

Weekender

RESTORING AN AWA, ONE PLANT AT A TIME

KAITIAKITANGA:

Young and old, from all walks of life, come together to help out on planting days along the Whangawehi River on the Mahia Peninsula. Key themes of the river restoration project's success have been kaitiakitanga, looking after the land for future generations, and collaboration.



PICTURE © Supplied

As the country grapples with a freshwater crisis, it could do well to learn from a catchment on the Mahia Peninsula, where a community has banded together over the past seven years to improve their waterways. Michael Neilson met with members of the award-winning Whangawehi Catchment Management Group to find out what makes the project so special.

Around New Zealand farmers have been pitted against everyone else in the battleground over freshwater, but a community group on the Mahia Peninsula has taken a more collaborative approach. Once a month the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group, consisting of farmers, tangata whenua, general community members, and local and central government representatives, gather over a cup of tea at Rongomaiwahine's Tuahuru Marae to discuss environmental concerns in the area.

While throughout Aotearoa stories are emerging of swimming spots running dry due to irrigation, E.coli from livestock making people sick, and toxic algae, the Whangawehi River, surrounded by farming and forestry, has seen improvements across the board. The collaborative group, formed in 2010, involves five marae, Mahia Maori Committee, eight landowners, a forestry plantation, general community members, Te Mahia School, Wairoa District Council, Hawke's Bay Regional Council (HBRC), the Department of Conservation, and several other public and private agencies.

It has overseen a mammoth community effort, installing 15 kilometres of fencing, 56 hectares of native planting with 160,000 native trees, retiring five hectares of native bush and designing debris dams to retain silt beds. Water clarity has improved, E.coli levels have dropped 15 percent over the past seven years of monitoring (the only waterway monitored by HBRC to inverse the trend), and whitebait (inanga), long-fin eels (tuna) and native birds have all increased in numbers.

The group has also been involved in pest control, including a goat control strategy and managing about 350 traps.

Those efforts were recognised nationally this year when the group took out the supreme honour at the Government's Green Ribbon environmental awards.

"It has been a lot of hard work but well worth it," says group founder Kathleen Mato of Rongomaiwahine descent.

"When you involve everyone around you, it has to succeed — because everyone is working together to achieve the same thing."

The awa, sacred to Rongomaiwahine iwi and hapu, has a special connection to the community.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FRACS
Peter Stiven MBChB, FRACS
General, Laparoscopic & Upper GI Surgeon

NOW OFFERING LAPAROSCOPIC (KEYHOLE) HERNIA REPAIR

Because it is less intrusive, keyhole surgery has a quicker recovery time, enabling you to get back to work and leisure more quickly

Peter Stiven MBChB, FRACS
GENERAL, LAPAROSCOPIC
& UPPER GI SURGEON



GI SURGEON
Surgical
ASSOCIATES

CONTACT 06 867 7411
Three Rivers Medical Centre
75 Customhouse St
Gisborne

ChelseaHospital
Your Health Your Choice