

Motueka Catchment CBFM SHMAKers Group

Tasman / Nelson | May 2026

Wai Connection Highlight Story

Motueka Catchment Collective / Tasman

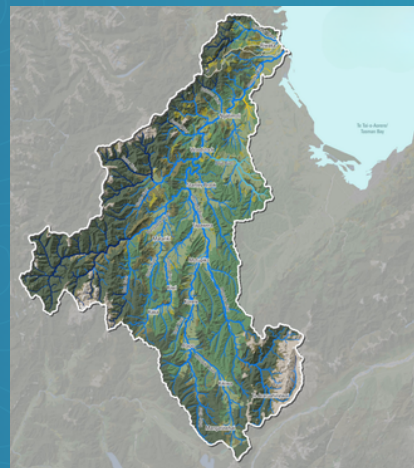
Photo credit: Motueka Catchment Collective

Overview

The Motueka catchment is a large and diverse river system flowing from mountain headwaters through farms, orchards and rural communities to the estuary and Tasman Bay. Its waterways are important for ecology, recreation, livelihoods and cultural connection, making freshwater health a shared priority across the catchment.

Through Wai Connection support, Tasman Bay Guardians and the Motueka Catchment Collective have helped establish a growing community-based freshwater monitoring network.

This group is known as the Motueka Catchment SHMAKers, which provide ongoing support, where local groups are building practical monitoring skills and contributing to a stronger understanding of stream health within their communities.



The initiative now includes 11 monitoring groups across the Motueka and Riuwaka catchments, with more than 30 trained SHMAKers monitoring 25 active sites across 12 sub-catchments.

Alongside SHMAK assessments, groups are also using temperature loggers and eDNA sampling to better understand environmental change over time and strengthen community connection to local waterways.



PHOTO CAPTIONS — 1.Winnie Long, Richard Osmaston, Sophie England discovering the macro invertebrates in their local stream **2.** Shannon Parker, Winnie Long, Debbie Win learning clarity testing **3.** Kath Dewar, Jill Bonny. **4.** Kate explaining Phosphate testing



Strengthening Skills and Data Quality

The eleven groups continue to receive support through regular SHMAKers workshops focused on improving monitoring skills, ensuring consistency, and deepening understanding of freshwater science.

Technical experts from Tasman District Council, Cawthron and Tasman Bay Guardians have contributed specialist knowledge, while quality control activities have helped ensure that monitoring practices remain reliable and comparable across the catchment.

This combination of enthusiasm, training, and quality assurance has transformed local interest into a capable, confident monitoring network.



A Connected Community of Practice

Another major outcome has been the sense of connection that is emerging between monitors across the catchment.

Workshops have created opportunities for groups to compare results, share experiences, and learn from one another as part of a growing community of practice. Between workshops, a WhatsApp group keeps communication flowing - a space to ask questions, troubleshoot issues, and encourage one another.

This ongoing peer support is becoming a cornerstone of the network's success, showing what's possible when community interest is matched with practical tools, strong partnerships and hands-on-support.



Wider Community Connections and Youth Involvement

The monitoring network is also building valuable connections with local schools, adding an important youth and education dimension to the catchment's freshwater mahi. Through the Whitebait Connection programme, students have taken part in stream investigations and SHMAK-style monitoring activities, gaining hands-on experience with freshwater ecology and developing early understanding of kaitiakitanga.

With Tasman Bay Guardians' support, tamariki have also contributed to native riparian planting efforts, helping to restore stream margins and improve habitat for freshwater species. They are now working to grow their own native plants through TBG's Nurseries in Schools programme, with the intention of supporting local restoration projects in their communities.

These school partnerships are helping to nurture future environmental leaders and strengthen the sense of shared responsibility for freshwater across the Motueka catchment.



Building a Scientific Baseline for the Catchment

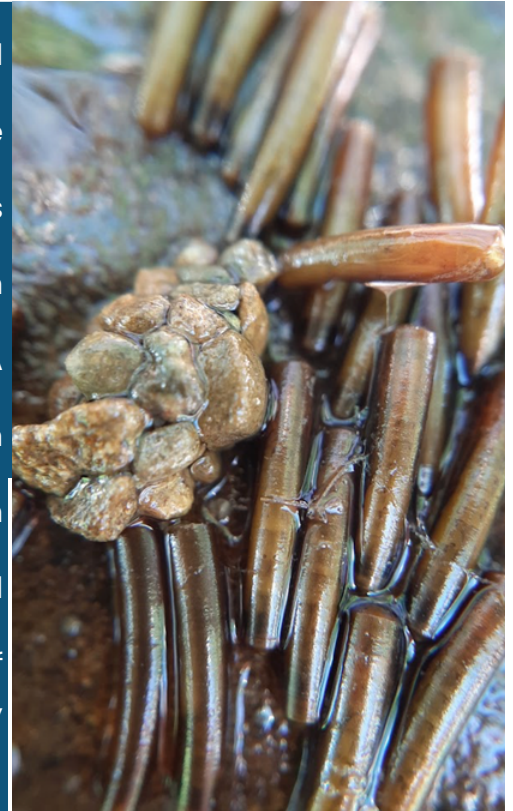
A key focus has been building a strong scientific foundation to guide future restoration. With support from Wai Connection and the National CBFM QA Framework, groups are now monitoring more than 25 sites, with nutrient testing showing generally healthy conditions and providing an important baseline for future tracking.

Monitoring plans include SHMAK assessments, eDNA sampling through Wilderlab, and continuous temperature monitoring using HOBO loggers. Together, these tools provide insights into stream health, biodiversity, and long-term environmental trends. Some groups are already identifying concerns, including high summer water temperatures and the absence of key species such as giant kōkopu.

Participation in the Focus Catchment Mapping Series (FCMS), supported by EOS Ecology, has also strengthened understanding of land-use impacts and restoration priorities. Working alongside Tasman Bay Guardians, the Motueka Catchment Collective, Tasman District Council, and Cawthron Institute, groups are being supported to use this data to inform future restoration planning.

Next Steps

- Continued SHMAKers workshops to grow skills, confidence, and shared understanding
- Ongoing long term monitoring using SHMAK, temperature loggers, and eDNA to track trends over time
- Working with Tasman District Council to minimise data gaps and strengthen data coverage in the catchment
- Providing training for Freshwater Survey 123 app & platform once released
- Introducing and guiding groups through the National CBFM QA Data Interpretation Guidance, launching in June 2026
- Welcoming and training new groups as more interest in monitoring continues to grow
- Continuing quality control and technical guidance from partner organisations
- Strengthening the community of practice through shared learning, communication and collaboration
- Building a more comprehensive catchment-wide picture of freshwater health to inform community decisions on land use, restoration, compliance, and long-term water planning



To learn more about the CBFM SHMAKers Group, Motueka Catchment Collective, or how 'Wai Connection – Tatai Ki te Wai' is supporting them, please contact:

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