



□ The Whangawehi Catchment Management Group Inc is being recognised at a national level. Kathleen Mato and Rae Te Nahu, pictured, recently made a presentation at the 2015 Maori Fisheries Conference.

Whangawehi group earns widening national recognition

THE Whangawehi Catchment Management Group Incorporated is footing it at a national level.

Members of the group attended the Maori Fisheries Conference 2015 — “In For The Long Haul” — in Auckland recently.

Representing the group were Te Mahia-based tangata whenua Kathleen Mato and Rae Te Nahu, supported by Doug Jones of Wai Maori Trust a subsidiary of Te Ohu Kaimoana.

The group delivered a short film and presentation to an audience of over 200 people and was widely recognised for its work.

Ms Mato and Ms Te Nahu said they were overwhelmed by the number of people who approached them seeking assistance and access to their template as a way forward for their whanau/hapu.

The project has been acknowledged as leading the way from a whanau/hapu, marae perspective, which was a major attraction for Te Ohu Kaimoana and organisations operating at a high economic level.

In 2010 pioneer Kathleen Mato of Rongomaiahine put together a submission, but didn't submit it after noticing the majority of submissions were against the wastewater sewerage system. She thought: “what happens if it goes ahead” — that was the most concerning part of it.

“If we weren't involved, everybody believed the council would let the water down the stream. So I thought, well somebody's got to have a contingency plan.”

Ms Mato came up with a strategy which later resulted in the establishment of the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group which was incorporated in 2012.

The group is a collaborative approach to address community concerns over the potential effects of the then-proposed wastewater treatment system.

The group identified a shared desire to create better management to protect and enhance the natural, physical, cultural and spiritual resources of the catchment as a whole, returning the Whangawehi awa to its most pristine condition flowing into the mahinga kai for future generations.

It was resolved to enter into a memorandum of understanding which was first signed in July 2011 and again in 2012.

The signatories of the first signing were the Marae — Tuahuru, Kainuku, and

Ruawharo — along with the Hawke's Bay Regional Council and the Waikato District Council.

The second signing was with the Mahia Maori Committee; the landowners in the Whangawehi Catchment, Grandy Lake Forest, Pat and Sue O'Brien; and the Department of Conservation.

The collaborative approach has led to successful outcomes and is a positive reflection of how tangata whenua, land owners and government agencies can work together at a decision-making level.

The group won the Regional Environment and Heritage award as well as the Regional Supreme Award at the Trust Power Community awards in Waikato in 2013 and attended the 2013 National awards in Invercargill.

They had the privilege to be invited to compete for the finals of the Green Ribbon Environmental Awards in June 2014, and the group was successful in taking out the top awards, the Regional and National Award in Pride of New Zealand.

This provided an opportunity to raise the profile of the organisation at national level and acknowledge the Whangawehi community and volunteers.

To date, 16,000 plants have been planted with a further 40,000 to be planted by the end of this year's planting season. A total of 200,000 plants is planned to be planted over a seven-kilometre area over the next two to three years.

The group's work has grown and developed to involve the whole community and include conservation projects including The Enviro-school Project, Water Monitoring Programmes, Freshwater Fisheries Enhancement, Pest Eradication Programme and more.

The group has three employees with a recent appointment of Oha Manuel as the community engagement officer. Ms Manuel of Te Waikato is a descendant of Rongomaiahine and also has links to Tuahuru Marae.

The group hopes to employ more tangata whenua in the future and thanks and acknowledges the work of all the volunteers who have contributed to the success to date.

Whakatauki

Ka tangi te titi — When the seabird suffers

Ka tangi te kaka — When the landbird suffers

Ka tangi ko koe — Then you will suffer
Ka tangi ko au — Then I will suffer.