

## Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchments

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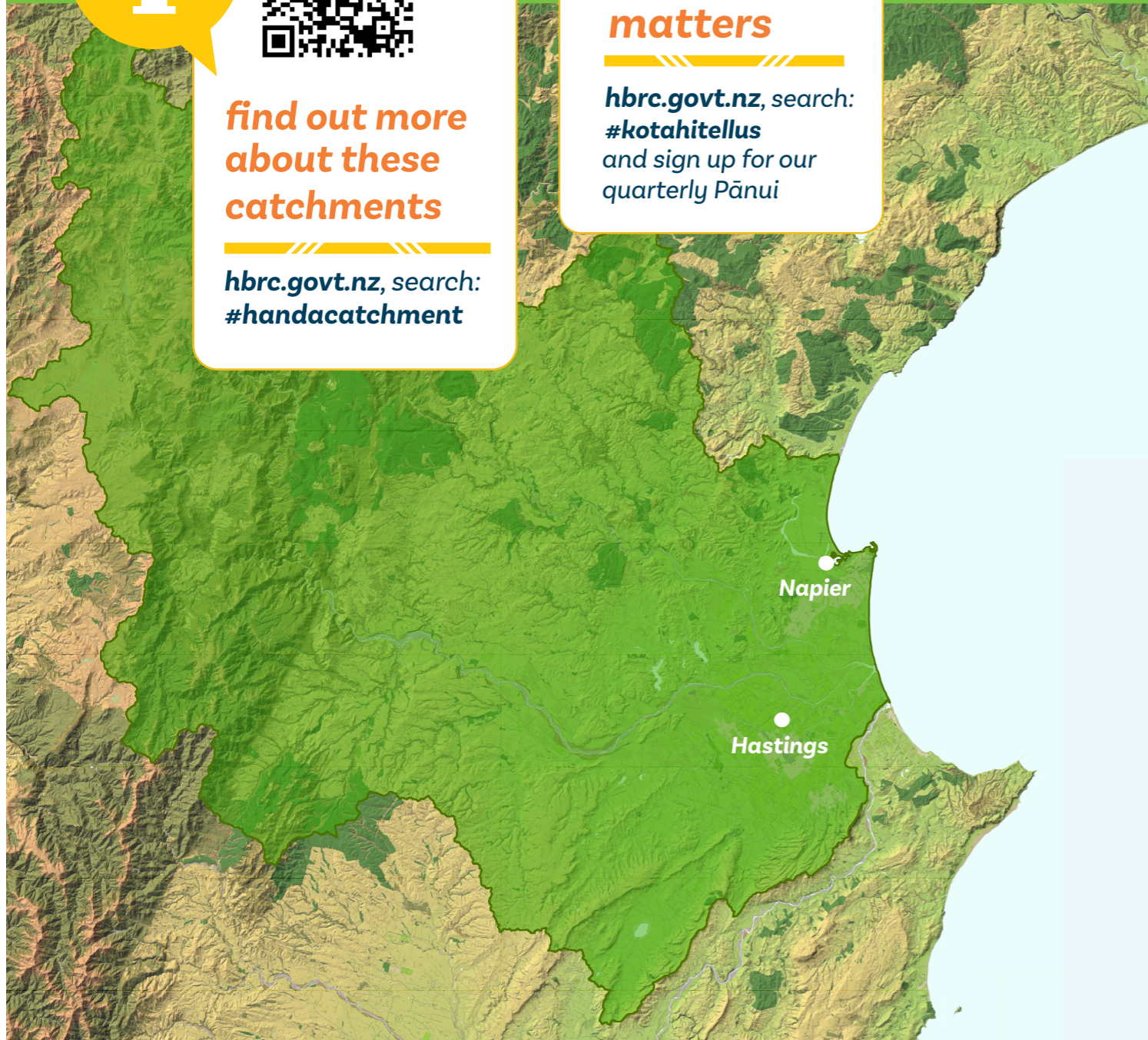
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## Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchments

**KOTAHI**

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OUR PEOPLE, OUR FUTURE

### What do we know?

Heretaunga and Ahuriri covers the catchments of the Tūtaekurī, Ngaruroro and Karamū rivers and the Ahuriri Estuary Te Whanganui-a-Orotū. These waterways are intricately connected to the large Heretaunga Plains aquifer, which supplies water to Napier and Hastings and supports the local economy.

85% of Hawke's Bay's population live in the Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchments and it represents 80% of the regions GDP.

The Heretaunga Plains is the site of intensive agriculture (cropping, horticulture, viticulture), land use associated with large urban centres, including transport, flood protection and service infrastructure, and a range of industries. The Regional Council-owned stopbanks along the main rivers provide flood protection

for communities, not to mention the recreation opportunities in the river corridors, walking and cycling trails.

There are large tracts of native vegetation in the upper Ngaruroro and Tūtaekurī catchments, including conservation estate in the Kaweka and Ruahine Forest Parks. There is highly-modified land cover in the mid to lower catchments with isolated patches of native vegetation.

Ahuriri Estuary Te Whanganui-a-Orotū is a significant conservation area with high ecological value, as well as the Poukawa and Waitangi wetlands. Many native fish species, and rainbow and brown trout frequent the rivers. Surface water quality gradually decreases from a pristine ecological condition in the upper reaches of the catchment, to an 'impacted rural condition', to the worst water quality in urban areas.



## Known issues

There is already pressure on this area's water quality and quantity, including the receiving estuaries at Ahuriri and Waitangi. The need to review outdated plan provisions for water allocation in the Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchments resulted in the Regional Council preparing the Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchment plan change. This was notified for submissions in 2020 after a lengthy community-led plan preparation process. While it reflected the intent of Government policy from 2017, the introduction of a revised policy in September 2020 means that further review is needed. HBRC is working to ensure that the rules for the Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchments reflect the Government's latest policy changes.

The issues addressed in the TANK Plan Change included:

- Poor water quality in some catchments due to rural and urban activities
- Too much erosion and sediment from land affecting waterway ecosystem health
- Too many contaminants affecting estuary ecosystems and other estuary values

- Over-allocation of freshwater from surface and connected groundwaters of Heretaunga Plains
- Water allocated to competing end users, including for future use
- Loss of wetland and aquatic biodiversity
- Effects of managing the land beside rivers on waterway ecosystem health and water quality.

Attention is being given to managing river stability and providing flood protection in the Ngaruroro and Tūtaekurī Rivers, and understanding the impact this has on ecosystem health, and the availability of gravel resources for construction and roading.

The tensions between urban development needs and its impacts on scarce resources like productive soils are also in the scope of the current work programme

Due to population concentration, Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchments is where our air monitoring and our air quality improvement measures have been and are currently focused.

Threats to terrestrial biodiversity are described in the regional biodiversity factsheet.

## How we are doing?

The TANK Plan change was developed to manage land and water activities to better meet community expectations and introduce new objectives for freshwater quality and quantity.

A decision on the TANK plan change is expected in 2022 and the plan is yet to be made operative.

However, the process so far highlights the varying concerns of Māori, the primary production sector and environmental groups in addressing many of the environmental challenges in this area.

The TANK collaborative process to develop the plan change, the range of reports commissioned, the submissions, hearings and potential future appeals all contribute to a thorough understanding of this area and its outstanding issues, along with strengthened management, new limits and rules.

This recent history of collaboration will help to confirm appropriate measures to be included in Kotahi and ensure that it reflects the Government's latest policy changes to improve freshwater.

Despite the plan process not being complete, a number of initiatives are underway as a result of the

plan process and the raised awareness about the issues to be resolved. The Regional, District and City councils are jointly focussing on urban stormwater management – a key stressor in freshwater and estuary ecosystems.

Catchment-scale collective management to meet new objectives for improved environmental outcomes is a key feature of the TANK plan change. A number of landowner catchment groups established during the Plan development. More are continuing to develop, with support from both the Regional Council and external bodies. The groups enable rural communities to work collectively and flexibly to meeting environmental and social goals, using local knowledge.

Council projects will help to meet environmental objectives. These include to reduce sediment loss, hill country erosion control, ecosystem improvement in the Ahuriri and Karamū catchments, improvements to flood control infrastructure and river management, and riparian land management.

## Where to from here?

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

The Regional Council's Regional Freshwater 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. This information will help to set rules for water allocation, limits and targets through this Kotahi process.

The main challenge for people in the Heretaunga and Ahuriri catchments is to understand where the new NPS is not being reflected and what that might mean for the current Plan as it is written.

The Regional Council will work 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 the community to discuss various matters and agree the best way forward.

