

Catchment group up for Asia Pacific river prize

WAIROAS Whangawehi Catchment Management Group has been nominated as the sole New Zealand group to represent the country as a finalist in the upcoming Asia Pacific International River Prize Awards.

The prestigious awards, to be held in Sydney next month, recognise organisations that have achieved strong results in river restoration and are sharing their knowledge to achieve greater benefits.

Group chairman Pat O'Brien hoped they would represent New Zealand and Wairoa well on the international stage.

"Winning such a distinguished river award will honour all the hard work undergone so far and be a great extension to being the supreme winner at the Green Ribbon Awards last year - the New Zealand Government's most prestigious environmental award," Mr O'Brien said.

The Whangawehi Catchment Management Group is a marae initiative which identified the Whangawehi stream in the Mahia Peninsula as a sacred river which needed protection and enhancement.

Under a community-led catchment management plan, the group has helped landowners to fence off their waterways, re-vegetate river margins, better manage their soil by establishing soil conservation areas planted in trees, and carry out pest control work.

"The collaborative work of the group has resulted in the protection of 13 kilometres of river, the establishment of 60,000 native trees on 60 hectares of riparian margins and the retirement of 5 hectares of native bush block."

Close monitoring of the work done by the group has revealed a 95 percent survival rate of plants, an increase in native bird and fish life and a 15 percent improvement in water quality.

The once nearly extinct whitebait population was now abundant, and the



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healthy populations, Mr O'Brien said. The group believed their winning edge could be a unique environmental education programme developed locally with Te Mahia School, to transfer local knowledge around Matauranga Maori and indigenous practices.

The community also hoped these school children would be the next generation of kaitiaki (guardians) of the land.

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management work initiated by the Whangawehi group.

The group is also in the final stages of talks to develop an extensive walkway through the Whangawehi catchment for both locals and visitors to enjoy.

Other projects include the development of a brand to return a premium for any meat products produced under a catchment management plan protecting

this year, the Asia Pacific International River Prize Awards will be split into two separate categories.

The Asian River category includes projects of huge scale such as the Yangtze River in China and the Pasig River in the Philippines.

The Whangawehi project competes in the Bert and Vera Thiess Australasian River category alongside projects on Brisbane's Laidley Creek and Sydney's Parramatta River.

All three groups in the Australasian category have been credited with achieving significant outcomes for rivers in a collaborative partnership with their