

2020 Progress Report

Chair column



William Thomas, Ashburton
Water zone committee Chair

2020 has been a challenging year for us all, with changing rules, elections, and above all else, the disruption that Covid-19 has brought. But it's a reminder of the importance of looking out for one another, and taking care of physical and mental health.

I'm proud that the Ashburton Water zone committee was still able to achieve many of our goals this year. We successfully held a virtual meeting during lockdown, and in spring explored how landowners are protecting some of the region's remaining wetlands. Thanks to Angela Cushnie and NZ Landcare Trust for organising the latter.

We also spent some time planning the committee's future work. Advances are being made on the Hakatere / Ashburton River, with protection for wildlife at the rivermouth, and the consent review is progressing. Next year we

will be working with the community on two new priority waterways – Wakanui stream and Carters Creek. These two waterways pass through urban and rural areas, and have water quality issues associated with both town and country.

Next year we will be refreshing our zone committee membership, and we are keen for passionate individuals who care about freshwater in the Ashburton region to join. Get in contact if you know someone who may be interested.

Finally, as this year ends, we say farewell to two "retiring" committee members: Karl Russell (who represents Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua on the committee) and John Waugh. John and Karl both have a wealth of knowledge and passion for the people and waterways of our region, and we're grateful for their dedication.

Key achievements 2020

- Recreation and conservation groups worked alongside councils towards the development of the Hakatere/Ashburton River mouth. Fencing was installed to protect an area in which 400 seedlings were planted, a new walkway was created, a 4WD route leads around the protected area and predator traps are being monitored to protect birds nesting around the site.
- The zone committee was delighted to support the Carters Creek Enhancement Committee's action plan to restore the creek to a pristine waterway. This action plan involves identifying the key sources of pollution and actions to mitigate them through fencing, stock exclusion and planting, as well as flood and stormwater management.
- The zone committee supported the Ashburton River consent review process and affected consent holders, providing feedback and guidance to the Environment Canterbury project team. Important progress made towards this key outcome, with half the consent reviews now granted.
- The Hekeao/Hinds Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) Project increased the number of active recharge sites from 12 to 17 and increased annual recharge volume from 6.15 million cubic meters to 11.1 million cubic metres. Monitoring shows that groundwater influenced by the pilot site remains low in nitrate-nitrogen concentrations (1-3 parts per million) and groundwater levels remain sustainably high, while the Near River Recharge site has significantly increased flow length in the Hekeao/Hinds River.

New signage installed together with fencing at Ashton Beach this year gives visitors an idea of the amazing biodiversity found at the site.



Delivering the community's vision for freshwater

The Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS) puts finding solutions for freshwater management in the hands of the community, with support from councils, Ngāi Tahu, and others. The strategy sets out freshwater goals and targets to deliver the community's vision for freshwater.











“To gain the greatest cultural, economic, environmental, recreational and social benefits from our water resources within a sustainable framework both now and for future generations.”

Each of the ten community-led water zone committees work collaboratively to develop freshwater recommendations to ensure council plans give effect to these goals and targets.

Within each target area there are several specific time-bound targets to be achieved and these are monitored and reported on to ensure progress is being made.

The target areas are shown below – read some of the stories about what is being done in the zone to achieve deliver on these on the next page.

CWMS Targets

	Ecosystem health and biodiversity		Kaitiakitanga		Recreational and amenity opportunities		Irrigated land area		Regional and national economies
	Natural character of braided rivers		Drinking water		Water use efficiency		Energy security and efficiency		Environmental limits

Extraordinary year provides a chance to pause and reflect

2020 has been an extraordinary year in more ways than one.

This time last year we had not heard of Covid-19 or the exceptional lengths governments from around the world would take to slow its spread. Keeping any group working productively together in such circumstances can be a challenge but each committee has embraced new technology to communicate, adapted their work programmes and continued their commitment to improve water management in their zone. The committee's year in review report highlights their achievements in what has been a challenging year.

2020 has provided an opportunity to pause and reflect on the achievements of the last ten years of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy and in particular the progress that had been made to put a Resource Management Act planning framework in place (Land and Water Regional Plan). A plan, however, is only as good as the actions that follow. The Canterbury Mayoral Forum asked councils to work in partnership with Rūnanga and committees to refocus their work more on facilitating action on the ground with their local communities. This review of the zone committees has taken longer than expected, because

of Covid disruptions, but we expect to have a new Terms of Reference completed by the end of the year. Councils have also taken the opportunity to clarify their three year priorities, and where they would like support from committees, in a Letter of Shared Priorities.

The next few years is going to continue to be challenging for many local communities as they grapple with the implementation of the new National Policy Statement for Freshwater and National Environmental Standards. Furthermore, the government has announced its intention to repeal the Resource Management Act and Ngai Tahu has sought a declaration in the High Court seeking Rangatiratanga over freshwater in its rohe. These changes will be unsettling and uncomfortable for many local communities.

The new Terms of Reference and Letter of Shared Priorities will give committees a clear focus for future action and an ability to support their local communities to navigate this next wave of change designed to further improve the mauri and health of our freshwater and the way it is managed.

Ashburton zone committee members and other guests join landowner Angus McKenzie at a coastal wetland on his Lowcliffe farm.



A rocky ride for freshwater species

Fish in the lower reaches of the Hekeao / Hinds River now have a more stimulating environment – thanks to some big rocks.

A cluster of huge boulders have been installed in the riverbed near Longbeach. The boulders were placed in the river as part of a pilot programme that aims to improve diversity in river conditions – and create better habitats for a range of species.

The operation was supported by the Ashburton Water zone committee and funded by Fonterra.

Immediately downstream of the new boulders in the Hekeao, deeper and slower-flowing water forms a pool, perfect habitat for trout. Towards the north bank, the water flows faster over a shallow channel, known as a riffle. Other sections of river nearby form runs – smooth, steady flowing sections of river.

Together, the diversity of water flows forms a habitat for a greater range of species.



Rocks installed in the lower Hekeao / Hinds river create a better environment for freshwater fish.



Volunteers from Forest & Bird set predator traps near the Hakatere Ashburton river mouth.



Fences and planting protect wildlife hotspot

The zone committee was pleased with progress at one of the region's most important biodiversity hotspots this year, as the Hakatere Ashburton River mouth management plan begins to be put into place. Work at the site is the result of a strategic plan commissioned by the zone committee last year.

Fencing and path building has formed a 4WD access to the beach and river, while creating a protected space bordered by gorse and native plants, as well as the hāpua.

A new walkway passes through the protected area, where around 400 hardy native seedlings have been planted to fill gaps in the scrub and create a better environment for native fauna.

Signage at parking sites encourages visitors to look out for the variety of native birds that nest in the area, as well as native and introduced fish species. Traps have been set up around the area to control predator numbers.



Funding gives a boost to key dryland species

A remnant of the Ashburton region's natural shrubland will continue to thrive, with help from Immediate Steps (IMS) funding recommended by the Ashburton Water zone committee.

Funding is being used to meet the cost of managing the reserve over five years, and will pay for weed control, mowing and repairs carried out by a caretaker. This will be boosted by an additional 400 hours of planting and site management carried out annually by volunteers.

The alluvial plains of the Ashburton region, too dry for large trees to grow, were once dominated by kānuka and other dryland species. Now only tiny pockets of kānuka remain where once they covered a quarter of a million hectares.

Invasive grass species can spread from nearby farmland if the site is not maintained, so this IMS funding will help preserve the best remaining such site close to Ashburton.



Dryland species like kānuka are thriving in Harris reserve, near Ashburton.



The Ashburton Water zone committee left to right: Cr. Stuart Wilson, Ashburton Mayor Neil Brown, Les Wanhalla, William Thomas (Chair), Karl Russell, Angela Cushnie, Cargill Henderson, Cr. Ian Mackenzie. Absent: Arapata Reuben, Chris Allen, Genevieve de Spa, John Waugh (absent).

Zone description

The Ashburton Water Zone is bordered by the Southern Alps, Pacific Ocean, Rakaia and Rangitata rivers, and divided by the Hakatere / Ashburton and Hekeao / Hinds rivers, which have their origins in the foothills.

The rivers, lakes and wetlands that once covered large areas of the zone have always been an important place and food basket for Ngāi Tahu. Three rūnanga consider the zone part of their takiwā – Arowhenua Rūnanga, Taumutu Rūnanga and Ngāi Tūāhuriri Rūnanga.

Key zone contacts

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Zone committee membership 2020

Rūnanga representatives

Arapata Reuben –
Te Rūnanga o Tūāuriri

Karl Russell –
Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua

Les Wanhalla –
Te Rūnanga o Taumutu

Community members

William Thomas (Chair)

Chris Allen (Deputy Chair)

Angela Cushnie

Cargill Henderson

Genevieve de Spa

John Waugh

Council representatives

Ian Mackenzie
(Environment Canterbury)

Stuart Wilson
(Ashburton District Council)

