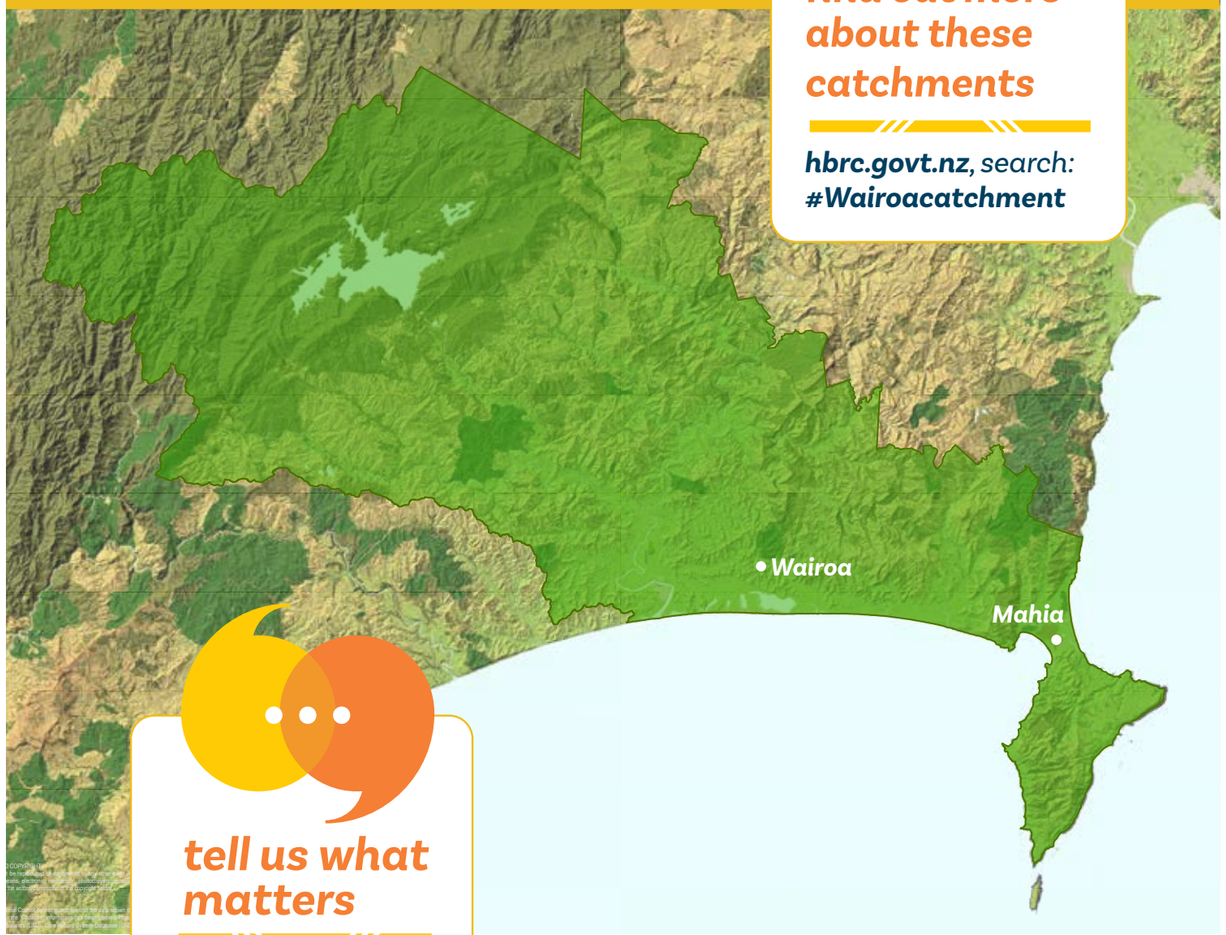
Wairoa and Northern Coast catchments



find out more about these catchments

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What do we know?

The Wairoa and Northern Coast catchments includes the catchments of Wairoa and the smaller catchments of Whakakī, Nuhaka and Mahia. The catchments includes the Wairoa River – the biggest river in Hawke's Bay – as well as the Waiau, Waikaretaheke, Mangaaruhe, Ruakituri, Hangaroa and Mangapoike rivers. This catchment also includes Te Urewera, which was previously a National Park.

The Wairoa and Northern Coast catchments are home to many native fish, such as three species of galaxiids (whitebait), four species of bullies, two species of mullet, two species of eels, torrentfish, lamprey, smelt and flounder. Lake Waikaremoana has a landlocked population of koaro, which are part of the whitebait family. The Wairoa Estuary, Mangawhio Lagoon and their connected wetlands are home to many of these fish species, as well as an array of bird and plant life.

Known issues

The combination of steep hill country, soft sedimentary geology and pastoral and forestry land uses in the catchments mean erosion and sediment rates are high, relative to the rest of Hawke's Bay. Once in a waterway, sediment can impact ecosystem health, alter the way estuaries function, and cause problems to the animals and plants that live there. The Wairoa Estuary shows signs of sediment stress.

Water quality in the catchments is generally good. There are relatively low concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorus, compared to other parts of Hawke's Bay. The issues are high concentrations of suspended solids and loads, and poor visual clarity.

Where conditions are favourable, such as in stony bottomed streams, some waterways in the catchment have nuisance algae (periphyton) growth due to nutrient inputs, particularly during summer low flows.

Lake Whakakī has some of the poorest water quality of any monitored lake in New Zealand. The shallow lake is muddy and has extreme algal blooms. However, bird surveys around the lake recorded a number of threatened species, fernbirds, bittern and spotless crake. These birds signal high ecological value and show that ecosystem health is not just about water quality.

The Wairoa River mouth has closed at times due to large swell events and sea currents. This causes low-lying areas near the township to flood. The river mouth is manually opened by HRBC to prevent flooding.

There is a high level of salinity lower down the Wairoa River, which may affect the supply of groundwater.

How we are doing?

The Hawke's Bay Regional Coastal Environment Plan identifies the Wairoa Estuary and Coastal Lagoons as a Significant Conservation Area with regionally important fisheries values.

Hawke's Bay's proposed plan of outstanding water bodies includes Whakikī Lake.

HBRC's Erosion Control Scheme will result in less sediment being lost to waterways and estuaries over time.

National funding has been received to identify solutions that will revitalise Whakakī Lake.

The Wairoa River has been identified as one of six environmental enhancement areas by HBRC with funding allocated to improve the area.

The Whakatipu Mahia project aims to completely eradicate of possums across the peninsula by 2022.

There is one catchment group in operation. The Whangawehi Catchment Management Group was established in 2011. Other catchments groups are being set up. Ruakituri has recently signed an MOU to form a sub-catchment group. Waikari and Nuhaka are also looking to form sub-catchment groups.

Where to from here?

The Regional Plan is due for review and will need to give effect to the Government's directions set out in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020. The Regional Council needs to describe Te Mana o Te Wai for the catchment and develop practical, catchment-based action plans.

HBRC's Regional Water Security programme is underway and will inform more accurate understanding of the current regional pattern of water takes and use. This will also look to future water demands in the context of a changing climate, and identify future water management options. However, Kotahi is the vehicle to set the rules for water allocation, limits and targets.

The Regional Council will meet with tangata whenua, local authorities, stakeholder and interest groups and the wider community to agree on a catchment vision, check the issues and then set up working groups to help tackle the issues in each catchment. Online channels will be one of the tools used with community to discuss various matters and agree the best way forward.