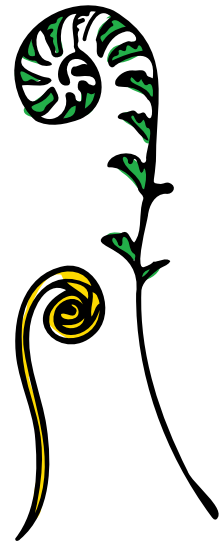
Funding

Conservation funding is still supported, with less emphasis on individual landowners (unless they provide public or ecological

access) to more community initiatives that support employment and community health. By 2025 restoration groups and community groups have the information that lets them be appropriately resourced, growing, connected, and coordinated, with access knowledge, expertise, and information to progress their projects supporting Taiao in the Waikato. Funding opportunities to explore the following:

- Increase the funding pool for restoration so protection of Taiao is prioritised;
- Investigate funding from external providers that Council could help facilitate e.g. local businesses and clubs, societies;
- Local offsetting by businesses, developers (connecting them with landowners); Secondary CO₂ offset – collective view of the district or within catchments of 1 ha – 3,000 plants, 5m in height.
- National – Register and apply for funding with central government funding, alternative funding - businesses, lotteries etc.
- Waikato Regional Council – Funding.
- Waikato District Council – Funding and partnership opportunities.
- Waikato District Council supports other ecological partners for funding and grants rather than applying ourselves.

WAIKATO DISTRICT COUNCIL EXPLORES PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES TO PROVIDE FUNDING AND EDUCATION TO MANAGE AND RESTORE NATIVE HABITATS (FLORA/FAUNA).



Biosecurity and other tools

The control of plant and animal pests (and other risks that require positive action) needs to be recognised as the core dimension of indigenous biodiversity management.

Protecting Taiao should utilise central and local government expertise in pest control and provide this to landowners and customers as tools, knowledge, and services.

Support the development of new technologies for controlling pests, e.g. biocontrol and large-scale permanent trap networks.



Biocontrol of the weed Tradescantia (Tradescantia fluminensis) helps native seedlings sprout.

Tools and monitoring

Investigate hosting a digital platform for restoration groups or community groups to manage their funding, labour and work programmes around pest management, plantings, and maintenance. This could be replicated for multiple groups across the district. Waikato District Council is investigating an information page and whether it could be used by existing groups

to help new groups. Current pest control could use scientific and Maatauranga Maaori monitoring principles and citizen science opportunities to improve Taiao.

Digital layers available for Council and landowners

Councils maintain GIS layers to include SNAs (Significant Natural Areas), conservation covenants and Open Spaces. Waikato district

to consider hosting a webpage for restoration groups, community groups throughout the Waikato district. Alternatively, work with WRC and others to promote app's if they can achieve improvements in Taiao. Waikato District Council supports all efforts in tracking, maintaining, monitoring, and restoring Taiao.

ACCESS

Esplanade reserves

Esplanade reserves may be required when land is subdivided, reclaimed, developed (through conditions), or when a road is stopped along a riparian margin, whereby the road is vested in the Council as an esplanade reserve.

Esplanade reserves can also be created voluntarily. They are classified as reserves under the Reserves Act 1977, and land ownership is transferred to a territorial authority upon deposit (completion) of the subdivision plan. New esplanade reserves and strips should be surveyed and depicted on the cadastral maps.

The boundary of an esplanade reserve is measured from its bank where it is a river or stream, its margin where it is a lake, or from the mean high-water springs (MHWS) in a coastal area. In all cases, the landward boundary is a fixed survey line.

Accordingly, the landward boundary does not change as the water boundary accretes or erodes.

Esplanade reserves created as part of a subdivision (each allotment that abuts a waterway) will sit under Council control to manage.

THE BOUNDARY OF AN ESPLANADE RESERVE IS MEASURED FROM ITS BANK WHERE IT IS A RIVER OR STREAM, ITS MARGIN WHERE IT IS A LAKE, OR FROM THE MEAN HIGH-WATER SPRINGS (MHWS) IN A COASTAL AREA.



Esplanade strips

A rule may require esplanade strips in a plan when land is subdivided, reclaimed, or developed.

A condition may also direct the landowner to apply for resource consent for reclamation. Additionally, an esplanade strip may be created voluntarily by agreement.

Esplanade strips are legal instruments between landowners and territorial authorities; they do not need to be formally surveyed or identified on a survey plan. They can be registered on the title, but the land within the strip remains in the ownership of the landowner. Although identified on a survey plan, they do not need to be formally surveyed.

The creation of a strip, and restrictions and requirements relating to its use and management, are noted in the title and bind every party having an interest in the land. The form of the agreement and standard restrictions imposed on an esplanade strip are defined in Schedule 10 of the RMA.

An esplanade strip can include provisions to exclude access by the public during certain times or under certain conditions (as prescribed in Form 31 of the Resource Management

Forms, Fees, and Procedure Regulations 2003).

Unlike esplanade reserves, the width of an esplanade strip remains unchanged within the same allotment. So, if a riverbank is eroded by 2 metres, the width of the esplanade strip extends beyond its old boundary by 2 metres to offset the lost ground.

Esplanade strips can be varied or cancelled by a territorial authority subject to the procedure in s234 of the RMA. Similarly, an esplanade strip can be changed, reviewed, and cancelled if a condition applies under s127-132 of the RMA.

ESPLANADE STRIPS ARE LEGAL INSTRUMENTS BETWEEN LANDOWNERS AND TERRITORIAL AUTHORITIES; THEY DO NOT NEED TO BE FORMALLY SURVEYED OR IDENTIFIED ON A SURVEY PLAN.



Access strips

Access strips can enable public access to or along waterbodies or public land.

They can be established by agreement between the landowner and the territorial authority under s237B of the RMA.

Access strips are surveyed and fixed, but their ownership remains with the landowner. The creation of a strip and restrictions and requirements relating to its public use are defined in Schedule 10 of the RMA and are set out as an easement registered against the title to the land.

Access strips may be cancelled by agreement between the landowner and territorial authority, taking into account the matters in s237B (4) of the RMA.



Summary on access

Overall, esplanade reserves, esplanade strips and access strips are a range of tools available to local government, Department of Conservation, restoration groups and community groups.

Private landowners provide public access to native bush or waterbodies on a voluntary basis. Things for all parties to consider when determining the strategic approach for native bush and esplanade areas are the form of the protection and level of management.

- The nature of the resources and the land abutting waterbodies (inclusive of coastlines).
- The nature of land uses (e.g. rural/urban/natural habitats/features and their proportions within the district).
- The possibility of developing an integrated network of access points to waterbodies through the use of esplanade reserves, strips and access strips.

The policy approach follows national and regional direction with four underlying principles, including:

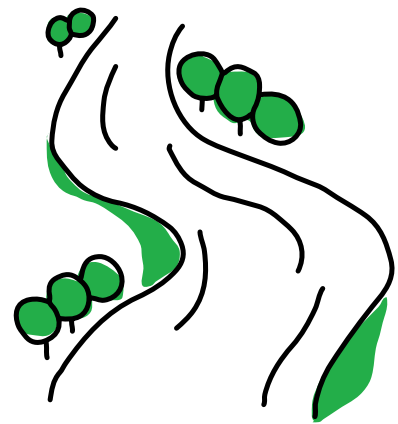
1. Adjacent private property rights must be considered;
2. Landowners are responsible for minimising the effects of land use on waterbodies;
3. Where esplanade management results in public benefits, funding should be available from public sources;
4. The Council must be cost-effective in seeking to implement the above principles.

Where possible, WDC will promote access to wider walking networks, parks, and reserves with willing landowners. The Council will treat esplanade reserves, strips and access strips based on each case's merits and focus on public access or recreation demand. Where there are significant conservation features on privately-owned riparian areas, encouragement of protection is essential.

Sustainable management, minimising conflicts, protecting public benefits, and partnering with Tangata Whenua, community and recreation groups, and private landowners will be sought. Key reserve priorities are waterbodies, including the Waikato and Waipaa Rivers, the West Coast, lakes, and others (rivers, streams, and a short east coastline area on the Firth of Thames). The Council also seeks to promote connectivity and conservation outcomes and work with conservation agencies, iwi, hapuu, restoration groups, community groups, and landowners.



WHERE POSSIBLE, WDC WILL PROMOTE ACCESS TO WIDER WALKING NETWORKS, PARKS, AND RESERVES WITH WILLING LANDOWNERS.



ACHIEVING OUR VISION AND GOALS THROUGH ACTIONS

Focus Area 1

Maintain, restore, and improve a range of natural habitats and ecosystems to a healthy functioning state in public spaces.

All focus areas and actions must consider the Strategy's vision, goals, and our partnerships with Tangata Whenua.

Action 1.1 – Illustrate Best Practice - Maintain, restore, and improve a range of natural habitats and ecosystems to a healthy functioning state in public spaces.

Waikato District Council, through this Strategy, seeks to integrate statutory and non-statutory indigenous biodiversity functions such as monitoring, research and collaborative action and showcase this on land owned and administered by the Council. The restoration of these Council areas to be guided by evidence-based best practice in plantings, weed and pest control.

This includes planting a range of indigenous natives (preferably eco-sourced) on public reserves, e.g. passive areas, pocket areas adjacent to waterways, and within esplanades, maintaining appropriate levels of pest control (weed and animal species) across the Council reserves and helping adjacent landowners with native bush areas, including restoration and community groups in weed control either through identification or active control.

Action 1.2 – Linking Taiao areas to multiple indigenous biodiversity impacts.

An essential action underpinning this Strategy is to develop a district-wide prioritisation of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, and identify key areas as a mapped layer for future ground-truthing.

These areas have the potential to enhance existing ecosystems. Places with the potential to enhance existing ecosystems as a corridor link to multiple SNA areas in proximity and identify where the gaps might be for future expansion. Map iwi, DOC and community indigenous biodiversity initiatives to better understand the gaps in our indigenous biodiversity across the

Waikato district. The benefit of this exercise is valuable in aligning and coordinating operational work and sharing resources across all parties. We aim to establish connections with successful restoration projects outside the district e.g. Hamilton City Council - Nature in the City gully restorations.

Action 1.3 – Identifying those areas of highest priority (remnant areas not well represented).

Prioritisation - once areas (ecosystems) are mapped, they can be prioritised for restoration and active management. This includes existing and threatened conditions like weeds and pests, current control, and restoration initiatives. For example utilise national and regionally-threatened species databases to help identify high-priority areas for intervention.

Action 1.4 – Catchment and Area Planning (Integrated Catchment Management Plan).

Adopt best practice principles, e.g. Low Impact Design (LID) standards for stormwater; the road network incorporates ecological links and minimises corridors acting as barriers to ecology.

Focus Area 2

Support actions to conserve, maintain and improve a healthy ecosystem's ecological linkages and promote sustainable natural resource use and greenhouse gas emissions (reduction).

Action 2.1 – Promote Local Nurseries set up: Social benefits, training skills (e.g. Kimihia Lakes Project).

Investigate the development of a programme to support and advise people managing land with better indigenous biodiversity values. Set up a database with all projects and investigate the use of encrypted software (e.g. blockchain) to secure the information for individual landowners. This can be based on the current WDC projects and identifying willing landowners initially.

Advice and access to resources will include management and legal options that would be most useful to maintain or enhance indigenous biodiversity on properties. The information will be displayed as a dashboard.

Create a database of the existing nurseries and their capacity for people to contact and purchase plants. See if there is potential to increase capacity and scale up native propagation with current nursery providers and the capability for restoration and community groups to maintain their growing programmes and enlist schools.

Action 2.2 – Identify pockets of Significant Natural Areas (SNAs), conservation covenants and esplanade opportunities.

Link good ground-truthed SNAs and conservation covenants to Action 1.2 and Action 1.3 to existing information. Managed areas could be complemented voluntarily by legal protection through other mechanisms such as covenants or designations. Include unique linkage to other funders, including Waikato Regional Council, QEII National Trust, and Waikato River Authority. Explore a programme

to identify key native areas (logged over time) and how these could be captured, logged, and monitored over time.

Action 2.3 – Submit relevant government legislation to promote sustainable natural resource use, reduce emissions and support our rural communities (update with changing legislation).

Identify key principles to direct submissions on future legislation, including Te Ture Whaimana and Maatauranga Maaori.

Action 2.4 - Support walking access to our native environments utilising esplanade reserves and access strips with restoration groups, community groups and willing landowners.

Work with restoration groups, community groups and landowners to promote walking access (use existing esplanade reserves and strips) and help engage with private landowners to complete access (access strips) as required.



CREATE A DATABASE OF THE EXISTING NURSERIES AND THEIR CAPACITY FOR PEOPLE TO CONTACT AND PURCHASE PLANTS.

Focus Area 3

Seek collaboration opportunities to work with others, including mana whenua, to achieve the Conservation Strategy vision.

Action 3.1 – Investigate applications and platforms to track ecological data (plantings, pest and weed control) for conservation projects.

WRC app/software, Restor, Trap. NZ and iNaturalist or solutions could help manage and maintain conservation projects. There is potential for restoration groups and community groups to run and

support conservation projects. The Council will explore partnership opportunities with other Territorial Authorities e.g. Hamilton City Council’s “Nature in the City” (HCC NITC) about hosting or supplying a technical option for pest and planting tracking. Consider LIBs and whether a local community group could utilise voluntary, regulatory or digital solutions with Waikato District Council support. Partner and work with HCC NITC programme projects over time to extend and embed Taiao in the community including mana whenua.

Action 3.2 – Consider how we can fund and resource improving biodiversity in the district. This could include funding education directly and linking into WRC (Enviroschools), DOC, QEII opportunities and other NGOs.

Helping, funding or non-financial opportunities for restoration groups, community groups (two or more nearby landowners).

Availability of expertise, resources, and space to help groups carry out their planning and operational work. Connecting the relevant parties to funding streams.

Help restoration groups and community groups with Health and Safety support (Council’s systems and processes).

Action 3.3 – Identify areas of farmland for retirement – Carbon Credits, rates relief, funding.

Investigate key land areas with willing landowners that could be retired and explored for restoration and the potential benefits to Taiao.



THE COUNCIL WILL EXPLORE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES WITH OTHER TERRITORIAL AUTHORITIES

Focus Area 4

Policy, rules and regulation.

Action 4.1 – Implement the Regional Pest Management Plan.

Review and implement the Regional Pest Management Plan, provide

operational feedback on the National Pest Management Plan for kauri protection; draft Waikato Bat Strategy.

Action 4.2 – Strengthen provisions to enhance indigenous biodiversity in reviews of National, regional and district strategies and plans.

Seek to enhance indigenous biodiversity in other legislation, National and regional strategies, plans and policies with on-the-

ground skills, knowledge, and experience.

Maintain relationships with WRC – Natural Heritage and Strategic and Spatial Planning.

Make submissions on draft legislation (RMA reforms, Regional Biodiversity Strategy, Waikato Coastal Plan).

REVIEW AND IMPLEMENT THE REGIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT PLAN



Focus Area 5

Education and community engagement

Action 5.1 – Develop in consultation with WRC advice and management around best practices for Taiao.

Advice and management of indigenous biodiversity. Through education: current examples include Enviroschools, Ka mihi ki a Ranginui, ki a Papatuuuanuku, ka mihi ki te ngao o te wheiao.

Connect with the Waikato Enviroschools programme to support and expand the education profile for early childhood centres. Schools commit to a long-term sustainability journey, where tamariki/students connect with and explore the environment. Then plan, design and take action in their local places in collaboration with their communities, particularly active restoration groups and community groups.

Augment the Enviroschools tools with Council information and support to utilise student skills better and collaboratively plan, design, and take action on the issues they are passionate about. Information for landowners on what they can do, where to plant, what to grow and how to maintain those areas.

Action 5.2 – Support marae, hapuu, iwi, restoration groups, community groups working to enhance indigenous biodiversity by providing advice, connections, and funding, such as:

- Helping with community group advice and guidance opportunities throughout the district.
- Connecting volunteers with restoration groups, community groups for planting days.
- Seeking donations and sponsorship for Taiao projects.
- Facilitating applications for funding of group projects.
- Provide or link ecologically-sourced native plants when resources are available.

- Providing planning and technical advice (weeding, land preparation, types of plants and season/timing of planting, maintenance and pest management until the plants are established).
- Assisting with plants for iwi/hapuu and residents adjacent to parks, reserves, and esplanades when resources are available from local nurseries or other Territorial Authorities.
- Connecting with Hamilton City Nursery and others if any unallocated plants are known for restoration projects.
- Exploring whether any school horticultural programmes have propagated plants that could be utilised by iwi/hapuu and community groups.



CONNECT WITH THE WAIKATO ENVIROSCHOOLS PROGRAMME TO SUPPORT AND EXPAND THE EDUCATION PROFILE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

*THE STRATEGY
IMPLEMENTATION WILL
BE REVIEWED
REGULARLY*

This Strategy will guide staff with day-to-day decisions relating to Taiao in the Waikato and offer guidance to the community.

The Strategy implementation will be reviewed regularly and before each Waikato District Council Long Term Plan to remain current and relevant.

A Council group (Councillors and staff) will engage with key partners and monitor progress at four levels:

1. **Focus areas**
2. **Actions**
3. **Implementation/who is doing the work**
4. **Outcomes/results.**

The Council group will periodically report progress on actions to the Council and partners that will be determined as contributing to or leading each step.

Progress on each action will be reviewed by the Council group once a year. Taiao in the Waikato Strategy will be reviewed every three years. An integrated approach will be used to implement the Strategy.

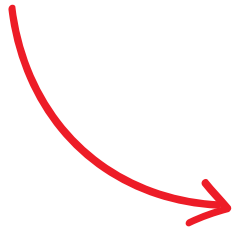
This allows decisions to be made on investment, monitoring, and reporting on indigenous biodiversity.

This task will require a commitment of resources by the Council and partner organisations once the implementation plan is established and populated by the Council and partners. Appropriate investment priorities can be set, so that the gathering and collating of data to track progress on outcomes can be finalised.

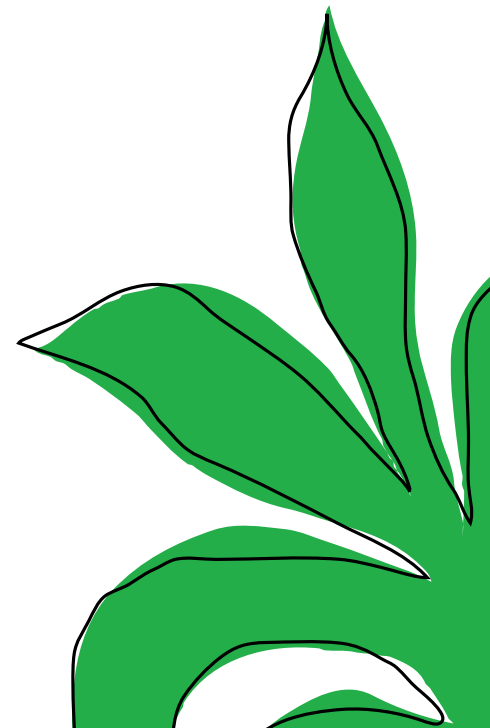
A template could be used for the Standard Report Card on each outcome as set out overleaf. Each Council group meeting will focus on one outcome in sequence, so that outcomes can be addressed on an ongoing basis.



Report Card (Example)



<p>Starting in 2023, each outcome will form the focus of a Council Group meeting.</p>	
<p>Intermediate</p> <p>Outcome: Plantings occur in less frequently-used reserve areas (esplanades).</p>	<p>Intermediate</p> <p>Outcome: Restoration groups/ community groups help contribute to Council reserve plantings and incorporate their areas into Council reserves (Tamahere Gully system).</p>
<p>Indicators: Increase in vegetation coverage (natives) on Council reserves, corresponding increases in native fauna (birds, reptiles and insects).</p>	<p>Indicator: More groups working and recreating in native areas.</p>
<p>Illustrate Best Practice.</p>	
<p>Narrative Context: How does this fit into the regional and broader Waikato district context?</p>	
<p>State: Increase native plantings (indigenous biodiversity) within Council reserves. Log the number of trees planted, area and survival per annum.</p>	





Resources

[Enviroschools](#)
[Biodiversity Waikato](#)
[Go Eco](#)

[Establishing a
Nursery](#)
[Trees for Survival](#)

[Waikato Regional
Council – Planting
guides](#)

TAIAO 'NATURE' IN THE WAIKATO

*STRATEGY
DOCUMENT*