

# WHAKAORA TE REPO, KA ORA TE TAONGA WAI

## Restoring our wetland treasure – a combined vision for Wairarapa Moana



Photograph Pete Nikolaisen

### Public land at Wairarapa Moana

This year the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal recommended that all public land at Wairarapa Moana be returned to tangata whenua as part of the treaty settlement process.

Much of Wairarapa Moana became publically owned land when it was transferred to the Crown in 1896. This sounds notable but no one has tried to manage it as one system, until now. That is partly because the public land boundaries at Wairarapa Moana have changed, with drainage and further land transfers. And the reserves are disjointed and managed by different organisations.

Most of the public land we are left with are the beds of Lake Wairarapa and Lake Onoke and a collection of low-lying reserves in the east of Lake Wairarapa. Many of these reserves are dominated by pasture and have been leased for grazing.

Significant areas of native wetlands remain. The shallow and silty eastern shore of Lake Wairarapa is a haven for wading birds and water fowl, as are the remaining ponds and lagoons. There is a great example of native forest from the hilltops to the water's edge on the western shore of Lake Wairarapa and an interesting collection of native dune plants and animals at Onoke Spit. All of the above are managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC).

Lake Domain Recreation Reserve is popular with day visitors and campers and is managed by South Wairarapa District Council (SWDC). There are a couple of reserves to allow easy movement of floodwaters that are managed by the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC).



Fish monitoring at Lake Wairarapa. L-R Alton Perrie, Amber McEwan, Haami Te Whaiti. Photograph Jim Flack.

Warren Field showing pupils from Kahutara School how to plant flax at the Wairarapa Wetlands. Photograph Jim Flack.

### Managing the public land

It would be fair to say these reserves haven't received as much attention as they could have, with each organisation having more pressing priorities.

A water conservation order was put in place on Lake Wairarapa in the late 1980s to protect it from further drainage. This was in recognition of its importance for wading birds and water fowl.

The Lake Wairarapa Co-ordinating Committee has representatives from all groups with an active stake in the lake. The committee has used a public forum to negotiate the terms of the water conservation order and has been the main arena for discussion on issues involving public land around the lakes.

The idea of managing the public land at Wairarapa Moana as a park was mooted in the 1990s but having more than one land owner made the task too difficult.

In 1999 DOC produced a management plan for Lake Wairarapa, should a source of extra funding for work at the lake become available. It didn't.

In the meantime, DOC, SWDC and GWRC continued to individually manage the reserves they were responsible for.



Featherston locals at Barton Lagoon planting - Lake Domain. Photograph Jim Flack

Haami Te Whaiti and Ron Mark planting at Lake Domain. Photograph Jim Flack

### Joining forces

In 2007, the three organisations met with Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Rangitane o Wairarapa and hapu representatives to work together to manage the public land at Wairarapa Moana. Despite the issues of a multitude of different titles and a lack of funding for the project all agreed the area was too important not to pool their resources and expertise to make improvements and the parties decided to work towards a Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park.

The project focuses on improving the health of native plants and animals and on the cultural and recreational opportunities for people to enjoy themselves on the public land.

It is overseen by the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park Group, made up of: two representatives from DOC, Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Rangitane o Wairarapa and GWRC, one from SWDC and a combined representative from Papawai and Kohunui Marae.

### A joint vision for Wairarapa Moana

Given that the area has radically changed in the past 100 years, no one was fooling themselves that there would be any quick fixes. The area is a crucial part of the South Wairarapa economy. Any improvements would have to benefit the community.

After much discussion, the group settled on a vision, mission and goals for the project.

**Project Vision :** Restoring our wetland treasure – Whakaora te repo, ka ora te taonga Wai.

**Project Mission :** We will work with the community to enhance the spiritual identity and ecology of Wairarapa Moana, and improve recreational and economic opportunities for the benefit of everyone.

#### Project Goals :

- Wairarapa Moana is highly valued as a place of cultural and historical significance that inspires our future.
- Healthy water in Wairarapa Moana nurtures all native plants, animals and their ecosystems.
- Wairarapa Moana underpins environmental, customary, recreational and commercial values that benefit the wider community.

Wairarapa Moana partners at the official project launch at Kohunui Marae. L-R Alan McKenzie (Department of Conservation), Nelson Rangitane (Kahungunu ki Wairarapa) Mihi Namana, Fran Wilde (Greater Wellington Regional Council), Yvette Grace (Rangitane o Wairarapa), Haami Te Whaiti (combined hapu representative), kneeling Adrienne Staples (South Wairarapa District Council). Photograph Jim Flack.



Group chair Fran Wilde describes Wairarapa Moana as an important part of the region's identity. *...the Wairarapa district is named after this area of lakes and wetlands. It must have been a very prominent feature when the first people arrived.*

Reflecting that in recent history the area has suffered from a lack of profile, as have many wetland areas... *However, its value is understood by the people who know it, live around it and visit it – Wairarapa Moana is a real treasure.*



Sarah Wyn-Pettus and daughter Sage planting at Wairarapa Yacht Club. Photograph Jim Flack.

In the beginning God made Carex seeds. Jim Flack at Lake Domain. Photograph supplied by Jim Flack.