


RESTORED TAIAO - NATURE



Guided by mana whenua,
we will uphold the mauri of
Te Taiao, ensuring healthy
waterways and biodiversity
for future generations.

IN 2055, LOWER HUTT IS A CITY CONNECTED TO NATURE | HONONGA

Te mauri o te whenua – we protect and enhance our whenua, moana and awa for generations to come. (A guiding principle of Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika).

Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt has a stunning natural environment and plays a vital role in preserving Aotearoa’s native biodiversity. Although a city, nearly two-thirds of Lower Hutt’s land is rural. Indigenous vegetation covers 65.7% of the land, spanning 24,700 hectares – providing critical habitats for native plants and animals.

Our coastline features protected natural areas such as Turakirae Head and Mātiu / Somes Island—a scientific reserve and regional taonga (treasure) situated in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington harbour). Te Awa Kairangi / Hutt River, the Waiwhetū Aquifer, and the Te Awamutu, Wainuiomata and Ōrongorongo Rivers are vital freshwater sources.

Our country’s incredible variety of native plants and animals make us unique globally, but that biodiversity is under threat. Across Aotearoa New Zealand, and here in Lower Hutt, lowland forests have been cleared, wetlands drained, and native species lost to urban development, agriculture, logging and pollution.

Challenges such as a growing population, climate change and the spread of pest species

continue to threaten our natural environment. This is not just a crisis for nature—it is a crisis for us. The wellbeing of people is tied to the health of our environment.

Our goal is to restore Te Taiao – nature, by actively protecting native ecosystems and controlling invasive plant and animal species. We are committed to improving the water quality of our moana (coastal waters), awa (rivers) and streams.

Mana whenua deep historical and ongoing connections to this land, and their vital role as kaitiaki (guardians) will be respected and upheld. We will also connect people to the natural beauty of Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt. These efforts will ensure lasting benefits for generations to come.

This chapter highlights initiatives that will help realise our vision for Te Taiao (nature) in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt by 2055. It concludes with “What You Can Do,” providing practical ways you can support and contribute locally to building Tō Tātou Tāone 2055– Our City 2055.

INDICATORS

WE WILL TRACK PROGRESS OF THE FOLLOWING INDICATORS:

INDICATOR	LATEST DATA	TARGET
SAFE SWIMMING SITES (% of summer sites that are safe for swimming)	84% 2024	All Hutt rivers are safe to swim in 2055

BACKGROUND

While most people live in the urban area of the city, a large proportion of Lower Hutt is rural, including areas of high ecological value. Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt contains rivers, streams, small lakes, aquifers, a coastline, estuary, old forests, and regenerating bush.

Old-growth forests in places like Wainuiomata and Hutt Water Collection Areas serve as strongholds for native birds, insects, and plants. Along our coast, there is both dense urban development and protected natural areas like Turakirae Head.

Rivers - Te Awa Kairangi/Hutt, Wainuiomata and Ōrongorongo connect to streams such as Awamutu, Waiwhetū, Stokes Valley and Black Creek. Our city's groundwater zone extends southwards from Taita Gorge to the entrance of Wellington Harbour and is made up of the Taita, Waiwhetū and Moerā aquifers.

The developed part of our city includes 2,780 hectares of public open space, and vast regional parks like Belmont, East Harbour, and Remutaka. This includes 'green spaces', sports and recreation grounds, neighbourhood playgrounds, walkways, parks, cycleways, trails and tracks, bush, hills, the coastal edge, streams and rivers.

Mana whenua as kaitiaki

The Māori worldview is explained in *Te Mahere Wai o Te Kāhui Taiao* as based on relationships with the taiao “...our mountains, rivers and tributaries are our ancestors.” The role of Mana Whenua “...is to protect and respect them as taonga (treasure) through the provision of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) to ensure their survival.”¹

Te Awa Kairangi is an awa tupua—a treasured ancestral river. The Waiwhetū Stream, Te

Awamutu Stream and estuary were once vital sources of mahinga kai and supported customary practices like rongoā Māori (traditional healing).

Mana whenua have strong connections to land which are now in regional parks and city reserves. For example, Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika a Maui and Ngāti Toa Rangatira have interests in Belmont Regional Park.

Importance of nature

Lower Hutt's natural environment provides multiple benefits, for biodiversity, customary practices, health and wellbeing, business and industry, and carbon sequestration.

Our city's groundwater sustains freshwater ecosystems in riverine and wetland habitats. It also provides domestic, municipal, industrial and irrigation water supplies. The Waiwhetū Aquifer provides around 40% of Wellington's municipal supply.

Spending time in nature supports holistic wellbeing, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Engaging with nature has been linked to reduced stress, enhanced mood, and greater creativity.

Carbon sequestration (carbon stored in plants and forests) helps to reduce our city's emissions.

The broader context

Lower Hutt's unique biodiversity, home to an incredible variety of native plants and animal species, is under threat. The Wellington region has one of the highest degrees of historic wetland loss in the country. Invasive weeds and pest animals can cause significant damage, contributing to forest collapse, soil erosion and flood risk and transforming our natural

¹ [Greater Wellington — Te Mahere Wai o Te Kāhui Taiao](#)

landscapes. Urbanisation, pollution and waste are also degrading our natural environment.

The region's water supply comes from local rivers, but more water is currently being taken than river ecosystems can sustain. Waiwhetū Stream ranks in the worst 25% of New Zealand's waterways for E.coli, phosphorus, and ammoniacal nitrogen. It flows through the Seaview Gracefield industrial area and receives treated effluent from Seaview Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Climate change poses a significant threat to our environment. By 2050, Lower Hutt's average temperatures may rise by 0.8–1.3°C, altering growing seasons and species habitats. Increased warmth is already causing toxic algae blooms in the Hutt River. Rising sea levels and coastal flooding will impact

wetlands and bird habitats, while salinity intrusion threatens the Waiwhetū aquifer and coastal rivers. Nature-based solutions can also lessen the impacts of climate change (see *Climate-Ready City*).

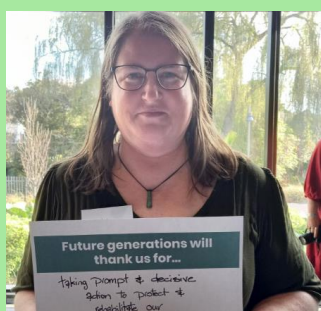
FUTURE FOCUS

There is already positive action happening across the city by mana whenua, community groups, environmental organisations, and government agencies. Initiatives like Mouri Tupu – Planting for the Future and local Enviroschools and community groups such as Friends of Petone Beach, and Predator Free Hutt Valley support pest control, rubbish collection, and restoration planting.

This strategy will both support ongoing mahi, and establish new actions, with a focus on protecting native ecosystems, including waterways, and controlling invasive plant and animal species. We will uphold the vital role of mana whenua as kaitiaki (guardians) and connect people to the natural environment. In the following pages, you will see the initiatives that will help us to realise our goals.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE LOWER HUTT COMMUNITY

Many people expressed appreciation for past environmental efforts, such as *"looking after our whenua"* and the legacy of planted street trees. The community values local rivers and freshwater sources like Te Awa Kairangi and the 'Dowse' artesian water, though concerns were raised about future pollution and scarcity. People hoped for *"an awa I can swim in with mokopuna"* and a shift away from using waterways for waste. There was strong support for restoring native biodiversity and bringing wildlife back— *"Kākā, bring back parrots to the Hutt."* Alongside protecting green spaces and improving recycling, many emphasized the importance of a deep *"connection to the land and natural environment"* and a future where *"environmental sustainability is incorporated into everything."*



Our goal to achieve Restored Taiao - Nature supports SDGs related to sustainable management of water, marine and coastal ecosystems and forests, and halting biodiversity loss.



INITIATIVE 20

PRESERVE AND RESTORE NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS, CONTROLLING PEST PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Bringing back the bush, wetlands and other habitats for native birds, insects and other species supports indigenous biodiversity, and strengthens the resilience of natural ecosystems. We will control invasive weeds and work towards a predator-free Lower Hutt.

Restoration and revegetation

We will focus on restoration of regional parks as a long-term priority, to bring back forest and shrub lands, rare and threatened ecosystems. Restoration will include phasing out stock grazing which has been used historically as a land management tool in Belmont, East Harbour Ōrua-pouanui/Baring Head parks.

There will also be a focus on revegetation, including planting native trees and plants to enhance biodiversity in city reserves and regional parks. Belmont regional park is a priority - in 2025, GWRC is planting over 150,000 native plants, shrubs and grasses on previously grazed areas in regional parks, with the largest area of planting in Belmont.

Support community initiatives

We will support restoration initiatives that are already underway by mana whenua and community groups across the city, such as Friends of Te Mome Stream, and Forest & Bird - which is working towards creating eco-corridors across Hutt Valley. These projects bring the community together and play a vital role in restoring Lower Hutt's natural environment.

Strengthen predator-free

We will strengthen the network of predator-free and pest-free organisations in Lower Hutt, including Predator-Free Hutt Valley, HCC and

GWRC, to maximise their collective effort in eradicating rats, possums and mustelids. We will continue to protect predator-free areas like Mātīu-Somes Island. GWRC will also look at extending its Regional Predator Control Programme to Lower Hutt from 2030.

Explore wildlife sanctuary in Wainuiomata

GWRC will explore a proposal to establish a wildlife sanctuary in the Wainuiomata catchment. The Puketahā proposal includes the construction of a 28.8km predator proof fence around 3,313 hectares. A key benefit would be the 'Halo effect' – migration of species which occurs from the predator-free zone (the 'nursery'), into surrounding habitat (the 'halo').

Controlling pest plants and animals

While taking an ambitious approach to eradicate pests like feral deer, goats and pigs, and control pest plants like old man's beard, our efforts will be targeted. Our initial priority is to control pest plants and animals in areas of high ecological value, which includes Key Native Ecosystems (KNE) and Significant Natural Areas (SNA). Reducing pest plants and animals in these areas supports natural regeneration. We will utilise new technology and approaches to maximise our impact (such as AI trail cameras, and deer exclusion fencing).

STEPS TO GET THERE	OWNER
Undertake restoration and revegetation of city reserves and regional parks, including Belmont Park and Hutt River corridor.	GWRC and HCC
Actively control pest plants and animals, strengthening predator free network and exploring proposed wildlife sanctuary.	GWRC and HCC

INITIATIVE 21

IMPROVE THE WATER QUALITY OF MOANA (SEA), AWA (RIVERS) AND STREAMS

Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt contains rivers, streams, small lakes, aquifers, wetlands, a coastline and estuary. As our population grows and we experience drier and hotter summers, there will be increasing pressure on freshwater bodies. We will take action to regenerate waterways, reduce water extraction, improve water infrastructure, and restore the mauri (life force) of the waters of Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt.

Support implementation of Whaitua programme

We are committed to supporting the implementation of the values of Te Mana o te Wai, a Māori concept that highlights the essential role of water and its wellbeing, acknowledging that safeguarding freshwater is vital to the health of both the environment and the community. This will be implemented through *Te Mahere Wai o Te Kāhui Taiao*, a Mana Whenua Whaitua implementation programme for Te Whanganui-a-Tara. This plan provides a framework for restoring the mana and mauri of our freshwater bodies, guided by mātauranga Māori and the principles of Te Mana o te Wai. It emphasises the importance of mahinga kai (food gathering) as a measure of water health.

Regenerate waterways

We will prioritise regeneration of our waterways, planting native plants and trees to help restore their health and biodiversity. Focusing on restoring stream headwaters, such as those in Belmont Regional Park, will deliver significant downstream benefits – improving water quality throughout large catchments,

residential areas, local streams, and ultimately, the harbour.

Reduce water extraction

Currently, more water is taken from Lower Hutt rivers than their ecosystems can sustainably support. Te Whanganui-a-Tara Whaitua Committee has recommended progressively increasing minimum required river flows. GWRC's Natural Resources Plan will make it more challenging to obtain consent for extracting water at current levels. Wellington Water advises changing water-use practices, including more efficient water use and reducing water loss. Introducing water meters could help encourage lower consumption, while exploring water recycling may provide a valuable longer-term solution.

Improve Three Waters Infrastructure

When making decisions about maintaining and upgrading three waters infrastructure, it is essential to consider the impact on water bodies. Accelerating the upgrade and renewal of wastewater pipes will help reduce leaks and prevent pollutants from entering waterways. (See *Smart Infrastructure*). Nature-based solutions will further enhance water quality (see *Climate-Ready City*).

Educate our community

We need to widely share knowledge about restoring mana to our freshwater bodies. Educational campaigns could encourage efficient water use and raise community awareness about how we can collectively prevent contaminants from entering the stormwater network.

STEPS TO GET THERE	OWNER
Guided by mana whenua, regenerate Lower Hutt waterways.	GWRC, HCC, Mana Whenua
Change the way we use water by reducing extraction, improving three waters infrastructure and educating our community.	GWRC and HCC

INITIATIVE 22

UPHOLD THE KAITIAKI (GUARDIAN) ROLE OF MANA WHENUA IN PROTECTING THE MAURI (LIFE FORCE) OF TE TAI AO.

Mana whenua have rich and significant historical and present-day connections to Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt: “...our mountains, rivers and tributaries are our ancestors” – and their important role as kaitiaki will be upheld. This includes ensuring that mana whenua have a meaningful role in local decisions affecting te Taiao and supporting restoration efforts.

Support restoration efforts

The ongoing restoration of native vegetation and improvements in freshwater quality are vital to sustaining habitats for mahinga kai and customary practices such as rongoā Māori (traditional healing). We will support mana whenua efforts in ecosystem restoration. Prioritising the restoration of Waiwhetū stream will remain a key focus, alongside enhancing the indigenous biodiversity throughout the river corridor as part of Te Wai Takamori o Te Awa Kairangi. This will include providing resources to facilitate mana whenua collaboration and liaison with Council and community restoration groups.

Enable freshwater management decisions

Te Mahere Wai o Te Kāhui Taiao advocates for collaborative governance, ensuring that mana whenua have a meaningful role in freshwater management decisions across the region. A key goal is that *Mana Whenua are the lead agency and regulator for protection and restoration of wai ora in 20 to 50 years' time*. By supporting the implementation of the Whaitua programme, we will provide for mana whenua to have a key role in freshwater management decisions.

Kaitiaki role in regional parks and city reserves

We will enable mana whenua to exercise their kaitiaki role over land that is in regional parks and city reserves. Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika a Maui have interests in Belmont, East Harbour and Wainuiomata regional parks. It is important to note that while Taranaki Whānui have “interests” in these regional parks, their role as kaitiaki over the district extends far beyond map boundaries of regional parks.

Explore co-management opportunities

CASE STUDY FOR CONSIDERATION

Waikato River Authority is a unique co-governance entity restoring and protecting the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River. It operates under a co-chair model, with one Iwi and one Crown co-chair working in partnership.

We will uphold current co-management arrangements and explore future opportunities. Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust and GWRC jointly manage the Parangārahu Lakes Area through a Rōpū Tiaki, guardianship group set up in 2012. Future work of the Rōpū Tiaki includes management of Gollan's Valley, a 1366-hectare block of land connecting the Northern Forest to Parangārahu Lakes.

STEPS TO GET THERE	OWNER
Support mana whenua restoration efforts, including Waiwhetū stream and the river corridor.	Mana Whenua, GWRC, HCC
Enable meaningful role in decisions, including regional parks, city reserves, freshwater management, and explore co-management opportunities.	Mana Whenua, GWRC, HCC

INITIATIVE 23

CONNECT PEOPLE TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

“Elevating the wellness of our whenua leads to the elevated wellness of the people”.
Participant, Lower Hutt City Summit, 2024

Whether walking to Percy Waterfall, biking along the Hutt River trail or sitting on Petone beach, connecting people to nature is important for holistic wellbeing, which in turn encourages people to care for the environment. We will aim for residents to live within a short walk to a reserve and better connect green spaces. There will be stronger promotion of Lower Hutt’s stunning natural environment, and new opportunities for our community to connect with nature.

Maintain and establish city reserves

HCC manages 191 tracks and trails within the urban and natural areas of the city. It aims for a reserve within an easy walking distance from most houses in a suburb, particularly in areas zoned for more intensive housing and mixed use (an easy walking distance is 400 metres or 8.5 minute walk). We will work to enhance accessibility for all ages, such as installing railings and benches for senior members of the community.

Over time, we will look to connect reserves, so that people can effectively remain in nature as they move between green spaces, such as biking along a tree-lined path.

Develop new opportunities to connect with nature

We will promote our city’s ecological treasures, as a key attraction to living here and visiting Lower Hutt. Several exciting new opportunities will be explored, including a Wildlife sanctuary in Wainuiomata.

GWRC is aiming to achieve ‘International Dark Sky Park’ accreditation for Wainuiomata Regional Park. If successful, it would be the closest Dark Sky Place to any city in the world. This project would include the development of a Dark Sky Museum, educational opportunities and storytelling experiences.

A new cycling route is proposed to connect the Hutt Valley with Porirua through Belmont Regional Park. There will also be future opportunities in the recently acquired Gollans Valley, which effectively links two parts of East Harbour Regional Park.

Enhance learning

We will enhance learning about te Taiao, so that our tamariki grow their understanding of our local environment, and what it means to care for nature. This includes supporting initiatives such as Lower Hutt EnviroSchools or other kaitiaki programmes in schools.

STEPS TO GET THERE	OWNER
Maintain and establish city reserves within a short walk to most houses and connect reserves.	HCC
Develop new opportunities to connect with nature such as “Dark Sky” Wainuiomata, Gollans Valley and Belmont cycling route.	GWRC

INITIATIVE 20: PRESERVE AND RESTORE NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS, CONTROLLING PEST PLANTS AND ANIMALS

STEPS TO GET THERE	OWNER	STATUS
Undertake restoration and revegetation of city reserves and regional parks, including Belmont Park and Hutt River corridor.	GWRC and HCC	Ongoing
Actively control pest plants and animals, including strengthening predator free network and exploring proposed wildlife sanctuary.	GWRC and HCC	Ongoing/Proposal
INDICATORS	LATEST DATA	TARGET

INITIATIVE 21: IMPROVE THE WATER QUALITY OF MOANA (SEA), AWA (RIVERS) AND STREAMS

STEPS TO GET THERE	OWNER	STATUS
Guided by mana whenua, regenerate waterways.	GWRC, HCC, Mana Whenua	
Change the way we use water by reducing extraction, improving three waters infrastructure and educating our community.	GWRC and HCC	
INDICATORS	LATEST DATA	TARGET

INITIATIVE 22: UPHOLD THE KAITIAKI (GUARDIAN) ROLE OF MANA WHENUA IN PROTECTING THE MAURI (LIFE FORCE) OF TE TAIAO (NATURE)

STEPS TO GET THERE	OWNER	STATUS
Support mana whenua restoration efforts, including Waiwhetū stream and the river corridor - Te Wai Takamori o Te Awa Kairangi.	Mana Whenua, GWRC, HCC	
Enable a meaningful role in decisions, including regional parks, city reserves, freshwater management, and explore co-management opportunities.	Mana Whenua, GWRC, HCC	
INDICATORS	LATEST DATA	TARGET

INITIATIVE 23: CONNECT PEOPLE TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

STEPS TO GET THERE	OWNER	STATUS
Maintain and establish city reserves within a short walk to most houses and connect reserves.	HCC	Ongoing
Develop new opportunities to connect with nature such as "Dark Sky" Wainuiomata, Gollans Valley and Belmont cycling route.	GWRC	Proposal
INDICATORS	LATEST DATA	TARGET

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1

EXPLORE NATURE. Walk along the Hutt River trail, picnic on an Eastbourne beach, or go tramping in the Ōrongorongo valley.

2

REDUCE WATER USE. Take a shorter shower, fix leaks, and turn off the tap while brushing your teeth.

3

VOLUNTEER. Get involved with local trapping, planting or park restoration projects, like Friends of Petone Beach.

4

PLANT A NATIVE TREE. Trees provide shade, absorb carbon, improve biodiversity and enhance the beauty of our city.

For more information on how you can take action, visit: www.huttcity.govt.nz/environment-and-sustainability or www.gw.govt.nz/parks