



# Catchment group profile - Wai Kōkopu -

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Wai Kōkopu is a community organisation with a vision to restore health to the catchment from Rotoiti and Rotoehu, to the Waihi Estuary. The catchment's four sub-catchments, from largest to smallest are: Pongakawa, Kaikokopu, Wharere, and Lower Catchment (estuary).

The Wai Kōkopu programme started in February 2021, initiated by a group of farming interests, led by chair Andre Hickson. The group is passionate about leading change for improved health and replenishment from the farm to the water, for both the environment, and the community. While the programme is still embryonic in its outreach, there is already amazing support from industry and local landowners wanting to do the right thing. Those involved with the community group are very grateful to Ministry for Primary Industries for providing funding for farm planning, and to Bay Trust for funding restoration and community outreach. Our interim board comprises a small

group of landowners, community and iwi representatives who work collaboratively to address the health issues facing this catchment.

The Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC) identified elevated levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, *E. coli* and sediment in the Waihi Estuary, as primary issues. The BOPRC's 2018 monitoring report explains that low oxygen levels, build-up of nutrients and organic matter, loss of native sea grasses, reduced fauna due to anoxic sediments, and algal growth are all indicators of declining ecological health of the upper estuary.

Wai Kōkopu's strategic goals are to have thriving soils, waterways, biodiversity, microclimates and healthy connected

accountable communities. The strategy is developed with the guiding principles of kaitiakitanga, (stewardship/guardianship) manaakitanga (services) and kotahitanga (unity).

## Overview

The project covers four areas of work:

- 1. Best practice and innovation for land management:** This involves developing relevant Land Environment Plans (LEPs), covering a variety of land uses; horticulture, agriculture and forestry. The high quality and applicability of these should encourage farmers and growers to develop their own individualised LEP. Wai Kōkopu works with lighthouse farmers; those that



want to learn how to tread more lightly on the land, while retaining profitability, a low risk threshold, and climate resilience.

- 2. Information and monitoring:** Improving information about contaminant sources and loads; this involves gathering data on the health of water, sediment and shellfish.
- 3. Restoration:** Physical rehabilitation of the Waihi Estuary catchment by facilitating riparian and land retirement to native plantings and wetland restoration.
- 4. Connecting with the community:** Sharing knowledge, bringing the community together and supporting landowners with land use change and restoration initiatives.

Significant restoration (retiring 'boggy areas') is well underway across parts of the upper catchment to minimise hot spots for sediment, pathogen and nutrient runoff.

The Wai Kōkopu programme has 14 of 15 lighthouse farm plans currently underway for horticulture, forestry, dairy, drystock, and carbon farming.

## Finding the sweet spot

A full environmental and economic analysis of pastoral businesses to date has found the 'sweet spot' for each business (the most profitable and resilient outcome, with the least stress, and the smartest changes at the lowest cost for change). This work has identified successful on-farm practices, areas for improvement, and is helping to develop a digital farm plan. Read more about it at [wai-kokopu.org.nz/our-projects/](http://wai-kokopu.org.nz/our-projects/)

The goal of this innovative pan sector digital farm plan is to develop a singular plan that covers a contiguous land block encompassing all enterprises. Currently, each industry has a distinct plan, which is not ideal for farmers and business owners. Wai Kōkopu is working closely with orchard design company GPS-it to develop a single suite of data and a sensible action plan that meets industry and policy requirements to stay ahead of the game. We are also working closely with industry, landowners, and regional and central government to ensure landowners are well informed about

upcoming policy changes.

The Wai Kōkopu programme aims to align industry approaches to:

- **Critical source areas**
- **Nutrient overload and nutrient management**
- **Pathogen management (and prevention of spillover)**
- **Groundwater protection**
- **River and spring protection**
- **Estuarine remediation (longer term)**
- **Soil health and rejuvenation**
- **Sediment management**
- **Biodiversity enhancement**
- **Carbon sequestration**
- **Whole of catchment - remediation**
- **Enhanced waterway access, safe food gathering**
- **Community health protection**
- **Education and extension**

BOPRC modelling shows the following reductions are required to achieve a



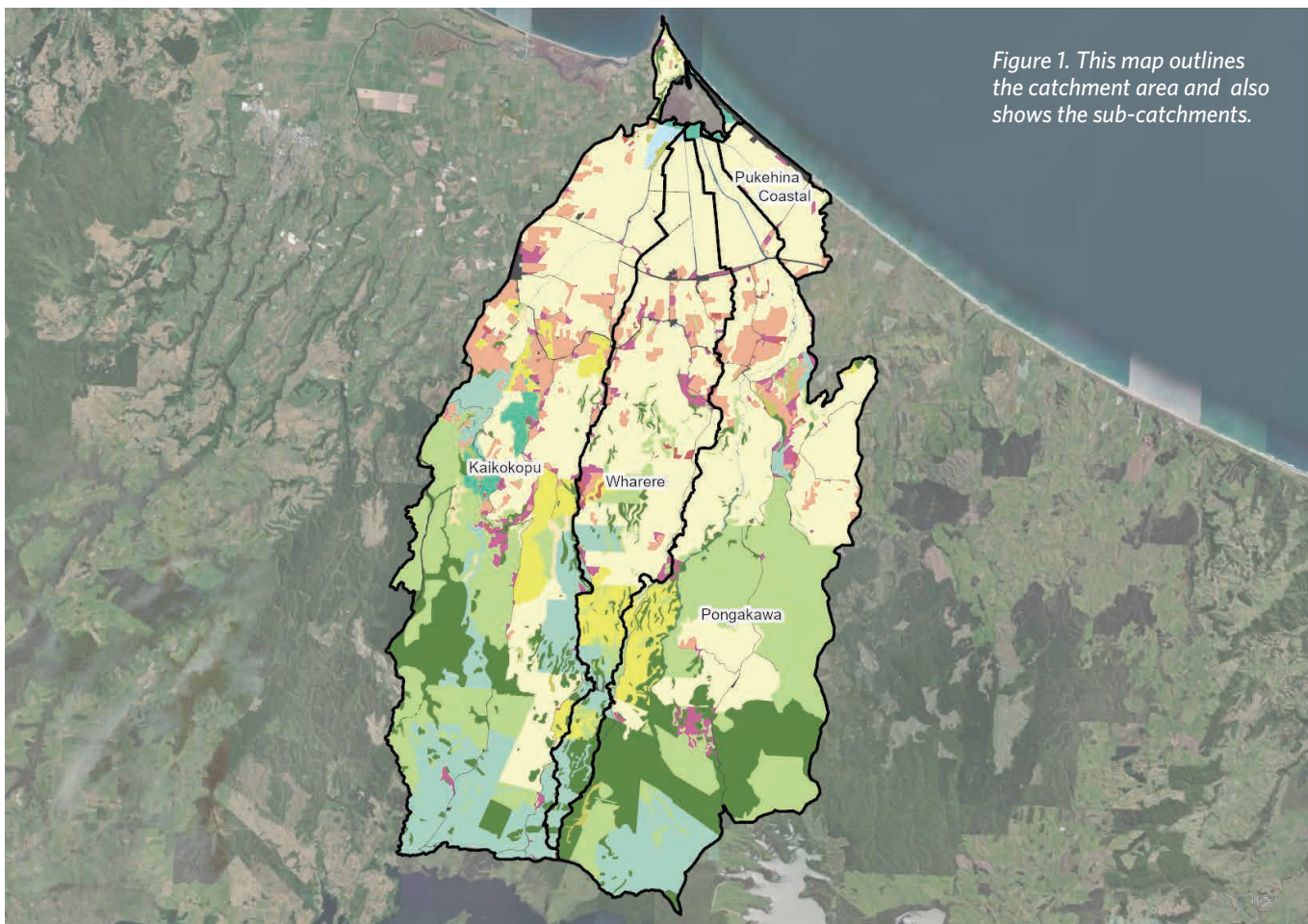
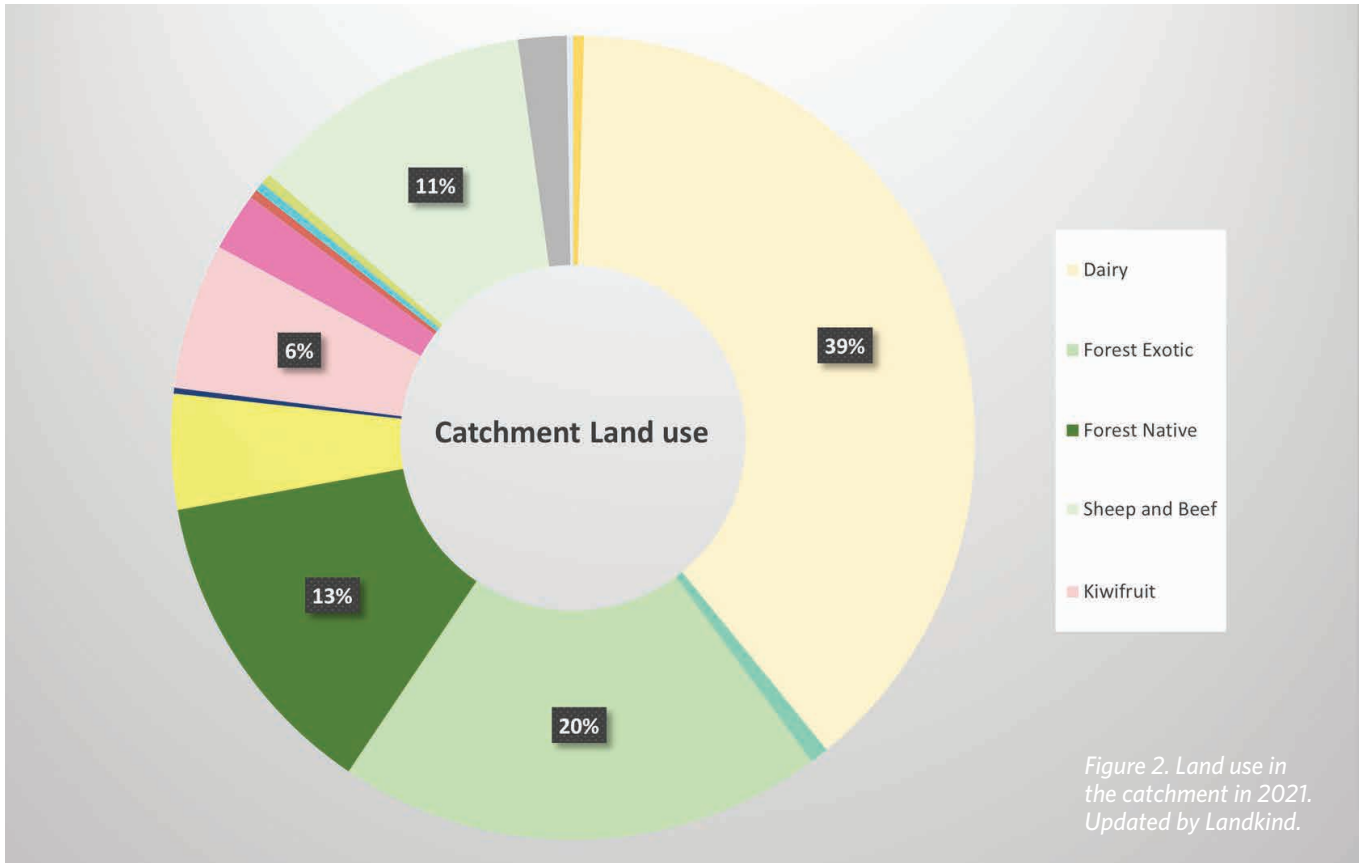


Figure 1. This map outlines the catchment area and also shows the sub-catchments.





moderately healthy estuary state in the little Waihi Estuary over time:

- *E. Coli* ↓ 55%
- Nitrogen loss ↓ 70%
- Phosphorus ↓ 30%

Waves of central government's policy changes are on the way and will affect landowners across New Zealand. While there is nervousness among farmers, the community group has been supported to work alongside industry to help as much as possible.

The Wai Kōkopu programme aims to reach out to landowners to support them into the new paradigm of farming, to protect resources, nature, health and local economies.

The future is exciting for agribusiness, our local economy, and our community health.

Wai Kōkopu and other qualified and science and business trained specialists will use programme funding to help farmers understand what is required, and how we work together for change to stay ahead of the game and on the front foot, for catchment and community health. Active restoration activities are creating native habitats between dairy farms and orchards.

To find out more about Wai Kōkopu or to contact us, visit our website at [wai-kokopu.org.nz](http://wai-kokopu.org.nz). ■