

# National recognition for lady of Whangawehi catchment



A CHAMPION for the environment, and of Whangawehi particularly, scooped a national award last Wednesday.

Whangawehi Catchment Management Group former chairperson Kathleen Mato, pictured above, won the inaugural Pride of New Zealand Environmental Award at the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

It was one of seven awards with another Hawke's Bay person Wade Kelly winning a Bravery and Heroism award.

Four years into the wetland restoration, Ms Mato said the award acknowledges the successful and unique model of the group which incorporates a mix of farmers, three marae, Mahia Maori Committee and also work closely with the Te Mahia enviro-school.

"It's a model that the Crown is looking at for other community groups and landowners around the country to safeguard the waterways," she said.

The catalyst for starting the group was her concern about the state of the marine and freshwater fishery in Northern Mahia coast.

"All our marae and community depend on seafood and the fresh water fisheries for hui and tangi

"We want to teach the next generation how to manage the catchment management plan to carry it on.

"We are teaching them every single thing — where to plant, the cost, and what species go where."

This month they have already planted 600 plants and looking to plant another 6000 this spring.

Long-term, she hopes to see a cycleway through the catchment, eco-tourism and walkway following the Whangawehi through northern Mahia.

"In pre-European days the river was the highway and people turned off at a stream.

"We want to bring back the birds, trees with medicinal properties, flax for weaving and trees handy for carving."

It's a mammoth task with 200,000 plants eventually going in from O'Brien's property down to the rivermouth in the next few years.

She said they were looking to a local nursery to supply the group long-term.

WCMG chairman Jamie Cox said the award acknowledged the significance of the commitment to the environment shown by Kathleen Mato and all the partners in the Whangawehi catchment management group.

Last November the group won the Supreme Award at the Trustpower Wairoa Community Awards.

The group has won several regional awards for its work in the region.