



□ Associate Environment Minister and Coromandel MP Scott Simpson, left, came to Mahia last Tuesday to meet members of the award-winning Whangawehi Catchment Management Group, congratulating them on their recent award and a \$143,597 grant. He is pictured with group chairman Pat O'Brien.

□ Right, many hands make light work during a planting day in June 2014, early in the Whangawehi restoration programme.



Minister confirms large grant for catchment management group

AFTER seven years, the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group is now seeing improvement in catchment water quality.

One of the few catchments in the country to have reversed a decline in water quality, members were keen to share their progress with a Government Minister earlier this month.

Associate Minister for the Environment, Minister for the Statistics and Coromandel MP Scott Simpson met group members, congratulating them on receiving a national award last month and confirming \$143,597 was going to the group for a special project.

The Whangawehi Catchment Management Group's achievements include 160,000 trees planted, 56ha of farmland retired, and walkways which are a work in progress.

Soil conservation work has seen 600 willows planted and the construction of six debris dams, a shelter and walkways, and community-based fish and water monitoring programmes.

This year 23,000 native trees will be planted at Okeputa Station in a 4km fenced-off riparian margin along the Whangawehi Stream.

with 10 traps laid out over this 10.2ha of fenced-off land in the stream's upper-catchment.

Addressing the group at Mokotahi Hall, Mr Simpson said the Coromandel had similar terrain, landscape and topography, with regular slips on roads.

They both had small communities which were not as prosperous as they were in years gone by, he said.

There were dozens of similar environmental groups around New Zealand, "all with a commonality of purpose, trying to put right some of the things we have not done as well as we should have done."

His grandparents farmed north of Whaitanga 100 years ago, he said.

"They would have farmed with a box of matches, setting fire to the place and waiting for the new growth.

"That was the commonly accepted practice of the time. These days we look back and say 'how crazy'.

"Now we have folk like yourselves trying to put right some of these things."

He described last month's Green Ribbon Environment Awards as a special event for groups from all over the country, all doing inspirational things on

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Formed over concerns about Mahia wastewater system

THE Whangawehi Catchment Management Group was formed in response to Wairoa District Council's plan to build a wastewater system at Mahia in 2010.

Whangawehi community members raised the issue of the potential effects of the Mahia Beach Community Wastewater System, and other land uses, on the water quality of the Whangawehi stream, the estuary and the mahinga kai beds outside the rivermouth.

The Whangawehi catchment is around 3600 hectares in total, including 1000ha in commercial forestry, 370ha in native bush and

multiple levels.

The Whangawehi group had attended these awards four times before winning the supreme award.

"The moral is don't give up. If you are doing something fantastic, keep going," said Mr Simpson.

"This is something the whole community can be proud of."

Achieving their goals was going to take time, energy, passion and quite a lot of money.

"Organisations that are community-driven and growing, are organic and can make a dollar go a long way because the

2350ha in farming.

The council then brought a property from Earl Symes where it established the mahia community wastewater system.

A lot of submissions were put to the council about the proposed wastewater system, and founder Kathleen Mato put a plan in place with the help of Fopata Ainsley.

This plan has attracted more and more landowners at each signing, with the first Memorandum of Understanding in 2011 at Tuahuru Marae followed by others in 2013, 2015 and 2016.

people invest emotionally and physically in that project.

"That provides leverage for every dollar and cent spent."

Mr Simpson said the Community Environment Fund grant was money well spent that would have an impact on a precious environment.

Group project manager Nic Caviale Delescaux said the Green Ribbon Award this year confirmed they were doing the right thing, describing the win after four attempts as like vitamin C for everybody.

"It was really good for us to get this award."

Lots of development ideas for Whangawehi group

THERE is no shortage of development ideas for the multi-award winning Whangawehi Catchment Management Group.

Group community support person Oha Manual said the catchment group set the template for working collaboratively.

Their testing showed a 15 percent improvement in water quality in the catchment, she said — making Whangawehi the best and only catchment in New Zealand to have recorded improvement.

This brought benefits such as protection of the cultural transfer of knowledge as well as economic benefits, she said.

"There is healing and pride in setting up a template to share with other iwi and hapu."

Group project manager Nic Caviale Delescaux said the challenge was to remain financially sustainable.

"We have other projects like a coast-to-coast track, which could become a two to three-day walk with farm accommodation."

The group is exploring other tangata whenua work, a Mahia red meat brand, and is part of a community discussion to make the area pest free.

Reintroducing birds like kiwi, pukeko and maatuku are other long-term goals.

The group would also like to develop cadetships for youth to encourage continued engagement with their project.

The children were learning about the properties of native trees, and making kawakawa balm, while community engagement was growing through a series of mountain bike rides and walks over the years.

Building blue penguin homes had captured the Mahia students' imagination as they worked towards reintroducing them to the area, with the help of the Department of Conservation's Malcolm Smith.

This work could extend to Walkawa (Portland Island) too, he said.

Agency and local and central government support allowed them to go from a small project to link initiatives and create more success.

Mr Caviale Delescaux reiterated the challenge laid down by founders Kathleen Mato and Rae Te Nahu was to ensure their awa was maintained in a pristine condition for future generations.

Long-time member Arthur Bowen believes long fin eel are increasing in numbers in the

catchment and bird life is diversifying, with reports of fern birds or matata sighted. Bittern were known to be in the area once.

Pest control efforts include 250 traps laid in the community-driven initiative.

Around 5000 goats were removed through a goat control strategy.

Mr Caviale Delescaux said this work must not stop, if they were to keep on top of the threat.

Kaitiaki and group member Sophie Dodds said for her, they had not reached the water stage yet.

"We have not got into the whakapapa of the water."

"To understand the history and whakapapa of the water, makes a lot of sense.

"It has its own history and when we get to that stage, I will be happy."

"If you can get the history and health of the water and the plants at the edges, the water is not separate from the plantings."

Te Mahia School enviro-school students have contributed to the habitat restoration

"We have other projects like a coast-to-coast track, which could become a two to three-day walk with farm accommodation."

The group maintains a profile at community events such as the Wairoa A & P Show, and attracted \$80,000 from crowd funding.

Members regularly attend the Mahia markets and give presentations to the community and schools.

Mr Caviale Delescaux said the group enjoyed strong community support and had lots of dedicated volunteers who shared their passion for education.

"Without that marae leadership, we would not be here."

"Right from the start, we knew where we wanted to go with a clear vision and leadership."