



He tāngata, He tāngata, He tāngata – The Power of Collaboration in Waihou Piako Catchment Conservation and Restoration Projects

On the 29th of May, the Waikato Biodiversity Forum collaboratively held the “He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata”, wānanga and hui, to showcase how collaboration between iwi, hapū, community groups and agencies is key to successful conservation and restoration projects in the Piako and Waihou catchments.

The day began with a karakia timatanga from Mohi Korohina, of Ngāti Hinerangi, followed with a spirited mihi whakatau from Norm Hill of Ngāti Tumutumu, acknowledging Atua and ancestors, and welcoming guests to their rohe. As well to state the kaupapa and set intentions for the day. Sam Mcelwee, the Biodiversity Forum coordinator then followed by making acknowledgements and setting the scene for the day. Basically, that the Piako Waihou catchment like many places, has been modified dramatically from its original state, which in some way, large or small, we are all responsible for, so we must work together to remedy the situation.

The first speaker was Rebecca Lee, communications manager at [Manāki Kaimai Mamaku](#). Her kōrero was all about the power of “comms” for conservation. Rebecca began by explaining that we now exist in an “attention economy”, with swathes of information and content getting blasted at us from all angles. This can be overwhelming and even off putting for those who just want to get on with the mahi of restoring and protecting biodiversity. But the fact is, most restoration groups must maintain and attract funding, volunteers and general support and awareness for the good work they are doing.

Rebecca then provided a clear approach to social media and content creation, which can help seasoned users to complete beginners. Her key message was to try and keep things simple, so as to not get overwhelmed by limitless options. For those just getting started, the key messages were - Pick one channel you enjoy using; Done is better than perfect; Lastly, to step outside your comfort zone and celebrate your wins. To see more detail of her presentation [click here](#).



Sam helping Te Aroha show her map of the Piako Waihou Catchment

Te Aroha Drummond from the Piako Catchment Forum (PCF) and the Waihou Piako Catchment Trust was next to speak. Te Aroha’s kōrero charted the evolution of the Forum, from the initial idea coming from passionate local parent and early childhood teacher, Anita Richmond, in 2017, to where they are now with a paid part-time coordinator, a charitable trust (Piako-Waihou Catchment Trust), and multiple projects underway. Te Aroha, set the scene by explaining all the changes that happened with the area over the last 150 years or so. Most notably the deforestation and draining of what is now known as the Hauraki Basin, to which now there is less than 2% of the original lowland forest. So it is not a stretch to say that PCF is an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff, and this reflects the nature of their projects, which are primarily based on conserving and restoring the remaining low-land fragments. Integrated into these efforts, is the restoration and protection of cultural heritage, as well as education and pest control. PCF evolution and story is both heartening and inspiring. Their resilience has come from the back of some very passionate and hard working individuals coming together from a range of backgrounds and experience, to get to where they are now. To see Te Aroha’s presentation [click here](#). Website piakocatchmentforum.co.nz

Next up was Mohi Korohina, of Ngāti Hinerangi and Wairere Mahi. After his introductory mihi, Mohi spoke about returning from living in Australia to take the opportunity to support and assist his iwi in restoring the Mauri of Hinerangi whenua and people post settlement. With jobs for nature funding (running out end of June 2024), Ngāti Hinerangi Trust created the Wairere Mahi team, who took on the huge job of intensive predator control within a 1,000 Hectare area of the western Kaimai Ranges between Wairere Falls and State Highway 29. This year the team were able to get a 500ha area from 75% presence of rats in tracking tunnels down to 0%. While possums went from 24% to 10 % in leg hold traps. This was a huge achievement, particularly given the extremely difficult terrain they are operating in and the share size of area they cover. This required kaimahi to stay multiple nights in the ngahere, week on week, while sacrificing time from family in order to maximise the impact of their efforts.

Aside from the nuts and bolts of the predator control operation. Mohi highlighted the importance of collaboration. He remarked how in the beginning he wondered what the need was to reach out and connect with other groups, but soon came to realise its importance. One such group was Predator Free Matamata (PFM). Martin Louw from PFM also joined Mohi on the stage to reinforce power of collaboration to uplift and add value, not only their work to eradicate predators, but also as people, sharing the common connection we all have to te taiao, and breaking down so many perceived barriers between different people that arise when we don't make an effort to connect. To see more about Wairere Mahi [click here](#). To read more about collaboration between PFM and Waiere mahi [click here](#).

The last to speak was Rebecca Eivers of [Friends of Waiharakeke](#) and [Wai Kōkōpu Consulting](#). She shared insights and research findings from the last decade of restoration efforts she been involved in on the Hauraki Plains, working with local farmers. The focus of these projects has been on reconnecting waterways, wetlands, farmers, and communities. Rebecca began by reiterating the history of the area, with reference to massive land-use change initiated by European settlement. She remarked that it took such a massive effort to clear and drain the plains, and despite the shortcomings of it's results for biodiversity, which we now know, we can draw on a similar drive to do the mahi to restore wetlands and water courses on the plains – also requiring a huge effort.

One of the projects Rebecca spoke of involved Millington Dairies Farm, where riparian wetland restoration works took place, to improve water quality, manage flood flows, and enhance biodiversity. By permanently retiring land into wetland and lowland forest, and strategically selecting plant species, they aimed to maximize biodiversity. The wetland, with a focus on sedge land recreation, saw improvements in water quality and biodiversity, as evidenced by various water quality metrics.

Moving forward, the emphasis is on scaling up these efforts across the catchment and involving the local community through initiatives like Constructed Treatment Wetlands (CTWs), raceway wetland swales, and riparian planting. An important mechanism to upscale, is the creation of the "Waiharakeke and Friends", which will link together a group of farmers who are all trying to restore wetlands, watercourses and biodiversity on farms within, or close to the Waiharakeke stream catchment. David Sing and Johan Van Ras are two farmers involved and have been active members of the Piako Catchment Forum. Amongst other restorative work undertaken on their farms, the planting of carex species (geminata in particular) on both sides of drains have welded very promising results in terms of biodiversity benefits and reducing maintenance of watercourses (drains). [Click here](#) to see Carex trial research and implementation guide, and [click here](#) to see Rebecca's presentation.

After all the kōrero was finished up, the attendees which numbered over 50 enjoyed a catered lunch together and further discussion and networking took place. The plan after this where to have a guided tour of Keep Te Aroha Beautiful and Ngāti Tumutumu restoration projects within Te Aroha town, but it was called off as the weather really packed in by lunch, and much of the region experienced power outages that evening due to



Martin and Mohi talk about their mahi and whanaungatanga

high winds and lightning. Despite the cancellation of the field trip, the day achieved what it set out to do by showcasing how collaboration between groups and agencies is key to successful conservation and restoration projects in the Piako Waihou catchment or anywhere .

The reality is that the work achieved here so far is just a drop in the bucket in relation to what we would like to achieve to meet environmental, cultural and economic sustainability goals. But is absolutely clear that working together is crucial to make it happen, and like most worthwhile things, working collaboratively is often easier to talk about it than do. So were lucky to hear from people and groups who are actively working across cultural, organisational and many other types of barriers, to create outcomes that are greater than what could be achieved individually. Also like most worthwhile things, Its not always pretty, and doesn't always work out as planned. But only by taking actions, while being open-minded and willing to listen, share and reflect, we can grow and become more effective in our actions.

