

Waingongoro Awa Charitable Trust (WACT) Highlight Story

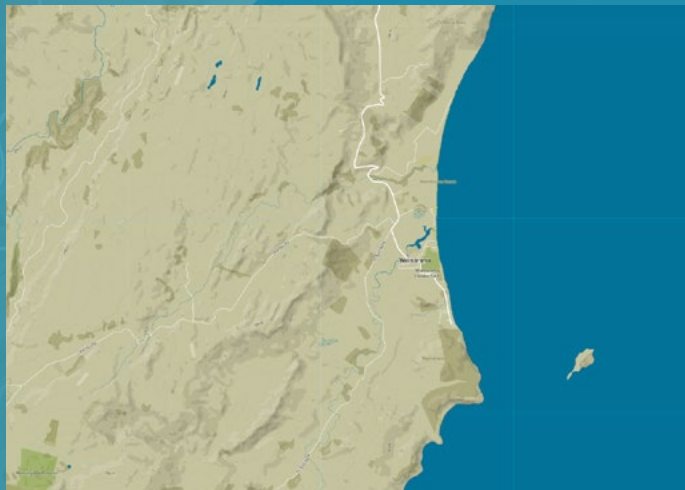
Hawkes Bay, May 2026

Group Overview

The Waingōngoro Awa Charitable Trust [WACT] is a community-led organisation dedicated to the restoration of the Waingōngoro Awa and the surrounding Waimārama and Waipuka catchments. The Waingōngoro Awa is a coastal stream that originates from freshwater springs on the Maraetōtara Plateau, flows through ecologically significant wetlands, and discharges to the sea at Waimārama Beach.

The Trust's purpose is to protect and enhance local biodiversity and improve water quality through strengthening community capability in freshwater management. This is undertaken alongside the preservation and intergenerational transfer of mātauranga Māori. The Trust also supports the reconnection of whānau to sites of cultural significance. WACT works collaboratively with landowners, whānau, hapū, marae, local organisations, and community groups to achieve resilient, long-term, and locally driven biodiversity and freshwater outcomes.

Through the Wai Connection programme delivered by Sustainable Hawke's Bay, engagement within the



Map: an indicative view of the catchment area south of Napier (source: LAWA).

Waimārama and Waipuka catchments commenced in 2024. Since that time, Wai Connection has continued to support WACT through a range of community engagement initiatives aimed at building capacity and capability among local kaitiaki.



Mahi on the ground

Empowering kaitiaki through training

At the heart of the mission is building local capacity for environmental care. Sustainable Hawke's Bay Wai Connections Catchment Coordinators, Aimey Tahu, Jane Gardiner, and Emily Strong, along with Connector Jae Whelan, led numerous Community Based Freshwater Monitoring (CBFM) workshops. Kaitiaki at Waimārama and Waitangi Marae gained hands-on skills in eDNA sampling, fish passage barrier assessments, and Stream Health Monitoring and Assessment Kit (SHMAK) protocols. To ensure this vital work continues, the team gifted a SHMAK kit and distributed 18 eDNA kits across the sub-catchments. Sustainable Hawke's Bay was also thrilled to support the Mountains to Sea National Wānanga at Hinetemoa Marae, creating an incredible space for regional and national conservation groups to share knowledge.

Connecting community, schools, and whakapapa

Engaging the next generation and bringing families onto the land has been incredibly rewarding. The Sustainable HB team rolled out the Whitebait Connection programme to all tamariki at Waimārama School, blending classroom sessions with local field trips to Balls Clearing and Lake Waikaremoana. Thanks to Air New Zealand funding and trap boxes built by IDEA Services, Sustainable Hawke's Bay also helped the school launch a successful predator trapping line. Beyond the schools, a Nature and Whakapapa Wānanga at Te Aratipi Station combined native planting instruction with cultural history from iwi leadership, while an "Insect Intrigue" evening at Peach Gully introduced citizen science methods to track local flying insects and freshwater macroinvertebrates.

Species monitoring and habitat restoration

Scientific monitoring has taken major leaps forward to protect native species. Working closely with the Department of Conservation (DOC) and hapū partners, the Wai Connection team installed lamprey pheromone samplers in

the Waingōngoro and Te Tōtara awa to investigate historical sightings. The team also placed artificial "love mattresses" to map local inanga spawning success, which culminated in a heavily attended, two-day Inanga Wānanga. This event fostered a deep sense of kotahitanga (unity) among mana whenua, landowners, and policymakers as they practiced fish identification and conducted nighttime spotlighting surveys.

Marking restorative milestones

Sustainable Hawke's Bay was proud to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of returning the Waingōngoro Awa to its original course. To honor this milestone, the team joined community members to plant eco-sourced carex for bank stabilization and installed a continuous water temperature monitor to track climate impacts. Looking forward, new partnerships—such as working with the Hawke's Bay Regional Council to promote erosion control schemes at Te Tōtara—ensure the communities remain resilient, connected, and fully equipped to look after their waterways for generations to come.

What's next?

The Waingōngoro Awa Charitable Trust is looking to further consolidate their learnings they have gained over the past three years through CBFM training events, eDNA sampling, and engaging with tamariki and community to develop knowledge and interest in local biodiversity. The trust will continue to refine their long-term restoration pathway, and strengthen established partnerships to enable community capability and catchment-wide resilience remain at the centre of the environment work the trust continues to carry out. As the Ministry for the Environment's [MFE] fresh water improvement fund comes to a close following the end of the financial year, the immediate focus for the trust is to continue delivering on their remaining water quality, biodiversity engagement and education objectives through to June. In conjunction with continuing their mahi, securing funding to ensure the continuity of the restoration work that has been undertaken within the catchment is a major priority going forward.

"Working with Wai Connection and Sustainable HB has been instrumental to our project, thanks to the expertise, resources, networking and passion they bring to the table. We are incredibly grateful for this partnership, and can't say enough how helpful the Catchment Coordinators are - it is a genuine pleasure to work with them"

-Jaroz Popata - Co-Founder of Maungataniwha ki Rangaunu Trust

