

# 'Whangawehi group project a model for future'

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Group leader Kathleen Mato, of Rongomaiwahine descent, says she is proud of what the group has achieved in the remote spot on the Mahia Peninsula neighbouring the RocketLab launch site.

"It has been a lot of hard work, but it has been well worth it. When you involve everyone around you, it has to succeed — because everyone is working together to achieve the same thing."

Ms Mato says the awa, sacred to Rongomaiwahine iwi and hapu, has a special connection to the community.

"We need to ensure that the area and water is safe for the young ones growing up to be able to continue to catch fish and bathe in."

"It all ends up on kaimoana beds, which is why we decided to try to do something in the first place."

With the country facing a freshwater crisis, Ms Mato says their project can be replicated by other communities to clean up their waterways.

"Already there are projects around the country replicating what we have done here."

"All around the country, communities are facing challenges with freshwater, and in marine environments, because it all ends up in the sea."

Despite the seven years of hard work, she says there is still a lot more work to do.



□ A growing concern — 2017 Supreme Green Ribbon Award winners, Whangawehi Catchment Management Group, pictured early in 2014.

"We are not even halfway there."

"We have still got to get the water back to a high quality, all the awa fenced off and pests eradicated. People don't realise what is involved in these types of projects until they begin. It is not only about water quality but the entire catchment, because it is all related."

Environment Minister Dr Nick Smith congratulated the group on its success.

"It signals what is needed across thousands of rivers and streams across New Zealand."

"The Government's target of 90 percent

swimmable rivers and lakes by 2040 is going to require 1000km of rivers be improved every year for the next 23 years."

"The Whangawehi Catchment Management Group is a powerful model of what is possible."

Regional council chairman Rex Graham said: "I'm absolutely delighted for them and it could not go to a more deserving group. I am not surprised they have won this prestigious award."

"This is such a great community initiative that we would like to see happen in other areas. This success is due to an active community driving a

project that the rest of us can get behind, and it is a model for the future."

Project manager Nic Caviale Delzescaux said the group had achieved a significant reduction in faecal contamination and Whangawehi was the only river in Hawke's Bay improving at that level.

The environmental group includes local land owners, local authorities, several marae, the Department of Conservation, a forestry company, the Mahia Maori Committee and Mahia School working together to better manage land and water in the catchment.

Despite its relatively remote location on Mahia Peninsula, the group has harnessed the energy of hundreds of volunteers from all over the region and the world who have helped with planting along the river and in the catchment.

Environmental education involving local schools, residents and volunteers has been an important part of the group's focus.

Associate Conservation Minister, Ms Wagner said the Green Ribbon Awards, now in their 27th year recognised exceptional initiatives by individuals, communities, organisations and businesses to protect and manage New Zealand's environment.

"This year we received close to 150 nominations — a significant increase on the past two years. We're seeing a growing sense of personal ownership to protect our environment and native species for generations to come."

## Mahia water project a winner

WHANGAWEHI Catchment Management Group is the 2017 Supreme Green Ribbon Award winner.

Also winning the Caring for Our Water category, at Parliament on Thursday, Environment Minister Nick Smith and Associate Conservation Minister Nicky Wagner presented project manager Nic Caviale Delzescaux with the award.

Dr Smith congratulated the group for winning the 2017 Supreme Green Ribbon Award describing the project as a team effort over seven years involving iwi, councils and landowners.

He said the group has achieved significant improvements in water quality in the Whangawehi River and in protecting native plants and animals.

"Specific achievements include 7.5km of fencing, 42 hectares of native planting involving

136,000 native trees, retirement of five hectares of native bush and carefully designed debris dams to retain silt beds. The benefits have been increased schools of whitebait, more abundant long fin eels and a 15 percent increase in the recreational status of the water quality."

Hawke's Bay Regional Council also congratulated Whangawehi Catchment Group for its success. The regional council was one of many organisations involved with the group, providing the support of a project manager. The group has been passionate about making a difference to the Whangawehi catchment on the Mahia Peninsula since 2011.

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Phone (06) 838 7194 - Email [editorial@wairoastar.co](mailto:editorial@wairoastar.co.nz)