

# AHURIRI ESTUARY - TE WHANGANUI A OROTŪ

We want a healthier estuary for fish, birds and people.

Ahuriri Estuary (Te Whanganui a Orotū) is a special wetland area. The remnant of the extensive pre-1931 earthquake lagoon, it is home to native and migratory birds and a nursery for ocean-going fish.

The wider estuary area contains a wildlife sanctuary in the wetlands, recreational 'pond' area, cycle pathways and farmland.



## IMPORTANCE

Ahuriri Estuary is listed as a Significant Conservation Area under the Regional Coastal Environment Plan (HBRC 2014), a Wetland of Ecological and Representative Importance (WERI), and a Site of Special Wildlife Interest (SSWI). A Wildlife Refuge status protects the areas between the Southern Marsh, Westshore Lagoon and the estuary, from the low level bridge to Pandora Pond.

The TANK Plan Change, looking at new land and water use policies for the Greater Heretaunga Plains, recognises the Ahuriri Estuary as a site of ecological, cultural and recreational significance, and recommends all reasonable measures to be undertaken to support these uses and values.

## HISTORY

Until the 1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake, most of this area was an inland sea from Pandora to Bayview. The earthquake lifted the area 1-2 metres, draining most of the water. Further drainage has enabled housing, industrial areas and the airport to be built. Due to a lack of awareness or concern, decades of industrial contamination has loaded a 'legacy' of chemicals in the estuary muds.

## WHAT DO WE WANT TO FIX?



We want to restore the estuary to good health, working with Napier City Council, Māori, Department of Conservation, landowners and businesses in this area.



We want to limit the amount of sediment coming into the estuary by planting wetlands and stream edges, and move stormwater discharges to land-based disposal.



We want to remove animal and plant pests and invasive underwater plants, that impact on estuary health.

## WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

The water of the Ahuriri Estuary is in an enriched (trophic) state. Too much sediment and contaminants flow in through the small streams (such as the Taipō Stream), degrading the habitat for marine life and birds.

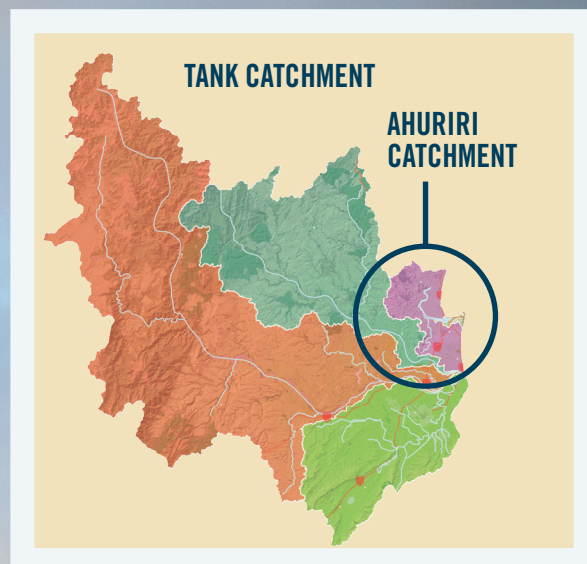
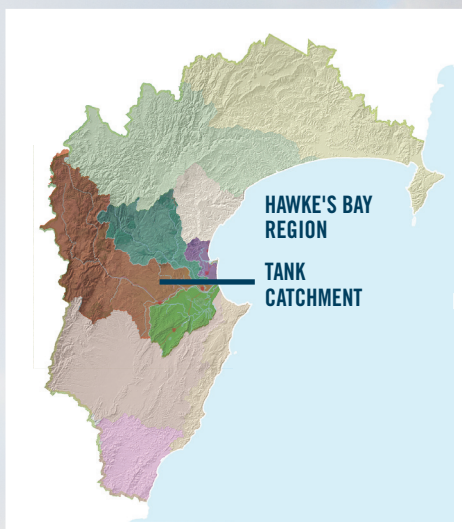
Nutrient levels are high, particularly phosphorus and nitrogen, increasing the likelihood of phytoplankton blooms in the shallow, warm waters.

The invasive fanworm *Ficopomatus enigmaticus* is a filter feeder that is becoming prolific in the estuary waters.

Unfiltered and untreated stormwater brings contaminants into the estuary. Shellfish often become unsafe to eat. HBDHB Public Health and councils publicly notify when this is a problem.

Many businesses in the catchment have pollution response processes in place, although accidents can still happen. Oil and chemical spills in the inner harbour are also a risk to water quality and wildlife; pollution response teams regularly practice reducing this threat.





## SWIMMING & RECREATION

Water quality in Pandora Pond is monitored from November to March each summer, and is suitable for swimming, boating and other water recreation 97% of the time. Public warnings are issued when water quality is unsuitable for swimming.



### WHAT ARE WE DOING?

HBRC scientists have been monitoring the water quality in the estuary at 8 sites since March 2013, reporting to Council on changes in the estuarine environment.

Resource consents are required for discharges in industrial area. Businesses that have stormwater drains that lead into the estuary have embraced HBRC's pollution prevention programme.

HBRC takes action on pollution spills and regularly practices ways to protect the estuary from pollution.

Department of Conservation manages the wildlife sanctuary which is home to many seabirds which feed and breed here. Godwits migrate here every year from Alaska. People can view the birds from hides on the cycle trail.

The Ahuriri Protection Society was formed in 1981 as a 'watchdog'. Volunteers work with DOC and councils to maintain the estuary and educate the public on its wildlife and environmental values.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



Ahuriri Estuary is within Napier city limits so, although this location poses continual risks, it also gives people an excellent opportunity to observe and learn about tidal estuaries and the wildlife that lives in it.

### FURTHER READING

A number of wetland and estuary investigation reports are available on [www.hbrc.govt.nz](http://www.hbrc.govt.nz)

A recent investigation by HBRC in May 2016 has been reported in *The estuaries of the TANK Catchments: Ahuriri and Waitangi estuaries, Values, State and Trends*. **Search on #TANKresources**

*Think TANK* newsletter from the TANK group meeting March 2017 also has a good summary of Ahuriri Estuary issues. **Search on #TANKresources**



[www.hbrc.govt.nz](http://www.hbrc.govt.nz)