

Mohaka catchment

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What do we know?

The Mohaka catchment covers the Mohaka and Waihua River catchments. Mohaka River rises in the Kaimanawa Ranges, is bound by the Kaweka and Maungaharuru Ranges to the south and east and flows into Hawke Bay near the Mohaka settlement. Waihua is a smaller catchment to the north.

Geologically, the upper catchment features both hard rock (greywacke, volcanic ignimbrite) and pumice. The lower catchment is mostly soft sedimentary rock. The climate tends to be wetter and colder than the regional average.

Mohaka River is recognised nationally for its outstanding trout fishery, exceptional whitewater recreation opportunities and stunning landscapes. Above Willow Flat, a Water Conservation Order prohibits most damming, and other water uses must not detract from the river's outstanding characteristics and features.

Native forest covers about half of the catchment, along with exotic plantation forestry, manuka/shrubland and exotic grasslands. There are some natural wetlands in

forested areas. A third of the catchment is under some form of formal protection, such as Ngā Whenua Rāhui or as DOC conservation areas. The frost flats of the Ripia and Waipunga valleys are nationally-rare ecosystems. Some threatened bird and plant species are found here, including whio (blue duck), kākā and long-tailed bats.

The main productive land uses are plantation forestry, and sheep and beef farming activities. There is a significant area of dairying in the Taharua catchment and orchards near the coast.

There are no towns in the catchment; instead small rural communities at Taharua, Puketitiri, Te Hāroto, Te Pōhue, Kotemaori, Raupunga and Mohaka. Only Raupunga has a registered drinking water supply. There are substantial blocks of Māori Trust land, some of which is managed under Ngā Whenua Rāhui agreements with the Department of Conservation.

State Highways 2 and 5 bisect the area, connecting Hastings and Napier with Wairoa and Gisborne to the north, and Taupo and Waikato to the west. The coastal railway connects Wairoa to Napier Port.



Known issues

Restoring the mauri of the water, giving effect to Te Mana o Te Wai

Degraded water quality – where farming leads to elevated nitrogen concentrations in the Taharua River, fuelling nuisance algae (periphyton) growth; this affects ecosystem health below the confluence with the Mohaka River, and reduces Mohaka’s approval for water-based recreation

Forestry slash and logs – creates safety hazards for recreational users, clogs water flow, destroys amenity values along the waterways and coastal foreshore

Excessive sediment on the lower Mohaka River – poor visibility, degraded cultural and use values, smothered aquatic habitat, adversely affected drinking water supplies

Livestock in rivers – degraded water quality, bed disturbance, damage to riparian margins and vegetation

Public access - includes poor infrastructure (access and toilets) – environmental damage, detracts from use and enjoyment, also at the river mouth

Biodiversity – retaining valued remnant native vegetation, improving riparian margins and wetlands, plant and animal pests such as goats and possums, spray drift, generating multiple ecological, water quality and pest reduction benefits

Customary Rights and Treaty issues - resolve access to and management of valued natural resources by tangata whenua, and gravel management including hangi stones.



How we are doing?

Work commenced on developing an integrated management plan for the Taharua Catchment back in 2009. Declining water quality in the Taharua and Mohaka (below the Taharua confluence) at that time was affecting trout and generating excessive algal blooms. Regional Council staff worked closely with a stakeholder reference group and the local community to identify what could be done on farms to improve the situation. This led to some changes to farm practices. Farmer groups are forming to look at how best to respond to the range of new environmental directives.

Overall, Mohaka River quality is in a good state, reflecting a catchment with a high natural character and low intensity land use. Upstream of the confluence with the Taharua, water clarity, bug and insect (macroinvertebrate) and algae (periphyton) levels are excellent. However, the Taharua River has substantially enriched nitrogen concentrations. All four of its monitoring sites fail the National Objectives Framework (NOF) bottom-line for nitrogen toxicity. This nitrogen also fuels nuisance algae growth and impacts ecosystem health in the Mohaka River downstream of the confluence. In the lower Mohaka, water clarity is poor and phosphorus levels are elevated at times, likely due to sediment from erosion.

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, determine how it applies to freshwater management, 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. This information will help to set rules for water allocation, limits and targets through this Kotahi process.

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 the community to discuss various matters and agree the best way forward.

In total, 130 ecological priority sites have been identified covering over 50,000ha of land. Five wetlands are part of the Council’s ‘state of our environment’ wetland monitoring programme. Some environmental projects have been initiated by tangata whenua, including plant nurseries for riparian planting and fencing for stock exclusion.

The Regional Council are now re-engaging in the Mohaka through the region-wide Kotahi plan review process, using a co-design partnership arrangement with iwi, led by Ngāti Pāhauwera.

