

Whangawehi enviro work recognised

A MAHIA environmentalist has been recognised for her efforts. Kathleen Mato of Mahia won the Pride of New Zealand Environmental Award for her work as the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group (WCMG) leader.

The inaugural awards recognise New Zealanders who make the most positive, uplifting and inspiring contributions to their community. The six winners were announced in a ceremony in Hastings last week and go on to the national awards in Auckland next month.

The environmentalist has a simple philosophy when it comes to seeking positive change.

"You have to step forward and you have to do something — don't just sit there and talk about it," she said of the Whangawehi group which was launched in 2010.

She described the award as a milestone for Mahia.

"It makes what we're doing all the more worthwhile."

The self-taught environmentalist grew up on the land, looking after it and the sea and said "We've always managed it in a sustainable way for future generations".

She plays an active role in the environmental school at Te Mahia and loves it.

Ms Mato had the original concept of actually working together with all the different agencies, tangata whenua and marae.

She hopes the Whangawehi area will attract ecotourism when the trees have

grown and the birds returned.

Chairman of the group and Wairoa District Council engineering manager Jamie Cox described Kathleen as a pillar of the Mahia community.

"She has made a tremendously valuable contribution towards progressing the protection of the environment and the Mahia district.

"Her influence has spread across a range of environmental protection projects as well as the preservation of the area's cultural heritage," he said.

WCMG project co-ordinator Nic Caviale-Delzescaux said the award recognised four years of hard work and is well-deserved.

"I am very happy for Kathleen and the Mahia community."

The group was established in July 2010 when the community raised the issue of the potential effects of the Mahia Beach Community Waste Water System and other land uses on the water quality of the Whangawehi river, the estuary and the mahinga kai beds by the river mouth.

The group's vision is to maintain and improve the cultural, ecological, recreational and economical values of the Whangawehi catchment.

It is working to protect the Whangawehi catchment area by improving water quality and the habitat for freshwater and estuarine species by improving the

unique biodiversity of the area. Their major initial success was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding which led to the development of a Catchment Management Plan.

The group won the Supreme Award

at the Trustpower Wairoa Community Awards in November 2013.

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