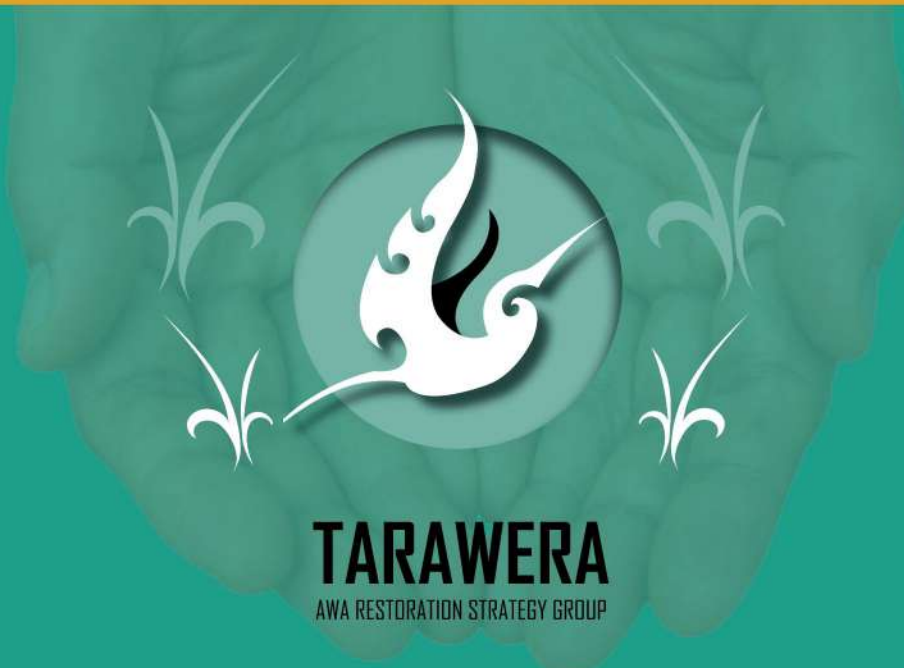




TE RAUTAKI WAI KI TARAWERA

Restoring Te Mauri o Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua

**Tarawera Awa Restoration
Strategy Document 2026 - 2036**

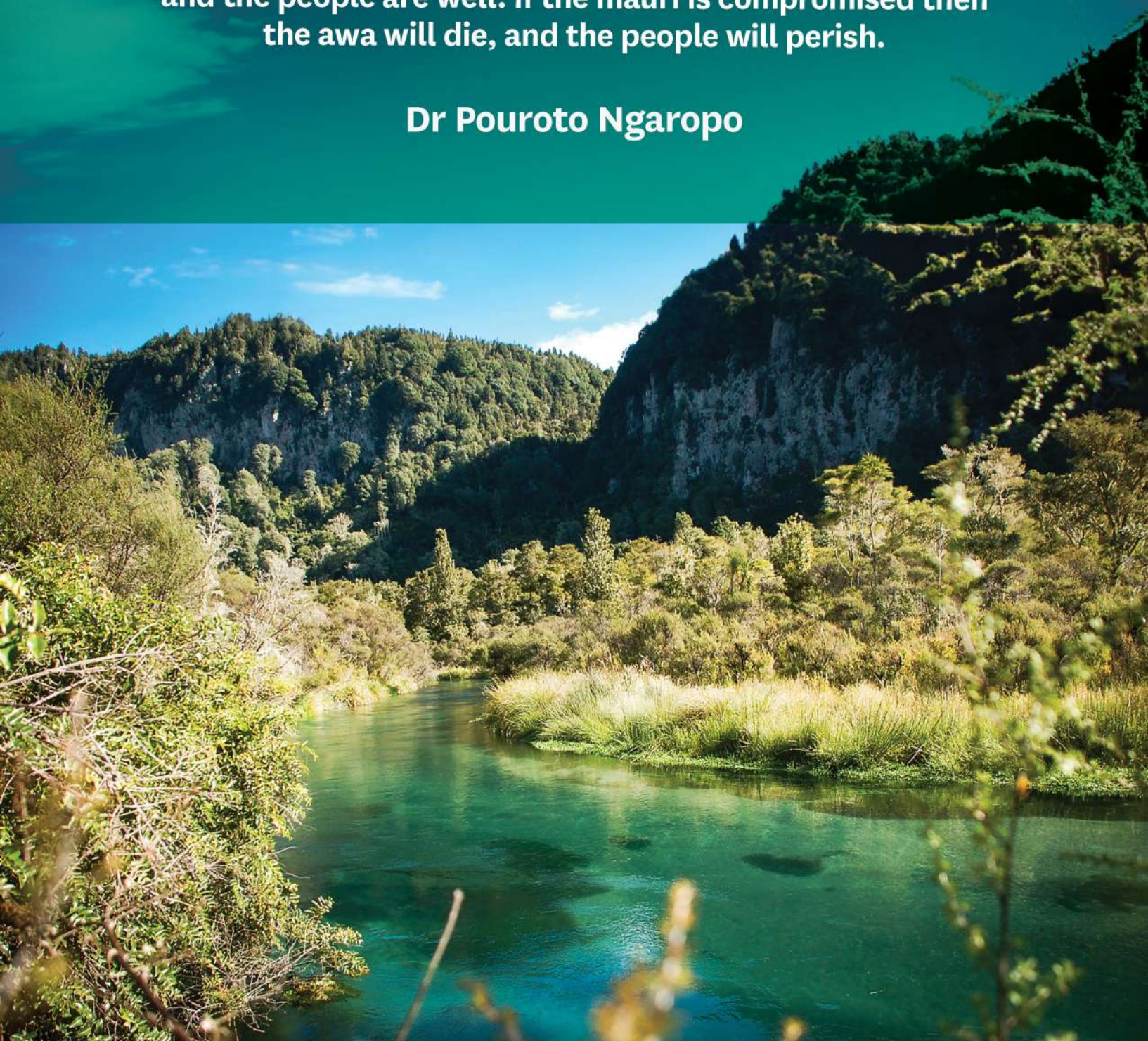


He whakataukī mō te mauri o te wai

**Ka ora te mauri, ka ora te awa o Tarawera,
ka ora te tangata; ka mate te mauri, ka mate te
awa o Tarawera, ka mate te tangata.**

**If the life force is well then, the river Tarawera is well,
and the people are well. If the mauri is compromised then
the awa will die, and the people will perish.**

Dr Pouroto Ngaropo



Message from the Chair

Kia tātou te hunga e noho piri tata ana ki te taha o Tarawera Awa, e rere ana te mihi i tēnei kaupapa hirahira, kia whakahokia mai te mauri ki Tarawera Awa ki te Awa o te Atua, nei te mihi maioha!

It is with great pride and deep aroha that I introduce “Te Rautaki Wai ki Tarawera – The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Document 2026–2036”. This document is more than just a plan; it is a commitment to restoring the mauri of Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua, weaving together the aspirations and efforts of many to heal and protect our sacred waters.

The kōtuku stands at the heart of our vision. Once, these majestic birds regularly migrated to Matatā, their return a harbinger of good things to come. I still remember the joy on my grandparents’ faces as they took me and my younger sister down to the lagoon to see two kōtuku nesting — an experience that remains etched in my heart. Sadly, in recent years, sightings of the kōtuku have become rare. Yet, through our collective efforts, we are seeing change.

This Strategy represents a significant milestone in a long journey — one shaped by shared purpose, challenges, and persistence. It is deeply grounded in the enactment of the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022, which not only acknowledges past grievances but also paves a new path forward. As a statutory document, the Strategy ensures that our restoration efforts are durable, recognised, and accountable. It aligns with our legislative obligations and the policy processes of the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and connects through to the planning of Kawerau, Whakatāne and Rotorua District Councils.

We recognise the extraordinary work of the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group, whose unwavering dedication has brought us to this point. Through tireless engagement with Iwi, our communities, and stakeholders, we are not only restoring the mauri of the awa and surrounding catchment but creating the conditions for the kōtuku to return.

Our kaupapa is gaining momentum, with many coming forward to support our vision. The voluntary participation of diverse voices has been instrumental in shaping this Strategy. It is a guide for partnership and shared decision-making — a living commitment to long-term care for the catchment and to the values we hold collectively.

The return of the kōtuku symbolises hope, renewal, and the rewards of our shared efforts. May this Strategy inspire enduring partnership and action as we journey together into a future where our awa flows strongly, our mauri is vibrant, and the kōtuku once again graces our waters.

Leith Comer

Chairman

Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group





Contents

Message from the Chair	3
Executive Summary	5
Part 1: Setting the scene	7
1.1 Purpose of the Strategy	7
1.2 Map of the strategy area	8
1.3 Summary of historical account	9
1.4 Ngāti Rangitihī - Crown acknowledgements	9
1.5 Moving forward together as Ngā Iwi o Tarawera	10
1.6 Tarawera Aspirations document.....	10
1.7 The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group	11
1.8 He Whakamārama – Our visual identity	14
Part 2: Vision, strategic objectives, and desired outcomes	15
2.1 Our vision.....	15
2.2 Te Awa o te Atua and Tarawera Awa	16
2.3 Strategic Objectives	17
2.4 Desired Outcomes.....	20
Part 3: Our people, our place	21
3.1 Ngā Iwi o Tarawera and the significance of the Awa	21
3.2 A pathway forward.....	21
Part 4: Restoring Mauri	23
4.1 Restoring Mauri – A foundation for transformation	23
Part 5: Integration and influence.....	24
5.1 Strategic influence and policy integration	24
Part 6: Looking forward and action.....	25
6.1 Bringing the strategy to life.....	25
Glossary.....	27
Bibliography	28
Annexes	29
Annex A: Ngā Iwi o Tarawera and the significance of the Awa	30
Annex B: The State of the Tarawera Awa today – Ki Uta, Ki Tai.....	32
Annex C: Restoring Mauri – A foundation for transformation	38
Annex D: Strategic influence and policy integration	41

Executive Summary

The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group, established through the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022, is a collective of Iwi, local and central government. This partnership is united by a shared commitment to restoring the mauri (life force), health, and wellbeing of the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua — together known as Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua — an ancestral awa and catchment of immense cultural, spiritual, environmental, and economic importance.

This Strategy weaves together the efforts of tangata whenua, councils, and communities across the catchment to protect, heal, and sustain the awa for current and future generations.

Our vision

The waters of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua flow in a state of mauri ora ki uta ki tai. Their restored life and vitality, from source to sea, have enticed the majestic kōtuku to return to its home waters.

Context and significance

Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua remains central to the Eastern Bay of Plenty — sustaining key industries such as agriculture, forestry, and wood processing, while nourishing the identity and wellbeing of surrounding communities. Spatial planning across the catchment, particularly in Matatā, will shape the future of the rohe, unlocking the potential of Te Awa o Te Atua as a visitor destination and economic gateway. Grounding this growth in climate resilience and the restoration of mauri is essential to ensuring enduring prosperity.

Strategic objectives

The Strategy is anchored in two interconnected waterbodies, reflecting the living whakapapa of the awa:

- **Tarawera Awa** and its catchment —Tarawera Awa is a living ancestor and life source, whose wellbeing is fundamental to the cultural, environmental, and economic future of the catchment and its people.
- **Te Awa o Te Atua** —Te Awa o Te Atua is a place where ecological abundance, cultural identity, and economic opportunity converge to uplift the wellbeing of Matatā and serve as a gateway to the wider region.

Our **vision** is supported by clear **strategic objectives**, developed to drive targeted and measurable action plans. These objectives reflect the aspirations of tangata whenua and all those who cherish these taonga, focusing on enduring transformation through community leadership, mātauranga Māori, and effective governance.

Desired outcomes

Our strategy focuses on three core themes:

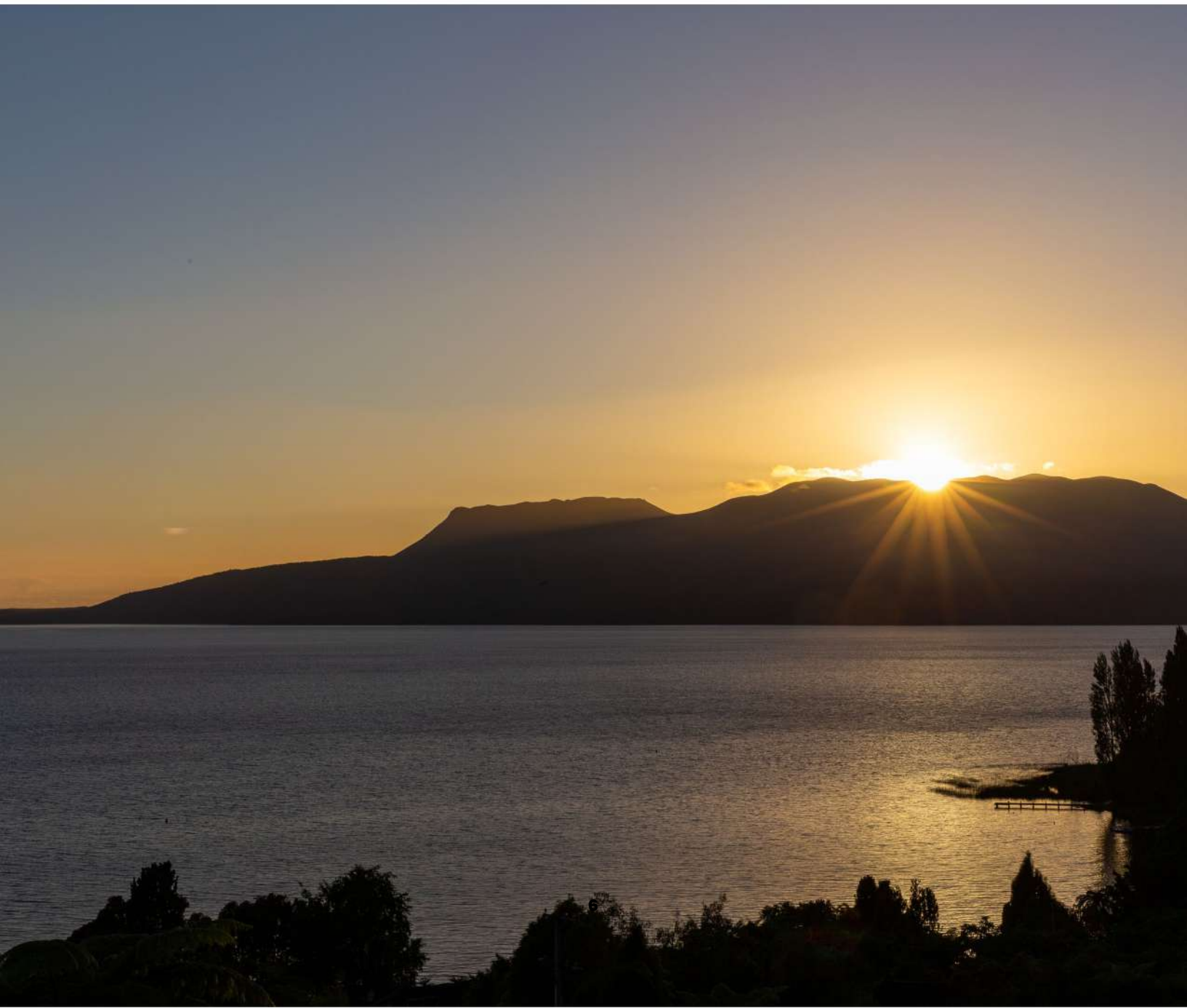
- **Resilient Taiao** — restoring healthy water flows and biodiversity and embedding mātauranga Māori alongside conventional science in decision-making.
- **Strong relationships** — honouring cultural connection, fostering collective purpose, and deepening relationships with the awa.
- **Thriving ecosystems and communities** — supporting sustainable kai gathering, clean and safe waterways, vibrant local economies, and recognition of the awa as a valued visitor destination – for all.

Next steps: Co-development of the Action Plan and implementation

The next phase involves the co-development of a comprehensive overarching Action Plan to deliver on the Strategy's objectives. This 10-year plan will prioritise high-impact projects, define roles and responsibilities for implementation, establish funding pathways, and unite central and local government, Iwi, key stakeholders, and the wider community in the delivery. Each strategic objective will have a tailored action plan. This is a critical next step to bring the strategy to life.

Ongoing monitoring and review will ensure the Strategy remains effective, adaptive, and aligned with community needs.

Together, through shared purpose and collective action, the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group reaffirms its commitment to restoring the mauri of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua — ensuring that the awa, its people, and its ecosystems flourish.



Part 1: Setting the scene

1.1 Purpose of the Strategy

The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Document (herein referred to as the Strategy) serves as both a practical guide and a powerful expression of collective intent to restore, protect, and enhance the mauri of the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua, together known as Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua.

Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua are ancestral waters - awa tūpuna and taonga tuku iho - carrying the whakapapa, mauri, and mana of generations. Their cultural, spiritual, historical, and ecological significance forms the foundation for all restoration efforts under this Strategy.

Developed under the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022, this Strategy marks a pivotal moment: a statutory commitment to healing the environmental, cultural, and spiritual impacts that have accumulated over generations. It reflects the vision of a future where the awa and its people thrive together. The Strategy outlines a shared vision, strategic objectives, and desired outcomes, shaped through the aspirations and insights of Iwi, councils, and community. It provides a strong foundation for coordinated and integrated action to enhance the health and integrity of the Tarawera catchment and uphold the enduring relationship between people and place.

The Strategy requires central government, local authorities, and relevant agencies to recognise and provide for its vision, objectives, and outcomes when developing or reviewing plans under the Resource Management Act. It also requires these entities to take the Strategy into account when making decisions under the Local Government Act 2002 and other relevant legislation, with an emphasis on upholding principles of co-governance and partnership with iwi and hapū.

The TARSG acknowledges legislative change is on the horizon. It is the TARSG expectation the Strategy Document will be provided equivalency consistent with existing provisions in the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022 ensuring the vision, objectives and desired outcomes are recognised and provided for including by the regional spatial plan, relevant land use plans and natural environment plan. Once agreement has been reached and new legislation enacted the Strategy Document will be updated to accurately reflect these arrangements consistent with the Crown's obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi settlements.

For the purposes of this document, "Tarawera Awa" refers to the Tarawera River, its tributaries and catchment, and the geographic area identified in the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022 and associated planning maps. This is the statutory area to which this Strategy applies.

1.2 Map of the strategy area

This map illustrates the geographic area of focus, highlighting key features within the strategy area as well as its surrounding relationships, providing a visual overview to support planning and decision-making.

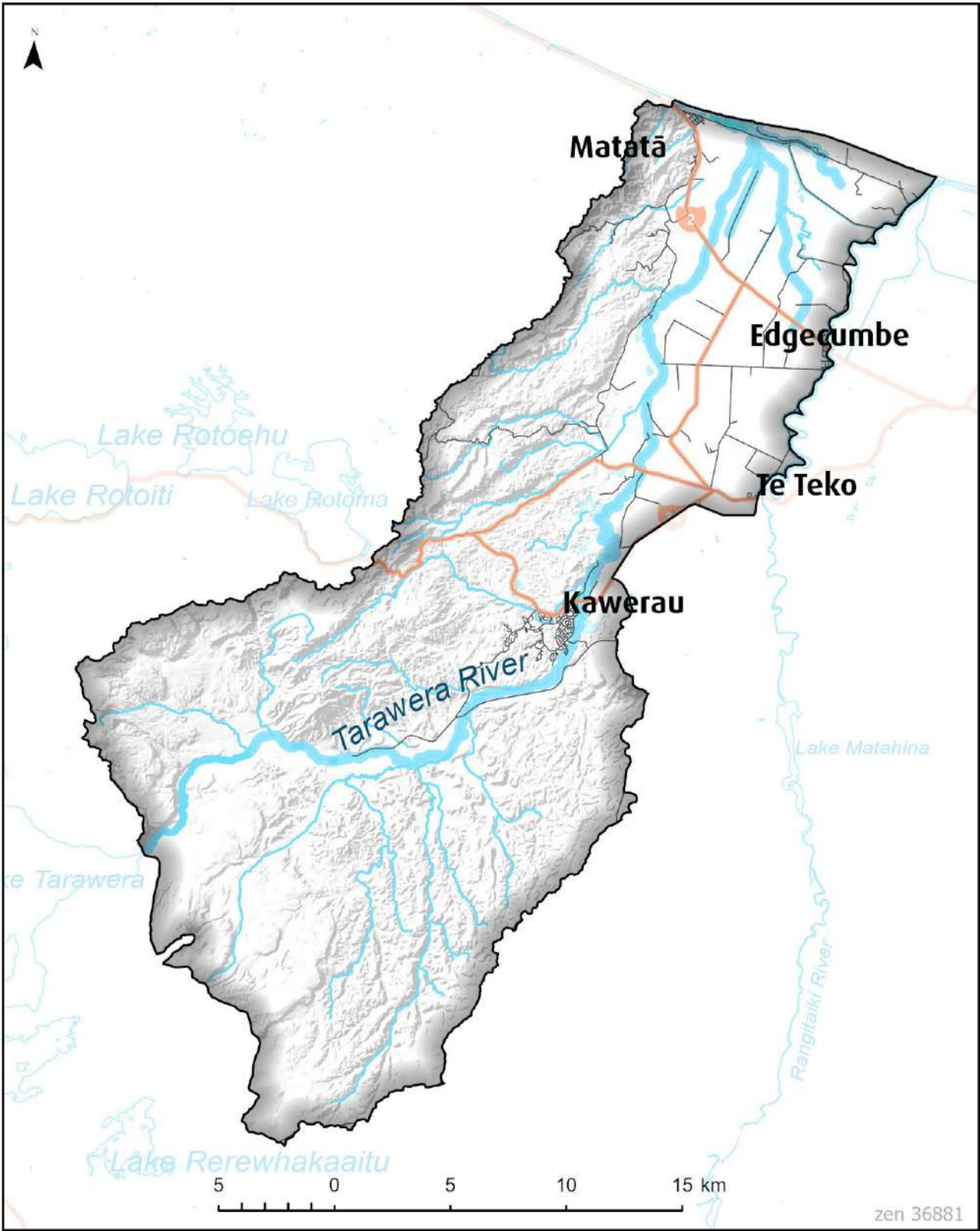


Figure 1 Tarawera Awa Catchment

1.3 Summary of historical account

For Ngāti Rangitihi, Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Māhino, Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau, Ngāti Tarāwhai and Tūhourangi, their connection to the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua has long been one of deep spiritual, cultural, and physical interdependence. However, as described in the Tarawera Awa Aspirations Document (August 2023), from the 19th century onwards, the Crown's actions caused significant environmental harm and cultural loss.

- In the 1910s, the Crown undertook extensive drainage of the Rangitāiki Swamp, destroying resource-rich wetlands, depleting traditional food sources, and contributing to the neglect of two Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau and Ngāti Rangitihi urupā. These environmental interventions deeply degraded the mauri of Te Awa o Te Atua.
- In 1917, the Crown's diversion of the Tarawera River and the continued drainage of the Rangitāiki River had far-reaching consequences beyond ecological damage. These engineering works led directly to the demise of the Port at Matatā by eliminating the natural harbour that had once sustained the town's thriving trading and shipbuilding activities. The disruption of these waterways not only impacted the local economy but further severed the longstanding cultural and commercial ties iwi held with the river and sea.
- From 1954, Crown legislation further permitted the Tasman Pulp and Paper Company to discharge industrial waste into the Tarawera River and Lake Rotoitipaku. This prolonged pollution inflicted profound and long-term damage on waterways that are sacred to iwi.

1.4 Ngāti Rangitihi - Crown acknowledgements

The following excerpts are drawn from section 9 of the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022 and reflect the Crown's formal recognition of the harm caused by its historical actions, including environmental degradation, cultural loss, and breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi.

The drainage of Rangitāiki Swamp

(9)The Crown acknowledges that environmental changes and pollution since the 19th century have been a source of distress and grievance for Ngāti Rangitihi. In particular, the Crown acknowledges that its actions in modifying the courses of the Tarawera and Rangitāiki Rivers and draining the Rangitāiki Swamp destroyed resource-rich wetlands, damaged Ngāti Rangitihi wāhi tapu, and caused significant harm to flora and fauna relied on by Ngāti Rangitihi. The Crown acknowledges that the draining of the Rangitāiki Swamp, combined with industrial pollution, has significantly degraded the Te Awa o Te Atua Lagoon.

Pollution of Tarawera River

(10)The Crown acknowledges that—

(a)the Tarawera River and its tributaries are taonga of great spiritual and cultural importance to Ngāti Rangitihi and once acted as a major trade route and abundant source of customary resources for them. The river conveys the mana of the senior lines of the iwi; and

(b)it promoted legislation in 1954 that minimised regulatory oversight of the Tasman Pulp and Paper Company's disposal of industrial effluent into the Tarawera River. For many years the Crown did not effectively monitor the harm being done to the river by this pollution. The Crown became aware of the pollution by 1974 at the latest, but failed to take reasonable steps to protect the river from harm until the 1980s, despite the existence of alternative effluent disposal schemes to mitigate against pollution; and

(c) the pollution of the river has been an ongoing source of distress and grievance to Ngāti Rangitihī; and

(d) its failure until 1986 to begin applying standard statutory protections to the river caused immense harm to the Tarawera River and was a breach of te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi and its principles.

Crown apology

The following excerpts are from the Crown's formal apology, as set out in section 10 of the Ngāti Rangitihī Claims Settlement Act 2022. This apology acknowledges the significant historical injustices suffered and is directly relevant to the purpose of this Strategy.

(a) The Crown makes the following apology to Ngāti Rangitihī, to your tūpuna and to your mokopuna, and recognises your arduous journey in pursuit of justice. This apology is long overdue.

(b) The Crown is profoundly sorry for the many hardships and tribulations Ngāti Rangitihī have endured, and unreservedly apologises for its failure to fulfil its obligations to you under the Treaty of Waitangi.

(e) The Crown's failure to protect the Tarawera River, a taonga of immense economic, cultural, and spiritual significance to Ngāti Rangitihī, left the river defiled, degraded and polluted. The Crown's acquisition of Ngāti Rangitihī lands combined with environmental damage has had a devastating social and economic impact on Ngāti Rangitihī, undermined your cultural hauora and left you feeling as strangers in your own rohe. For this the Crown apologises.

(g) The Crown hopes this settlement will be a starting point rather than an end, and will signal the beginning of a new, strengthened relationship between Ngāti Rangitihī and the Crown based on co-operation, mutual trust and respect for the Treaty of Waitangi.

1.5 Moving forward together as Ngā Iwi o Tarawera

While Te Rautaki Wai ki Tarawera is a direct outcome of the Ngāti Rangitihī Settlement (2022), The TARSG acknowledges the Treaty Claim Settlement Acts of Ngāti Awa (2005), Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau (2005) and Ngāti Makino (2012). These settlements lay important foundations for affirming the enduring cultural, spiritual, and historical relationships each iwi holds with the Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o te Atua. The TARSG further recognises and respects all Statutory Acknowledgements for the Tarawera Awa held by iwi with relationships to the Tarawera Awa ki te Awa o te Atua. Additionally, the TARSG recognises the relationships of Ngāti Tarāwhai and Tūhourangi with the Tarawera Awa. As we move forward together, we do so with the shared understanding that it is this unwavering, intergenerational, pan-iwi efforts that have laid the foundation for a shared and enduring vision for the Tarawera Awa.

1.6 Tarawera Aspirations document

The Tarawera Awa Aspirations document provides the foundation framework for understanding the iwi collective vision for the future of the Tarawera Awa ki te Awa o te Atua. It articulates the enduring commitment of iwi to restore and protect the mauri of the awa and documents three profoundly meaningful aspirations, which together form the guiding tapestry of the strategic direction for restoring and sustaining the mauri of Tarawera Awa ki te Awa o te Atua¹.

¹ Tarawera Iwi Collective (2023)

1.7 The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group

The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group provides a critical foundation for this Strategy Document's development and embodies the collective commitment to restoring the mauri of the Tarawera Awa and its catchment. Established through the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022, the Group represents a bold step forward in collaborative governance — anchoring long-term stewardship, shared responsibilities, and coordinated action to uphold and protect Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua.

More than a co-governance mechanism, the Strategy Group is a living expression of partnership between Iwi and local government. It serves as the principal vehicle for uniting the aspirations of tangata whenua, local communities, and statutory agencies to guide and coordinate restoration efforts. Through collaborative decision-making, transparency, and inclusivity, the Group plays a vital leadership role in advancing the outcomes of this Strategy.

The following sections outline the Strategy Group's legal foundation, membership structure, and the core responsibilities that underpin its role in restoring and protecting Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua.

1.7.1 Establishment and statutory basis

The Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022 provides for the establishment of a Strategy Group that operates as a permanent joint committee of the Bay of Plenty Regional Council. The Strategy Group's purpose is to support, coordinate and promote the integrated restoration of the mauri of the Tarawera Awa catchment.

The Strategy Document is recognised under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) (see Figure 2). As such, local authorities must recognise and provide for the Strategy Document's common vision, objectives, and desired outcomes when preparing, varying, or changing the Bay of Plenty Regional Policy Statement, or any Regional Plan, or District Plan that applies within the catchment. Until these planning documents are updated, councils must have particular regard to the Strategy Document when assessing resource consents relating to the catchment. This provision embeds the Strategy Document within the statutory planning framework, ensuring it has direct and ongoing influence over freshwater and land use decisions².

Importantly, this Strategy Document sits within a broader hierarchy of influence, targeting both Local Government and the Crown. It reinforces the requirement for local authorities to align their planning documents with the Strategy Document, while also supporting iwi and community efforts to hold the Crown to account for its Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, environmental responsibilities and historic impacts on the Tarawera Awa. This ensures the Strategy Document guides both operational planning and high-level policy development, contributing to enduring and systemic restoration of the mauri o Tarawera ki Te Awa o te Atua.

² See Annex D- Strategic Influence of the Strategy

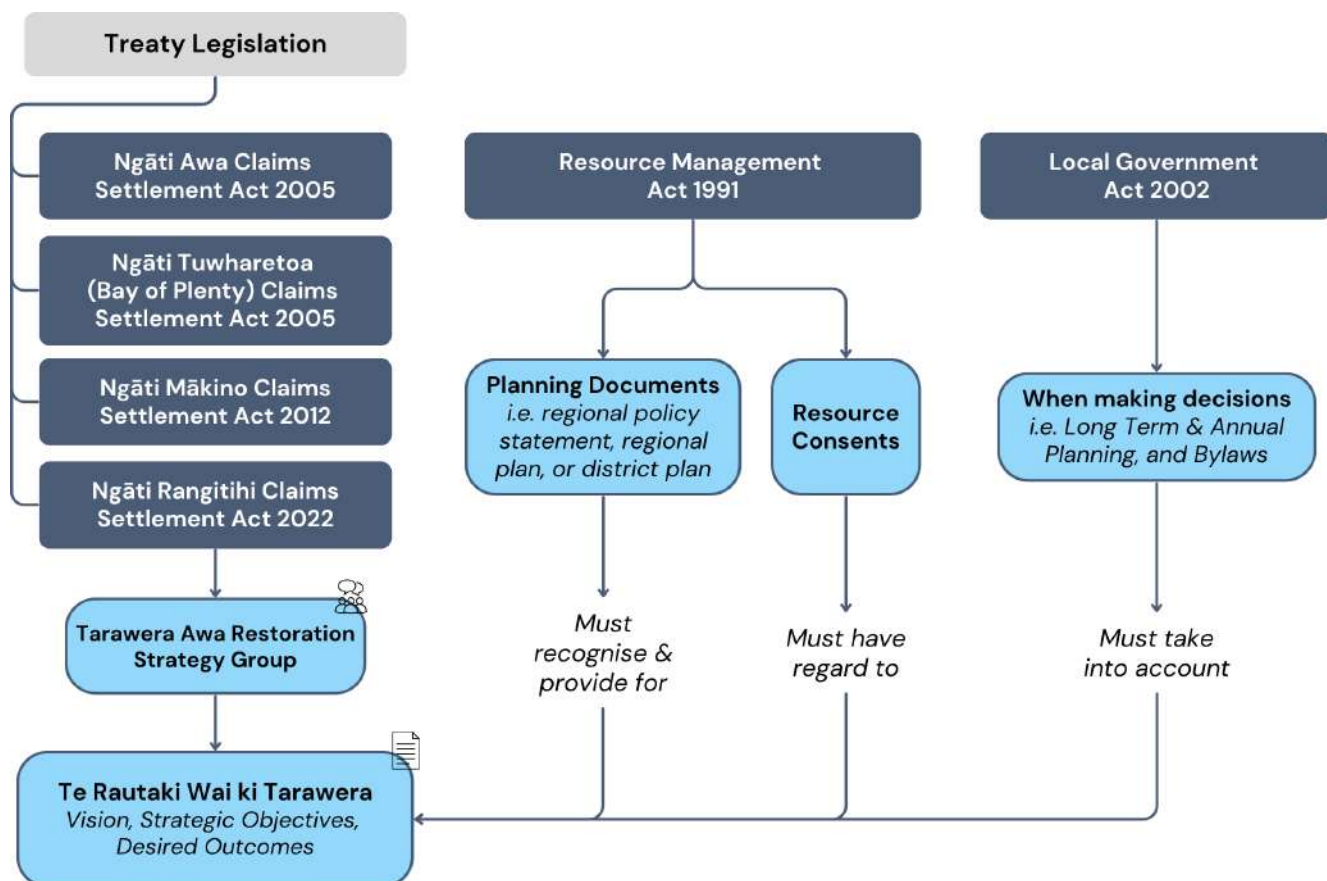


Figure 2 Policy influence

1.7.2 Membership structure and co-governance principles

The Strategy Group reflects a balanced and collaborative co-governance model. It includes equal representation from iwi and councils, with eight members appointed as follows:

- Ngāti Awa
- Ngāti Tūwharetoa (Bay of Plenty)
- Ngāti Mākino
- Ngāti Rangitihi
- Ngāti Tarāwhai (Non-voting member)
- Tūhourangi (Non-voting member)
- Bay of Plenty Regional Council
- Kawerau District Council
- Rotorua Lakes Council
- Whakatāne District Council
- Te Papa Atawhai (Non-voting member)

This unique governance structure ensures decisions are informed by both mātauranga Māori and local government expertise, acknowledging the interconnected responsibilities to the environment and community.

1.7.3 The Tarawera Awa Iwi Collective

The Strategy Group acknowledges the relationships and statutory acknowledgements including those of Ngāti Tarāwhai and Tūhourangi within the Tarawera catchment. In accordance with section 131 of the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act (2022), the Strategy Group is committed to operating in an open and inclusive manner with iwi that have interests in the Tarawera catchment but are not represented on the Strategy Group. Importantly, the Tarawera Iwi Collective has been critical to the crafting of the Strategy and will continue to provide strategic leadership, guide implementation, action planning, and monitoring to ensure the mauri of Tarawera Awa is restored in a way that upholds the aspirations, rights and responsibilities of tangata whenua.

1.7.4 Te Tatau Pounamu o Te Awa o te Atua - Joint Advisory Committee

The Matatā Scenic Reserve, Whakapaukorero, and Te Awa o Te Atua Joint Advisory Committee was established under Subpart 4 of the Ngāti Awa Claims Settlement Act 2005. Its purpose is to advise the Minister and Director-General on conservation matters related to Te Awa o Te Atua and Matatā Scenic Reserve, and to provide guidance to the Ngāti Awa governance entity on issues affecting Whakapaukorero.

Three members of the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group—representing Ngāti Awa, Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau, and Ngāti Rangitihi—sit on the Joint Advisory Committee. Te Papa Atawhai participates as an invited observer in the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group. This strong hononga (connection) ensures ongoing alignment and collaboration in the strategic development and implementation of conservation and restoration initiatives for Te Awa o Te Atua.

1.7.5 Functions and responsibilities

The primary responsibility of the Strategy Group is to develop, adopt, and oversee the implementation of the Strategy Document. In addition, the Strategy Group is responsible for:

- Monitoring the Strategy Document’s implementation and effectiveness
- Coordinating and overseeing restoration projects
- Engaging with communities, stakeholders, and relevant agencies
- Reporting on progress and supporting alignment with statutory plans and processes

1.8 He Whakamārama – Our visual identity

The koru is a symbol representing both harmony and eternal movement. It holds powerful meaning, symbolising new life, growth, strength, and peace. The four koru acknowledge Iwi representation from Ngāti Awa, Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau, Ngāti Mākinō, and Ngāti Rangitahi.

The exterior of the kōtuku is adorned with stylised raupō, comprised of simplified leaves that represent the kanohi of Strategy Group members, as well as the broader stakeholders residing along Tarawera Awa through to Matatā.

Together with these individuals, we will assist the restoration of the Mauri and the cleanup of the awa and catchment area: Mā rau ringa e oti ai – Many hands make light work.

The triumph and success of the co-partners in the restoration of the mauri of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua is symbolised by the arranged raupō itself ³.



TARAWERA
AWA RESTORATION STRATEGY GROUP

³ (³Rurehe 2024).

Part 2: Vision, strategic objectives, and desired outcomes

2.1 Our vision

2.1.1 Vision statement

The waters of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua flow in a state of mauri ora ki uta ki tai.

*Their restored life and vitality, from source to sea,
have enticed the majestic kōtuku to return to its home waters.*

2.1.2 The return of the kōtuku

The kōtuku (white heron) is a majestic and rare bird, deeply connected to the cultural and ecological landscape of Te Awa o Te Atua. Once, its graceful presence was celebrated as a tohu — a powerful sign of the awa’s ecological health and vitality — bringing joy and reverence to local communities.

The kōtuku waded through clear waters in search of inanga, eels, small fish, frogs, tadpoles, and aquatic insects — evidence of a thriving, balanced ecosystem. However, as water quality declined and habitats were destroyed or polluted, the kōtuku began to disappear. Being a species that depends on pristine wetlands for feeding and nesting, its absence became symbolic of the broader environmental decline. For many, the memory of seeing the kōtuku remains vivid and deeply missed.

Today, sightings of the kōtuku at Te Awa o Te Atua are rare, but its significance has not faded. The Strategy Group has embraced the kōtuku as a living symbol — of hope, of resilience, and of our collective commitment to restore what has been lost. The kōtuku stands not just as a goal, but as a guide, inspiring and reminding us of the need to protect, enhance, and cherish our natural taonga.

Achieving the return of the kōtuku in greater numbers to Te Awa o Te Atua will require dedicated, long-term collaboration. It will not happen overnight. It calls for shared vision, coordinated restoration efforts, and enduring partnerships across iwi, hapū, councils, community groups, industry, and government agencies.

To support this, we are establishing a series of “Kōtuku Commitment Agreements” with key stakeholders throughout the awa and catchment area. These agreements will set out how we, together, will uphold our shared responsibilities — to improve water quality, restore habitats, and sustain the mauri of the Tarawera Awa from Tarawera Awa ki uta, ki tai.

By aligning our mahi through these commitments, we signal a unified determination to restore balance in our ecosystems — and to once again welcome the kōtuku home.

2.2 Te Awa o te Atua and Tarawera Awa

The restoration of the mauri of the awa is essential to the wellbeing of our environment, our people, and our identity. Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua are intrinsically connected — through whakapapa, through spiritual and cultural significance, and historically, through the once-uninterrupted flow of water: ki uta ki tai.

Te Awa o Te Atua is a place where ecological abundance, cultural identity, and economic opportunity converge to uplift the wellbeing of Matatā and serve as a gateway to the wider region.

- Once a sacred meeting place of wai māori and wai tai, Te Awa o Te Atua sustained generations through its rich biodiversity, abundant kai, and deep cultural and spiritual connections. Its restoration is essential not only to healing the mauri of the wider Tarawera catchment, but also to unlocking the economic potential of the region — enabling eco-tourism, cultural enterprise, resilient local food systems, and infrastructure that supports both sustainable development and thriving communities.
- Te Awa o Te Atua has been specially identified for a focused set of objectives. This deliberate focus responds to the Crown’s historical actions that has left lasting impacts on the once thriving economic base at Matatā. These objectives focus on halting further degradation, investing in regeneration and renewed prosperity — returning Te Awa o Te Atua to a state of ecological and cultural abundance. It envisions a future where people live, work, and flourish in harmony with the taiao, and where a healthy environment becomes the foundation for enduring environmental, cultural, and economic prosperity.
- In revitalising this taonga, we honour its whakapapa and ensure its vitality for future generations — for Matatā, for the region, and for all.



Figure 3 Map of Te Awa o te Atua

Tarawera Awa is a living ancestor and life source, whose wellbeing is fundamental to the cultural, environmental, and economic future of the catchment and its people.

- From its source at Lake Tarawera, flowing through the volcanic cliffs of Te Tatau a Hape and onward through the rohe of iwi and hapū, the Tarawera Awa is a sacred tūpuna — a carrier of whakapapa, identity, and story. Its health reflects the health of the people, the land, and the communities that have long drawn sustenance from its waters.
- The restoration of the Tarawera Awa calls for bold and coordinated action — to re-establish natural flow, repair past degradation, and reverse the effects of extractive industries. This includes embracing mātauranga Māori and science in equal measure, and ensuring decision-making is guided by kaitiakitanga, tikanga, and community leadership.
- These catchment wide objectives commit to restoring the mauri of the awa as a foundation for intergenerational wellbeing — where clean, flowing water supports thriving ecosystems, proud communities, and local economic renewal. In doing so, we ensure the Tarawera Awa can once again nourish and connect all who dwell along its banks — physically, spiritually, and culturally — now and into the future.

Te Awa o te Atua and Tarawera Awa form the beating heart of this Strategy Document.

Each are reflected in our key Strategic Objectives and Desired Outcomes, grounded in the values and aspirations of tangata whenua and all who cherish these taonga. By structuring the Strategy around these waterbodies, we ensure that restoration is:

- **Targeted** – with actions tailored to the unique characteristics and needs of each,
- **Connected** – reflecting their shared whakapapa, mauri, and collective importance,
- **Effective** – guiding a future Restoration Action Plan that is coordinated, measurable, and enduring.

In doing so, we affirm that both the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua are taonga in their own right — deserving of focused, integrated approaches that honour their individual identities and shared mauri.

Together, Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua reflect the intrinsic value of our awa as living ancestors, cultural touchstones, and ecological taonga. They are not just geographical features — they are the threads that weave together our whakapapa, identity, and collective future.

2.3 Strategic Objectives

1 **Protect and improve water quality, ecosystem health, and flow across the Tarawera catchment towards a state of mauri ora.**

Objective 1 requires measurable improvements in water quality, contaminant reduction, habitat and wetland restoration and flow enhancement, through both conventional science and mātauranga māori.

2 **Enhance, protect, and provide for the relationships of tangata whenua and the community with Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o te Atua.**

Objective 2 seeks to re-establish the connection of the community with Tarawera Awa and its wetlands. The historical significance of Te Awa o Te Atua is not widely recognised or known. It is the landing place for several waka and was a significant historical trading port. Many mahinga kai species are no longer available for tangata whenua due to the low standard of water quality. To enable the re-establishment of community and tangata whenua activities such as mahinga kai requires river access and water quality of a high standard with safe swimmable areas, and mahinga kai indicators.

3 Integrate mātauranga Māori and science to drive adaptive, evidence-based decision-making

The Ngāti Rangitahi Claims Settlement Act 2022 states that the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group is to “restore the mauri” of the Tarawera Awa. Measuring mauri can only be achieved through embedding mātauranga Māori and utilising ways of understanding that align with te ao Māori. It must be integrated alongside conventional science to inform decision making, with hapū and iwi guiding how mātauranga is applied.

4 Establish Kōtuku agreements with all major land and water users in the Tarawera catchment.

Objective 4 requires TARSG to negotiate Kōtuku Agreements with all major land and water users impacting water quality or quantity in the Tarawera catchment. It is a relationship agreement where both parties agree to work together for continuous improvement of the mauri of Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o te Atua.

5 Build climate-resilient communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems across the Tarawera catchment.

Objective 5 requires that all actions across the Tarawera catchment, from policy writing and spatial planning to physical works, provide for safe and protected communities where people and places are resilient and adaptive to the effects of climate change.

6 Enable sustainable economic development aligned with Te Rautaki Wai ki Tarawera.

Objective 6 aims to promote economic opportunities within the Tarawera Awa Catchment. It focuses on supporting sustainable local enterprise and community-led initiatives that contribute to the long-term wellbeing of the awa, tangata whenua and local communities.

Bridging statement

Given the statutory foundations of this Strategy Document, the following three objectives are led by the Iwi Collective. They reflect customary rights, and Treaty settlement commitments and the unique role of iwi and their tikanga in relation to the Tarawera Awa catchment. Additionally, Te Awa o Te Atua has been identified within those statutory foundations as a priority waterway of particular significance within the catchment.

The Iwi Collective includes iwi who hold settlement commitments and maintain an ongoing relationship with the Crown in respect of these matters. However, the following three objectives are also objectives of the Strategy Group as a whole to the extent it has the power to contribute to them.

7 Revitalise the waterways and mana of Te Awa o Te Atua, ensuring its protection and returning it to a state of ecological and cultural abundance for present and future generations

Objective 7 focuses specifically on Te Awa o Te Atua as a priority waterway and recognises its unique cultural, spiritual and ecological importance within the wider Tarawera catchment. Over time, the mauri and mana of this waterway have been significantly diminished. This objective seeks to restore Te Awa o Te Atua to a healthy, functioning ecosystem that supports native species, cultural practices, and community use. It also ensures that its protection is prioritised in planning and decision-making so that future generations can experience a waterway that is abundant, resilient and respected.

- 8 The iwi collective seeks to ensure the customary, Treaty, and Settlement rights of Ngāti Rangitihi, Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Makino, Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau, Ngāti Tarāwhai Iwi Trust, and the Tuhourangi Tribal Authority are explicitly recognised and upheld across all national and regional water governance systems, enabling their representatives to participate fully in decision-making for the Tarawera Awa catchment. The local authorities will recognise and uphold Treaty settlements and other legal rights.**

Objective 8 supports the recognition and upholding of those rights across water governance systems, and affirms that water governance must reflect partnership, active protection, and the commitments made through Treaty settlements.

- 9 Ensure that the Tarawera Awa redress in subpart 9 of the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022 is given effect to in any legislation reforming the Resource Management Act 1991 in such a way that the mana, integrity and effect of the redress is upheld.**

Objective 9 focuses on the specific redress provided to Ngāti Rangitihi under subpart 9 of the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022 being properly implemented and maintained through this Strategy Document. As water and resource management legislation evolves, this objective requires that reforms do not undermine or dilute the agreed redress. Instead, future legislation and policy must give full effect to those provisions and uphold their intent, integrity and long-term application within the Tarawera Awa Catchment.

2.4 Desired Outcomes

The restoration of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua is a generational responsibility — one that requires enduring commitment from iwi, hapū, central and local government, communities, and partner organisations.

These Desired Outcomes reflect our shared vision for the future: a catchment where the mauri of the awa is restored, where cultural and ecological relationships are strengthened, and where both people and nature can flourish.

Guided by mātauranga Māori, informed by science, and grounded in the aspirations of tangata whenua, these outcomes set the direction for future Action Plans that will be targeted, connected, and effective.

Thriving ecosystems and communities	Resilient Taiao	Strong relationships
Kai can be gathered from the Tarawera Awa - from Tapahoro to Te Awa o Te Atua - to sustain iwi, our communities, and manuhiri.	Te Awa o Te Atua has a healthy flow regime, with intermingling wai māori and wai tai.	The cultural and historical significance of the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua is known, visible, and celebrated.
Our mokopuna will inherit a healthy, vibrant awa.	We can see, feel, hear, taste, smell and sense that the Tarawera Awa, its tributaries, and Te Awa o Te Atua are well.	Tangata whenua, councils, communities, industry, and near-by land and river users share a united purpose to restore Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua, and this purpose is widely supported and understood.
Infrastructure decisions in the catchment reflect opportunities for sustainable growth and economic development.	Mātauranga Māori is recognised, acknowledged, respected, and actively used in collective knowledge-based decision-making.	Whānau are proud to call Matatā, Kawerau, and all communities along the Tarawera Awa home, feeling safe, connected, and empowered to thrive in place.
Te Awa o Te Atua and Matatā are recognised as a gateway to the Eastern Bay of Plenty, a visitor attraction of exceptional beauty and significance - a taonga and tourism asset that provides opportunities for mana whenua, local communities and future generations to come.	Flora and taonga species have returned to Te Awa o Te Atua, indicating ecosystem recovery.	
The awa is safe to access, to swim in, free from contaminants that threaten health.		

Part 3: Our people, our place

3.1 Ngā Iwi o Tarawera and the significance of the Awa

Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua are deeply woven into the identity, whakapapa, and wellbeing of the Iwi connected to this catchment — **Ngāti Rangitihi, Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau, Ngāti Awa, and Ngāti Māhino, Ngāti Tarāwhai and Tūhourangi** ⁴. Each of these iwi holds unique and enduring relationships with the awa, shaped by ancestral ties, sacred histories, traditional practices, and sustained occupation of the lands and waters along its course. These connections are reflected in the many pā, tauranga waka, mahinga kai, and healing sites associated with the awa — as well as in the mātauranga, tikanga, and collective responsibilities that have guided Iwi interactions with the environment over generations. Tarawera awa is recognised not only as a vital source of sustenance and transport but as a living ancestor — a being with mauri and mana. Te Awa o Te Atua, in particular, has long been revered for its abundance and sacredness, with its name gifted by the tohunga Ngātoroirangi in recognition of its richness.

As mentioned earlier, the Tarawera Awa is a taonga to many iwi including iwi and hapū of the headlands of the Tarawera Lake such as Ngāti Tarāwhai and Tūhourangi. In addition, we recognise that there may be additional hapu and land Trusts with vested interests which will be acknowledged along the way.

The Strategy Document reflects the unified intent of these Iwi, alongside local and central government and community partners, to restore and protect the health and mauri of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua. This work is grounded in the principle of an all of catchment approach and a shared commitment to intergenerational wellbeing and ecological restoration.

3.2 A pathway forward

Engagement with iwi, hapū, landowners, and stakeholders has identified significant pressures impacting the health of the Tarawera Awa ⁵. In response, Kōtuku Agreements are proposed as a collaborative mechanism to align efforts toward restoring the awa's mauri and achieving shared environmental and cultural outcomes.

3.2.1 Kōtuku Agreements

To address these challenges and restore the mauri of the awa, the introduction of Kōtuku Agreements is proposed. These agreements offer a collaborative framework for aligning stakeholder actions with the shared vision for the Tarawera catchment.

Grounded in the principle of strengthening connections, Kōtuku Agreements provide a platform for:

- **Whakawhanaungatanga** – fostering strong relationships and mutual trust between all parties
- **Shared Understanding** – developing a unified vision and identifying the most significant stressors on the awa
- **Collaborative Action** – working together to implement practical, incremental improvements that move the catchment toward desired cultural, ecological, and social outcomes

⁴ Further reference to Iwi relationships with the Tarawera Awa ki te Awa o te Atua is included within Annex A

⁵ For further information, see Annex B

By drawing on both mātauranga Māori and scientific knowledge, Kōtuku Agreements aim to empower stakeholders to take collective responsibility and action. This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of the awa with its people, land, and ecosystems, and ensures that restoration efforts are enduring, inclusive, and grounded in shared kaitiakitanga.



Part 4: Restoring Mauri

4.1 Restoring Mauri – A foundation for transformation

The restoration of mauri — the life force that connects people, water, and whenua — is at the heart of the Strategy Document. Mauri is understood by the Iwi of Tarawera not simply as a measure of environmental quality, but as the spiritual, cultural, and ecological essence that sustains all life. The Strategy Group recognises the mana whakahaere of each Iwi, hapū, and whānau to define their own interpretations of mauri, and collectively offer Te Mauri Ihoiho⁶ as a shared framework to guide and evaluate restoration efforts across the catchment.

Currently, the awa is in a state of Mauri Rere — unsettled by generations of environmental harm. The journey to Mauri Ora (flourishing life) requires a reciprocal approach: one that weaves mātauranga Māori with science, honours cultural relationships, and ensures intergenerational capacity to observe, protect, and restore the wellbeing of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua — from Te Tapahoro to Te Moana-nui-a-Toi.



⁶ For further information, see Annex C.

Part 5: Integration and influence

5.1 Strategic influence and policy integration

Restoring the mauri of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua requires more than localised action — it demands strong policy alignment and strategic influence across all levels of governance⁷. This Strategy Document seeks to ensure its vision, objectives and desired outcomes are recognised and provided for in council planning documents, legislative frameworks, and decision-making processes across the catchment. By aligning with the responsibilities of local councils, central government and respecting Treaty Settlements, it provides a foundation for coordinated, enduring restoration outcomes.

Central to this is collaboration — through established mechanisms like the Joint Advisory Committee, spatial planning processes, and partnerships with lwi, hapū, communities, and councils - existing restoration initiatives and community-led efforts are acknowledged as vital to achieving Mauri Ora. The Strategy Document offers a cohesive platform to amplify these efforts, guide integrated land and water use, and influence policy in a way that upholds both environmental and cultural wellbeing.



⁷ For further information, see Annex D.

Part 6: Looking forward and action

6.1 Bringing the strategy to life

6.1.1 Development of a critical next step: Our Action Plan on the horizon

Te Rautaki Wai ki Tarawera establishes the shared vision and strategic direction for restoring the mauri of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua. Achieving that vision will require a coordinated, collaborative and adaptive approach to implementation.

The next critical step is the co-development of a comprehensive 10-year Action Plan that translates the Strategy into a practical programme of work. The Action Plan will identify Te Awa o te Atua and catchment priority actions, implementation timeframes, monitoring, measurable indicators, lead organisations and delivery partners, providing a clear pathway from strategic intent to measurable outcomes.

Recognising that restoration is a long-term commitment, the Action Plan will prioritise actions that deliver the greatest benefit for the awa while balancing cultural aspirations, technical knowledge, feasibility, available resources and long-term sustainability. It will be developed collaboratively by the Strategy Group, tangata whenua, hapū, local and central government, landowners, stakeholders, communities and technical experts, ensuring mātauranga Māori, kaitiakitanga and science are integrated throughout decision-making.

The Action Plan will also align restoration priorities with statutory planning processes, infrastructure investment, climate adaptation, land-use initiatives and existing environmental programmes, strengthening coordinated investment and action across the catchment.

A key component of the Action Plan will be the progressive development of feasibility assessments, technical investigations and cultural evidence to inform future decisions, refine restoration options and identify sustainable funding and investment opportunities.

By clearly defining priorities, roles and responsibilities, the Action Plan will provide a shared framework for accountability, collaboration and investment, guiding collective action towards the long-term restoration of the mauri of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua for present and future generations.

6.1.2 Review and evaluation framework

Te Rautaki Wai ki Tarawera will be reviewed at least every five years to assess progress towards the vision and ensure the Strategy remains relevant and effective.

The review process will:

- Assess progress against strategic objectives through monitoring data, mātauranga Māori indicators and community observations;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of implemented actions and identify opportunities for improvement;
- Ensure meaningful and appropriate resourcing for tangata whenua participation. This includes support for hapū-led kaitiakitanga, cultural health monitoring, and the integration of mātauranga Māori alongside science;
- Consider advances in best practice, technology, research and innovation;

- Incorporate feedback from iwi, hapū, partners, stakeholders and communities;
- Respond to changes in environmental conditions, legislation, policy settings and community aspirations.

Where necessary, the Strategy Group may update or amend the Strategy or associated implementation approaches following appropriate engagement and consultation.

This adaptive approach ensures Te Rautaki Wai ki Tarawera remains a living document — one that grows alongside the awa, responds to emerging challenges and continues to guide collective action for generations to come.

Glossary

Awa – River or stream.

Awa tūpuna / Awa as tūpuna – Ancestral river; a river recognised as a revered ancestor.

Hapū – Sub-tribe, often part of a larger iwi (tribe).

Iwi – Tribe.

Kai – Food, sustenance.

Kaitiaki / Kaitiakitanga – Guardian / guardianship; a responsibility to protect and care for the natural world.

Kōtuku – White heron, a culturally significant bird often symbolising rare beauty and dignity.

Mana – Spiritual authority or power.

Mana whenua – Customary authority or guardianship over land or territory, by right of ancestry.

Mauri – The life force or vital essence that exists in all living things and ecosystems.

Mauri ora – Restored vitality, wellbeing, and flourishing of life and ecosystems.

Mātauranga Māori – Māori knowledge, wisdom, and worldview, including traditional environmental, scientific, and cultural understandings.

Ngā Roimata o Tarawera – “The Tears of Tarawera”; a traditional name for the Matatā Lagoon – Te Awa o Te Atua.

Pounamu – Greenstone; a highly valued taonga with spiritual and cultural significance.

Pou – Pillar; in strategic contexts, symbolic of guiding foundations and strategic priorities.

Rongoā – Traditional Māori healing, including medicinal plants and practices.

Rohe – Tribal region or territory.

Taiao – Natural environment.

Taonga – Treasure; highly valued, including land, rivers, language, and cultural practices.

Taonga tuku iho – Ancestral treasure passed down through generations.

Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua – Bringing together the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua.

Te Awa o Te Atua – “The River of God”; traditional name for the Matatā Lagoon.

Te Moana a Toi / Te Moana a Toitehuatahi – The coastal waters and ocean of the region named after the ancestor Toitehuatahi.

Tikanga – Māori customs, values, and protocols that guide behaviour and relationships.

Tūpuna – Ancestors.

Wairua – Spirit or spiritual essence.

Waka – Canoe; also refers to ancestral migration canoes that brought Māori to Aotearoa.

Whakapapa – Genealogy, lineage, and interconnectedness to people, places, and the environment.

Bibliography

Adlam, B., & King, S. (2015). Connection of Ngāti Tūwharetoa (Bay of Plenty) with the Kawerau Geothermal Field, New Zealand.

Aurecon. (2020). Lake Rotoitipaku Landfill: Framework to guide future assessment and remediation.

Christensen Consulting Ltd. (2023). NZ River Managers Guidelines: Application of Room for the River for NZ Rivers & Streams. Prepared for NZ River Managers Special Interest Group.

Dodd, M. (2010). The Case of the Tarawera River.

Hikuroa, D., Clark, J., Olsen, A., & Camp, E. (2018). Severed at the head: Towards revitalising the mauri o Te Awa o Te Atua. New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research.
Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00288330.2018.1483120>

Ministry for the Environment (MfE)(2025). Our Environment, Our Lives: The Stories Behind the Numbers.

Mataatua Declaration on Water (2012).

Ngāti Awa Claims Settlement Act (2005).

Ngāti Māhino Deed of Settlement (2011, April 2).

Ngāti Māhino Claims Settlement Act (2012).

Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act (2022). Retrieved from:
<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0007/latest/whole.html>

Ngāti Tūwharetoa (Bay of Plenty) Claims Settlement Act. (2005).

Office of D. Tapsell (2023). Memorandum to Te Mana o Ngāti Rangitihi – Draft Deed to Amend the Ngāti Rangitihi Deed of Settlement.

Rurehe, H (2024). He Whakamārama – Our Visual Identity.

Tarawera Iwi Collective (2023). Tarawera Awa Aspirations Document.

Tarawera Iwi Collective (2023). Wānanga Series February – August 2023.

Te Mana o Ngāti Rangitihi. Our Story (Parts 1 & 2).

Te Waiū Settlement Trust. (2023). Hui, August 2023.

Thorndon Chambers. (2023). Memorandum to Te Mana o Ngāti Rangitihi – Restoration of the Tarawera Awa.

Annexes

- Annex A: Ngā Iwi o Tarawera and the Significance of the Awa
- Annex B: The State of the Tarawera Awa Today
- Annex C: Restoring Mauri – A Foundation for Transformation
- Annex D: Strategic Influence and Policy Integration



Annex A: Ngā Iwi o Tarawera and the significance of the Awa

Ngāti Mākino

Ngāti Mākino are a member of the Te Arawa Confederation. They maintain cordial relationships with other iwi in the Te Arawa tribal area, particularly Waitaha, from whom they descend through the eponymous ancestor Waitaha-a-Hei. Furthermore, they are related to Ngāti Pikiao through marriage and maintain strong relationships with Ngāti Awa. Ngāti Mākino, an independent iwi, has traditionally been located in the rohe between the Rotorua lakes and the Bay of Plenty coast. Historically, they have functioned as an autonomous entity, occasionally establishing partnerships with neighbouring iwi to facilitate mutual defence and cooperation in response to external threats or when compelled by shared interests.

The land and resources of Ngāti Mākino were held under a customary form of tenure that prioritised tribal and hapū collective ownership. Ngāti Mākino are dedicated to assisting Ngāti Rangitahi in the restoration of the mauri to these significant waterways, as they retain mana whenua interests over Te Awa o Te Atua in Matatā alongside Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau, Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Rangitahi.

Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau

Through the eponymous ancestor, Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa are descended from Ngātoroirangi. Tūwharetoa was born and raised in Kawerau, and his people expanded southward during his lifetime. He is the fourth generation descendant of Ngātoroirangi, the illustrious progenitor who disembarked from the Te Arawa waka in the 1300s from Hawaiki. Since that time, the iwi have established themselves in the Kawerau region, employing geothermal energy in the Ōkākāru rohe for heating, cooking, and a site of recuperation and healing. The region was also renowned for its abundant supply of fish and eels, as well as the spawning of eels, particularly in the warmest thermal waters.

The wetlands in the vicinity were abundant in kai, and transportation was conducted by waka. Further to this is the Tarawera River, a key resource for Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau. The iwi are spiritually and emotionally bound to and physically sustained by its waters where healing ceremonies were held. All the families that lived there dug hot springs and baths and used it communally. Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau's mana extends to Te Awa o Te Atua (River of God), a name that embodies the reverence in which Ngātoroirangi was regarded.

Ngāti Awa

The Tarawera Awa was created by the tears of Tarawera. Tarawera yearned for her husband, Pūtauaki, who left her for the island of Whakaari. In ancient times before the arrival of the waka Mātaatua the banks of the Tarawera River were inhabited by ancestors of Ngāti Awa including Te Tini o Toi, Te Tini o Awa, and Te Tini o Kawerau. In more modern times, but long before the arrival of Europeans, hapū such as Ngai Te Rangihouhiri II, Ngāti Hikakino, and Te Tāwera utilised the resources of the river and occupied its banks.

Toroa, chief of the Mātaatua waka named Te Awa o Te Atua (the river of Gods) at the mouth of Tarawera Awa after seeing his daughter Wairaka menstruating while swimming there. He had seen blood floating down the river and once confirmed by Wairaka that it was indeed hers, the name was bestowed on this area of the river mouth.

The Tarawera Awa was a major food and water resource to the Ngāti Awa people both prior to and since the arrival of the Mātaatua waka. Ngāti Awa resided in a number of pā sites located along the riverbank. Such sites are significant to them and illustrate their connections to the Tarawera Awa. A sacred pā site along the Awa is Parawai. Parawai was one of the pā of Te Tāwera hapū of Ngāti Awa. Parawai was the site of many battles between Ngāti Awa and other iwi. Another important pā of Ngāti Awa was Te Kohika. This was located toward the coast and near the island pā of Te Matata and Ōmarupōtiki and was used to access the reefs at the mouth of the river. Ōmataroro was another important Ngāti Awa pā near the Tarawera River. Ngāti Awa watched over and protected the Tarawera River from such pā.

The Tarawera River provided an abundance of fish, eels, kākahi, and whitebait for the hapū of Ngāti Awa. The junction of the Waikāmihi Stream and the Tarawera River was an important fishing location for whitebait, eels, and other fish for Te Tāwera hapū of Ngāti Awa. As well as being an abundant source of food for the hapū of Ngāti Awa, the Tarawera River was also used as a highway to assist the transportation of materials and people up and down the river. Waka that travelled up and down the Tarawera River were launched at Ōkauneke. The tipuna had considerable knowledge of whakapapa, traditional trails and tauranga waka, places for gathering kai and other taonga, ways in which to use the resources of the Tarawera River, the relationship of people with the river and their dependence on it, and tikanga for the proper and sustainable utilisation of its resources. All of these values remain important to the hapū of Ngāti Awa today.

Ngāti Rangitihi

Rangiaohia (son of Rangitihi and Kahukare) and his wife Rakauheketara (Ngāti Mākino) were the founding tūpuna of Ngāti Rangitihi. Mahi, son of Rangiaohia who inherited his father's mana, continued to dwell at Moura, Tapahoro, and Te Arikī - pā sites he had established with Rangiaohia. Mahi married Rangitihikāhira, Apumoana's oldest child and daughter. This strengthened their forefathers' authority over the lands in and around Lake Tarawera.

Ngāti Rangitihi were located at the south-east end of Lake Rotoiti (Wai-iti) and expanded around Lake Tarawera (Moura, Te Arikī, and Tikawe). It covered the territory between Lake Tarawera and Lake Okataina (Houroa), the western slopes of Makatiti (Haehaenga and Maunga Whakamana) and Tapahoro. Their interests spanned the Tarawera River and Te Awa o Te Atua, as well as from Maunga Whakamana to Pokohu and over to Matahina.

The Tarawera Awa and its tributaries hold spiritual and cultural significance for Ngāti Rangitihi. Historically, it was a key commerce route and source of customary resources. The Awa carries mana from the iwi's senior lines.

Te Awa o Te Atua in Matatā is where the three Awa flowed out to Te Moana a Toi (Toi Te Huatahi), the bay of plentiful ocean, the pūwaha tawhito (ancient river mouth), the Tarawera, Rangitāiki, and Orini Awa, all poured out at Mihimarino. According to Ngāti Rangitihi historical accounts, Te Awa o Te Atua was named by Ngātoroirangi, the tohunga of Te Arawa Waka, due to the abundance of Kai Moana (seafood), Kai awa (river food), and repo manu (marsh birds). He reasoned that, given its richness, this must be God's river.

The Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua is woven into the history of Ngāti Rangitihi alongside Ngāti Mākino, Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau. It is perceived as an ancestor, embodying the mana of all the iwi who have a relationship with it. Ngāti Rangitihi iwi through Te Mana o Ngāti Rangitihi are driven to ensure the mauri of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua is restored and rebalanced over time.

Annex B: The State of the Tarawera Awa today – Ki Uta, Ki Tai

The Tarawera Awa Catchment, and the area of influence of this strategy, covers just under 66,500 hectares—of which approximately 12,000 hectares is Māori-owned land. The catchment begins at Te Tapahoro (Lake Tarawera Outlet) in the west, flowing eastward to Te Awa o Te Atua and Te Moana-nui-a-Toi (the sea outlet near Matatā), stretching south to Te Maunga o Pūtauaki and north to Te Maunga o Matawahe.

The awa begins at 300 metres above sea level, dropping 80 metres in just 100 metres at Te Tatau a Hape (Tarawera Falls), before flowing eastward to Kawerau, where the elevation is just 20 metres. From Kawerau, the awa traverses the Rangitāiki Plains, meeting the sea at The Cut, where it also flows into Te Awa o Te Atua.

Spanning multiple sub-catchments, the Tarawera catchment crosses the jurisdictional boundaries of three district councils, one regional council, and several Iwi and hapū. While the Tarawera Awa is closely connected to Lake Tarawera and its upstream lake systems, these source waters lie outside the scope of this Strategy. However, from the moment the waters emerge at Te Tatau a Hape, the mauri of this sacred awa becomes vulnerable to human influence.

The upper catchment is renowned for its high water quality, visual clarity, natural character, and recreational opportunities, including trout fishing, canoeing, and hiking. These features attract both local and international visitors year-round.

Today, exotic forestry dominates much of the catchment, though pockets of indigenous forest remain. As the awa flows through a heavily modified landscape shaped by forestry, farming, wetlands, and townships, it is increasingly altered to meet land-use demands. The awa is nourished by water from Mount Tarawera and Pūtauaki, as well as natural geothermal discharges from tributaries such as the Mangakotukutuku and Waiaute Streams. These geothermal flows contribute to the awa's unique qualities, especially upstream of Kawerau.

As it meanders through Kawerau, the Tarawera Awa is joined by the Ruruanga Stream and flows past the Kawerau industrial estate. Within this area lie several water bodies of note, including Lakes Pupuwaharau, Rotoitipaku, Rotoroa, and Tamurenuī.

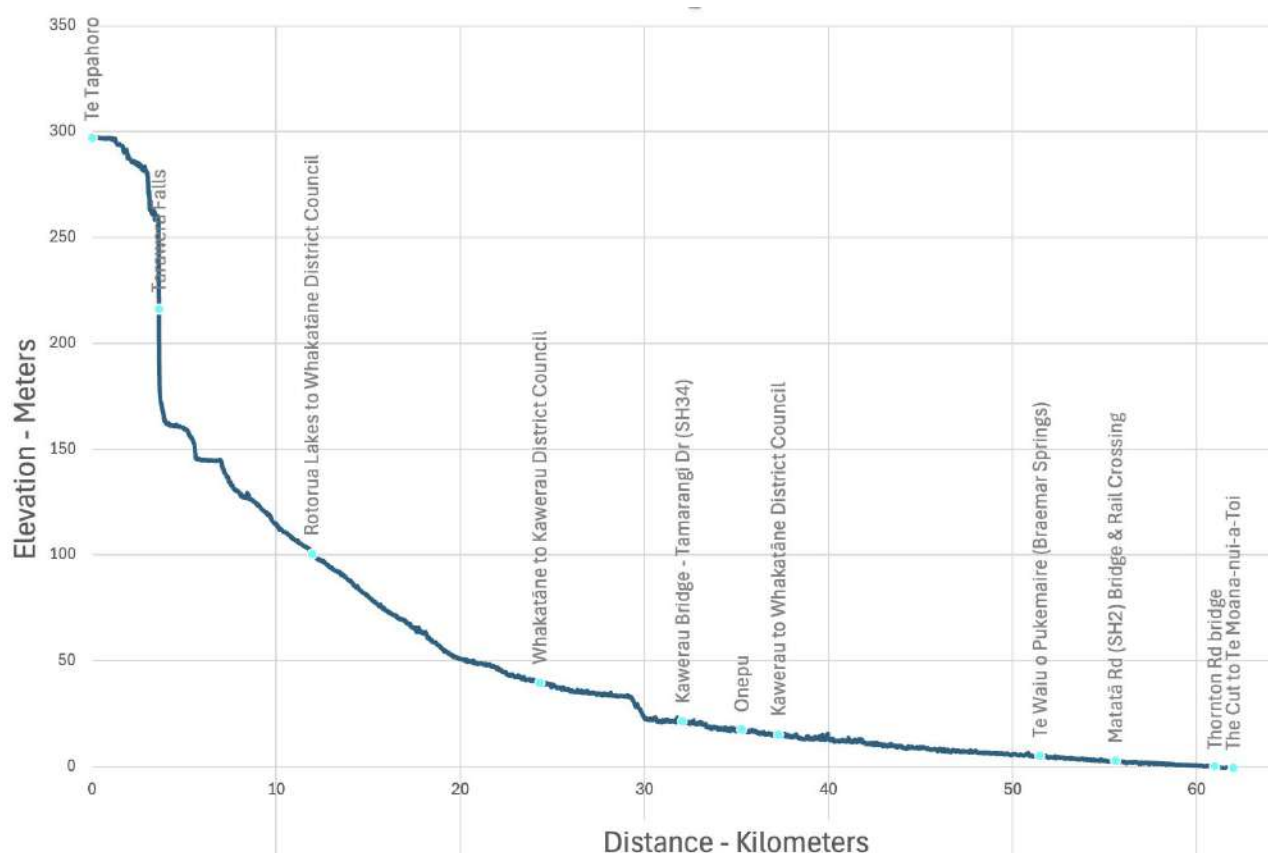


Figure B1 Profile of Tarawera River

Human impacts on the catchment

The catchment has been significantly altered by agricultural development, with extensive dairy farming and forestry operations contributing to declining water quality. Runoff containing *E. coli*, sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus are major pollutants affecting the awa. Additionally, physical modifications—such as the straightening of the river and construction of stop banks—have transformed the awa’s natural shape and flow to support agriculture. These cumulative effects have weakened the mauri of the awa as it journeys towards Te Awa o Te Atua.

Continuing past Onepu, the awa flows through land heavily engineered to support farming. The Rangitāiki Drainage Scheme includes drains, low stop banks, culverts, and flap gates, all of which disrupt natural flow and have impacted the health of surrounding wetlands and ecosystems.

The awa also provides for drinking water supply, irrigation, animal drinking water, food production, and recreation. There is opportunity to further improve practices in the catchment to provide for services while also enhancing cultural values and restoring ecosystem health.

As the Tarawera travels beyond the rural community of Ōtākiri, it passes several culturally significant tributaries, including Te Waiu o Pukemaire (Braemar Springs), Mangaone, and Waikamihi streams. The Mangaone Stream is especially noteworthy for supporting nine species of native fish, including the only known stream population of kōaro in the Tarawera catchment.

Loss of wetlands and biodiversity

Before European settlement in 1890, the Rangitāiki Plains were dominated by wetlands that played vital ecological and hydrological roles. The conversion of this landscape has led to the loss of essential freshwater wetlands, contributing to water quality degradation, erosion, and reduced biodiversity. Today, only 9.7% (575 ha) of the original wetlands remain, mostly in the lower reaches of the Tarawera Awa. Some of these remaining wetlands are now “perched” and require tailored management to maintain their function and health.

Downstream pressures and the river mouth

As the awa nears the sea, it gathers flows from tributaries and engineered drainage systems across the Rangitāiki Plains, bringing with it both point-source and diffuse pollutants. The Omeheu Canal, for instance, receives stormwater and treated wastewater from Edgecumbe before connecting to the Tarawera awa. The convergence of these water bodies near the river’s mouth symbolises the fragmentation of what was once a dynamic, interconnected estuarine system.

The mouth of the Tarawera is a highly dynamic environment, characterised by shifting channels and saline-freshwater interactions. Managed under the Bay of Plenty Regional Coastal Environment Plan, the mouth is a place of deep significance. On its western bank lies Ōtaramuturangi, an urupā sacred to Ngāti Rangitihi and Ngāti Awa. Historically spanning both sides of the coastline, much of this sacred site was lost due to channelisation works, leaving only an isolated section on the eastern bank. The ever-shifting river mouth continues to threaten this important wāhi tapu through erosion.

Tidal influence extends up to two kilometres upstream from the mouth, with saltwater intrusion reaching furthest during low flows and spring tides. Ecologically, the river mouth lacks the stable saline-freshwater balance of a classic estuary, resulting in few estuarine species. Still, the site holds high recreational value, particularly as a popular white baiting spot, and has been the focus of significant restorative planting in recent years.

What we’ve heard

Engagement with iwi, hapū, landowners, and other stakeholders has highlighted a range of concerns affecting the health and wellbeing of the Tarawera Awa, particularly along its journey to Te Awa o Te Atua. These concerns span current pressures, historical impacts, and anticipated future threats to the awa’s mauri and overall integrity.

A wide range of land use and development activities have contributed to cumulative impacts on the awa’s ecological health, hydrology, and cultural values. Key stakeholder activities that influence the state of the catchment include:

- Plantation forestry
- Agricultural and horticultural land uses, including dairy, sheep, and beef farming
- Industrial discharges
- Municipal and wastewater discharges

While these activities support local economies, they have also degraded water quality, altered natural flow regimes, and disrupted connections between the awa and its surrounding ecosystems and communities.

Challenges facing Tarawera Awa ki te Awa o te Atua			
Little flow through Te Awa o te Atua.	Changing national legislation creating uncertainty in how the strategy will be implemented	Limited access to significant sites	Economic barriers for Matatā to sustain growth
Impacts of degraded water quality on tangata whenua ability to express kaitiakitanga	The cultural significance of the awa, of Matatā, and of other sites of significance remain unseen.	Limited awa monitoring sites that align conventional and cultural monitoring practices to evaluate mauri	Mahinga kai species in decline
Economic opportunities remain unrealised e.g. tourism	An inability to swim in Te Awa o te Atua due to health risks	Few remaining lowland wetlands, with risk of habitat isolation	Inability to swim in Te Awa o Te Atua due to health risks
Risk of contamination of Te Awa o te Atua from current Matata Wastewater (aging septic tanks, small disposal fields and rising water table)	Risk of contamination from other wastewater infrastructure e.g. Edgecumbe wastewater management, farm effluent disposal.	Reliance on conventional science to determine the health of the awa and its catchment	Information is inaccessible, a lack of “dashboard” or collective record of monitoring data across the catchment
Water quality impacts from consented and non-consented discharges	Lack of visibility of water allocation and extraction, transparency required to effectively monitor	Presence of invasive pest species and threat of emerging pest species like golden clam etc	Restricted influence across private land management practices
Environmental and land use practices do not contribute to restoring mauri, and in some cases continue to contaminate Tarawera	Climate change impacting rainfall (flood/drought risk) and natural hazard impacts	Sea level rise impacting viability of agricultural land-use in the lower catchment	Lack of resourcing (financial and kaitiaki capacity) for cultural monitoring of the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o te Atua

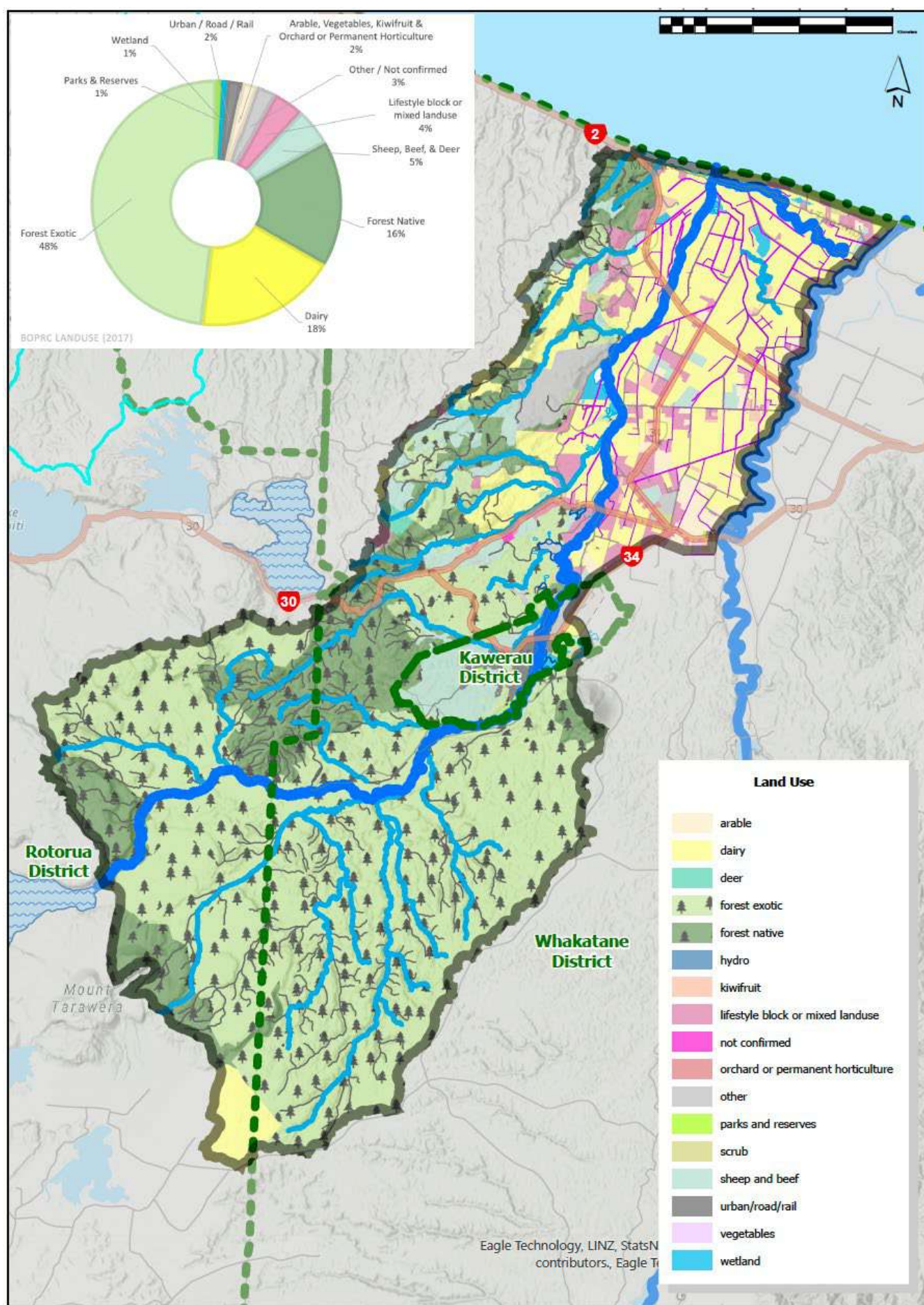


Figure B2 Land use within the Tarawera Catchment

A pathway forward: Kōtuku Agreements

To address these challenges and restore the mauri of the awa, the introduction of Kōtuku Agreements is proposed. These agreements offer a collaborative framework for aligning stakeholder actions with the shared vision for the Tarawera catchment.

Grounded in the principle of strengthening connections, Kōtuku Agreements provide a platform for:

- **Whakawhanaungatanga** – fostering strong relationships and mutual trust between all parties
- **Shared Understanding** – developing a unified vision and identifying the most significant stressors on the awa
- **Collaborative Action** – working together to implement practical, incremental improvements that move the catchment toward desired cultural, ecological, and social outcomes

By drawing on both mātauranga Māori and scientific knowledge, Kōtuku Agreements aim to empower stakeholders to take collective responsibility and action. This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of the awa with its people, land, and ecosystems, and ensures restoration efforts are enduring, inclusive, and grounded in shared kaitiakitanga.

Annex C: Restoring Mauri – A foundation for transformation

Understanding Mauri

The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group acknowledges the mana whakahaere of all Iwi, hapū, and whānau connected to Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua to define and apply their own frameworks for understanding the health and wellbeing of the awa. The collective Iwi of Tarawera offer Te Mauri Ihoiho as a foundational expression of mauri, providing a shared lens through which to assess the vitality of the wai.

Mauri, as understood by the Tarawera Iwi Collective, it is the life force inherent in all living things — a sacred essence passed down through whakapapa from our creator to our ancestors, and from them to us. It is a dynamic energy that both influences and is influenced by its surrounding environment.

Te Mauri o te Wai has existed since the dawn of time, its vitality inseparable from the land, mountains, and ocean. Every form of water within Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua — whether underground streams, surface flows, waterfalls, creeks, swamps, rivers, or lakes — collectively sustains all life, including the waters that reside within us.

Allowing the ongoing pollution of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua erodes not only the river's physical health but also the cultural practices, values, and deep relationships that bind Iwi to the awa — a taonga of immense spiritual and cultural significance. Restoring its mauri means more than reducing pollution; it is about restoring our tupuna to a state of Mauri Ora — flourishing life and vitality.

States of Mauri

Various states describe wellbeing in this framework:

- **Mauri Noho** (languishing)
- **Mauri Rere** (unsettled)
- **Mauri Oho** (activated)
- **Mauri Tau** (in balance)
- **Mauri Ora** (flourishing)

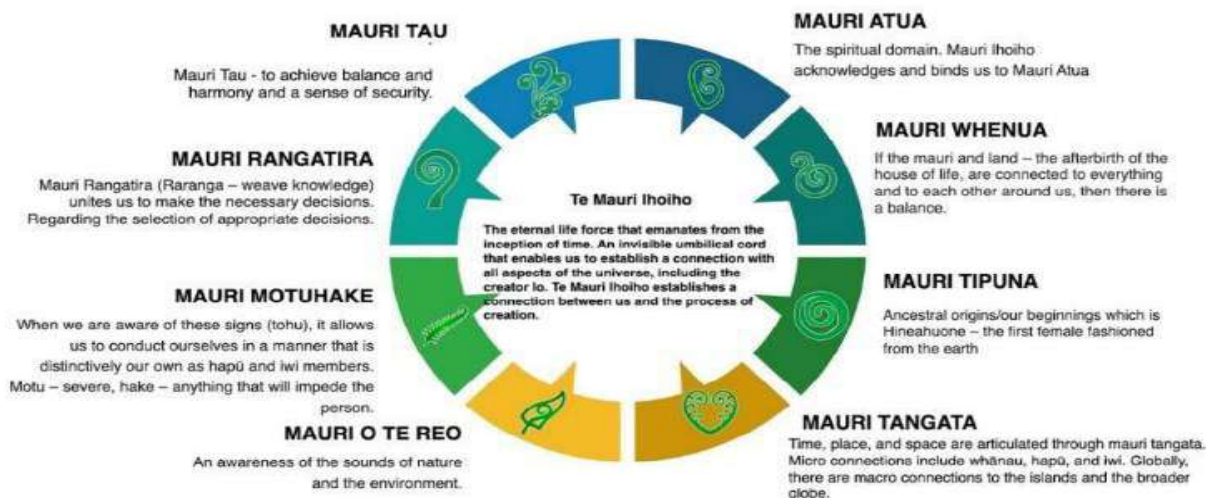
Currently, the Mauri of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua is in a state of Mauri Rere, unsettled due to ongoing environmental pressures.

The Mauri of awa is eternal — it was, is, and will remain so forever. Ontology (the nature of being) is circular and reciprocal in Māori culture. Fundamentally, it implies that since the river is a living organism, everything it provides for us must eventually be returned to it. If it provides for us by giving us kai, then we must repay the favour by ensuring that the river continues to flourish. This reciprocal relationship forms the basis of kaitiakitanga and guides the restoration of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua.

Te Mauri Ihoiho methodology

Te Mauri Ihoiho was developed by Iwi representatives of Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Rangitihi, Ngāti Makino and Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau and is a framework to assist in the articulation of mauri, its various states, and how it is affected by the surrounding environment. An elaboration of these expressions of Mauri is outlined below.

TE MAURI IHOIHO METHODOLOGY



In the context of the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy, this framework offers a tailored model for restoration, developed specifically with Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua and its associated waterbodies in mind. Importantly, this framework is also being applied across multiple other taiao kaupapa within the catchment, providing continuity that supports the alignment of project outcomes across the region.

The inclusion of Te Mauri Ihoiho is intended to be complementary to conventional scientific methodologies and tools, creating a collective knowledge system that enables comprehensive evaluation of progress toward the vision of Mauri Ora mai Tarawera ki Te Awa o Te Atua.

It is important to acknowledge that this guiding framework does not, in any way, override or diminish the rights of any Iwi within the Tarawera Collective to utilise their own existing mauri models or cultural monitoring approaches. Rather, it provides a unifying foundation that can coexist alongside diverse expressions of kaitiakitanga and cultural practice.

Monitoring Mauri – indicators of progress

To evaluate progress toward achieving Mauri Ora, the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group will develop a collective knowledge system grounded in a collaboratively designed tiro tiro (observation) methodology. This culturally appropriate system is tailored to observe, analyse, and evaluate the mauri of Tarawera Awa from Te Tapahoro to Te Moana-nui-a-Toi, encompassing the entire tupuna awa.

This approach integrates Te Mauri Ihoiho with conventional science and ongoing cultural monitoring to express a shared understanding of the awa's health.

Existing monitoring includes:

- Conventional water quality and ecological monitoring by member councils
- Cultural observations by Iwi and hapū

Historically, cultural observations guided Iwi and hapū interactions with their tupuna awa, managing usage to sustain and enhance mauri. These practices have diminished over time due to disconnection but are being revitalised through this collective methodology, enriching environmental management.

Indicators will include expressions of Mauri Atua through karakia and link monitoring data with the strategy's objectives and outcomes, defining the restoration target of Mauri Ora. Considerations of data sovereignty and appropriate application will be paramount.

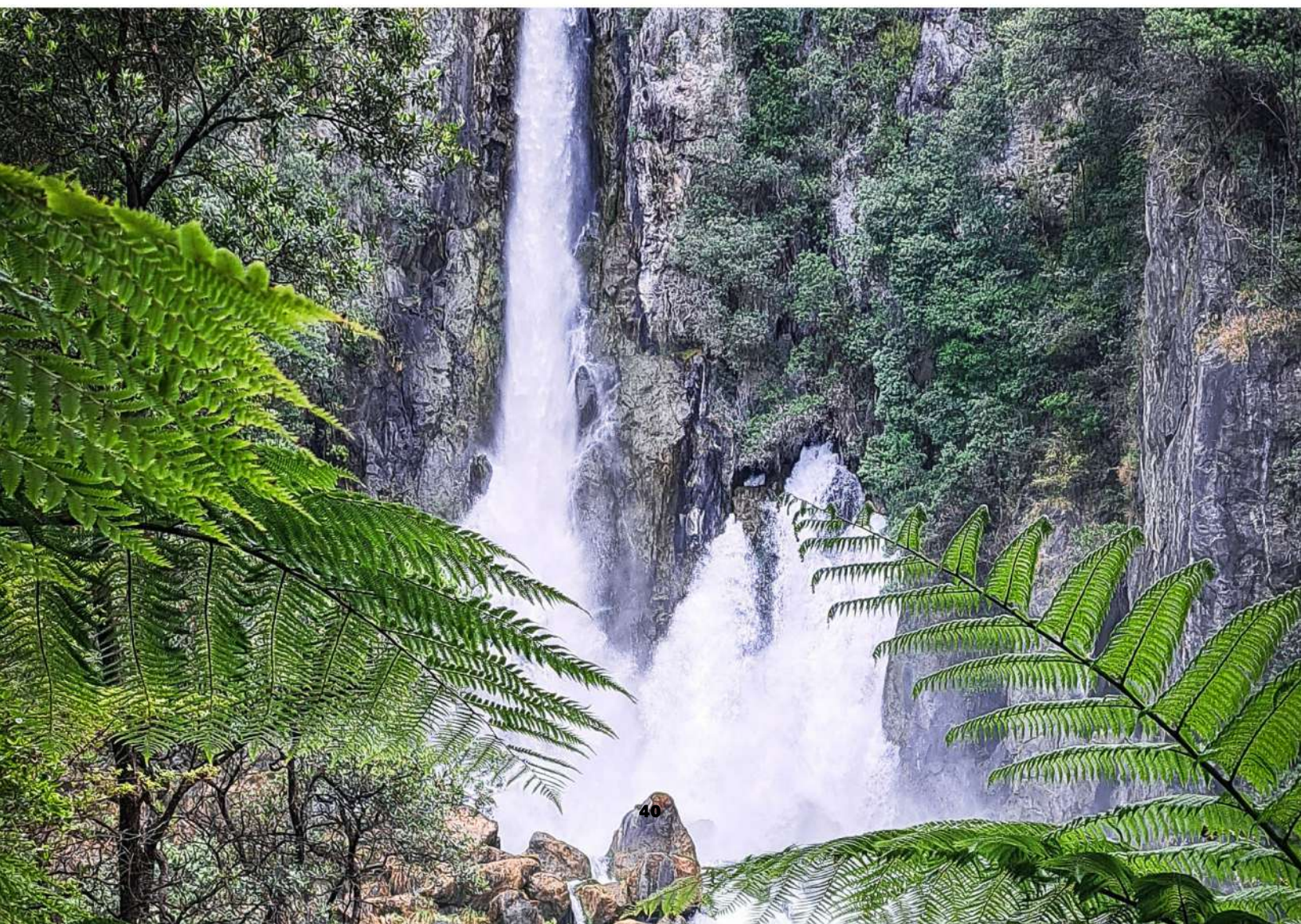
Capacity building and future generations

Implementation requires building capacity and capability across members of the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group, with opportunities for employment and social enterprise for ngā uri o Tarawera Awa. This will support continuous monitoring and succession planning, equipping future generations to contribute actively toward the vision.

Many marae, papakāinga, and communities along the awa and wider catchment have vested interests in this kaupapa.

Collective commitment

The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group acknowledges the mana whakahaere of all Iwi, hapū, and whānau connected to Tarawera, offering this collective approach to observe, monitor, and evaluate progress toward the vision of restoring Tarawera ki Te Awa o Te Atua to Mauri Ora.



Annex D: Strategic influence and policy integration

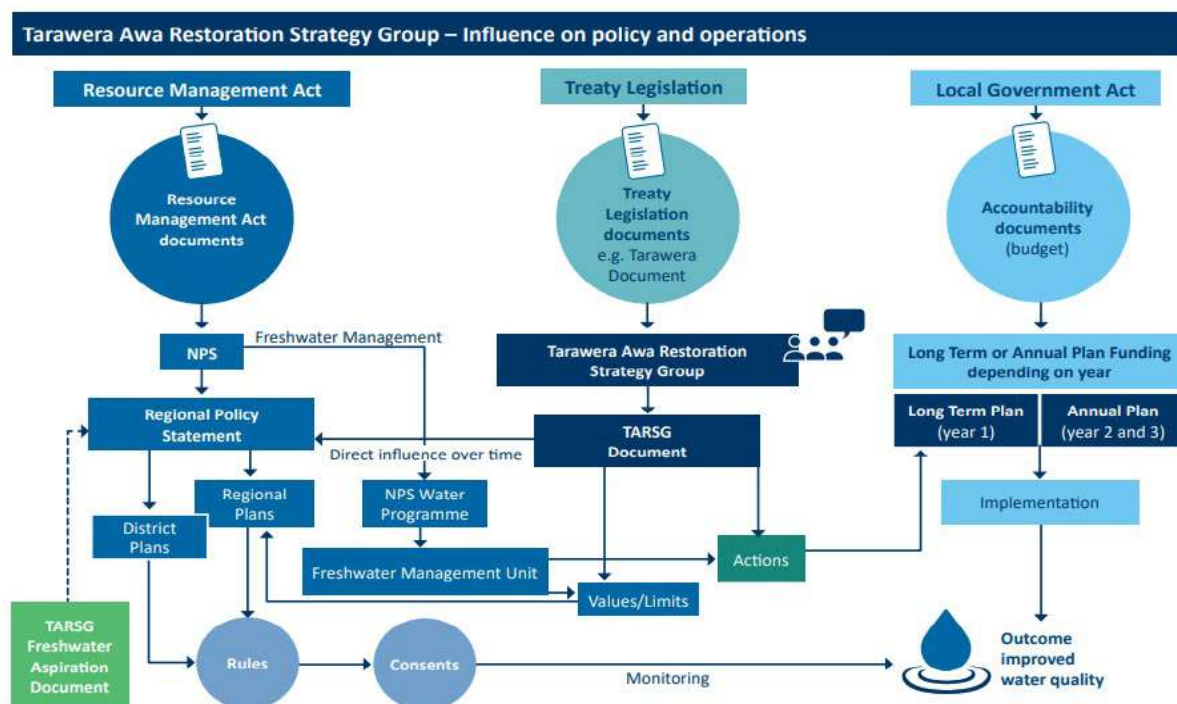
Effective restoration of Tarawera Awa ki Te Awa o Te Atua depends not only on on-the-ground actions but also on embedding the Strategy’s vision within policy frameworks and decision-making processes. By integrating strategic priorities into policy and operational practices, we strengthen the foundations for meaningful and lasting restoration outcomes.

The TARSG acknowledges that legislative change is on the horizon and that reforms to the current system are underway. Ngāti Rangitihi intends to work with the Crown to negotiate equivalent arrangements under the new system. It is the expectation of the TARSG that the Strategy Document will be afforded recognition equivalent to that provided under the existing provisions of the Ngāti Rangitihi Claims Settlement Act 2022. This will ensure that the vision, objectives, and desired outcomes are appropriately recognised and provided for, including through the regional spatial plan, relevant land use plans, and the natural environment plan.

Once agreement has been reached and the new legislation has been enacted, the Strategy Document will be updated to accurately reflect these arrangements, consistent with the Crown’s obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi settlements.

Influence on current policy and operations

This section outlines how the Strategy aligns with current legislative requirements, council planning documents, and governance structures. The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy plays a vital role in shaping local policy and operational decisions affecting the Tarawera catchment. By embedding the Strategy’s vision, objectives, and desired outcomes within council planning processes, it ensures that restoration efforts are reflected consistently across all levels of governance and management.



Alignment with planning documents

The diagram illustrates the interconnected framework between the three primary legislative Acts, council planning documents, and resource management decision-making processes. It highlights how Councils — Rotorua Lakes, Kawerau, and Whakatāne District Councils—must incorporate the Strategy’s vision and objectives when updating resource management policies and plans.

Flowing from Te Tapahoro to its mouth at Matatā, the Tarawera River traverses these district boundaries, each governed by its own legislative responsibilities. These responsibilities include the development and enforcement of District Plans, which must give effect to National Policy Statements and Regional Policy Statements, and cannot be inconsistent with Regional Plans.

When evaluating resource consent applications within the Tarawera catchment, Councils must carefully consider these interconnected planning documents to uphold the Strategy’s priorities. Additionally, any changes to resource management legislation must respect existing Treaty Settlements, safeguarding the Strategy’s place and influence.

Role of the Joint Advisory Committee

The Matatā Scenic Reserve, Whakapaukorero, and Te Awa o Te Atua Joint Advisory Committee was established under Subpart 4 of the Ngāti Awa Claims Settlement Act 2005. Its purpose is to advise the Minister and Director-General on conservation matters related to Te Awa o Te Atua and Matatā Scenic Reserve, and to provide guidance to the Ngāti Awa governance entity on issues affecting Whakapaukorero.

Three members of the Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group—representing Ngāti Awa, Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau, and Ngāti Rangitīhi—sit on the Joint Advisory Committee. Te Papa Atawhai participates as an invited observer in the Tarawera Awa restoration Strategy Group. This strong hononga (connection) ensures ongoing alignment and collaboration in the strategic development and implementation of conservation and restoration initiatives for Te Awa o Te Atua.

Existing initiatives and the role of spatial planning

The Tarawera Awa Restoration Strategy Group acknowledges and celebrates the many Iwi, hapū, kaitiaki, marae, kura, community groups, landowners, rangatahi pathways, councils and stakeholders actively restoring and uplifting the mauri of the Tarawera Awa and Te Awa o Te Atua. The future action planning intends to support these existing initiatives.

Across the catchment, a wide range of taiao-focused initiatives — from riparian planting and wetland restoration to environmental education and sustainable land practices — are making meaningful contributions to the health of waterways, ecosystem resilience, and community wellbeing. These efforts form a strong foundation for lasting change. The introduction of Kōtuku Agreements offers a valuable opportunity to build on this momentum through collaboration, knowledge sharing, and coordinated action.

At the same time, spatial planning plays a vital role in shaping the future of the Tarawera Catchment. The awa is central to the region’s economy, supporting key industries like agriculture, forestry, and wood processing, while also holding deep cultural and social value. Integrated, forward-looking planning has the potential to restore the mauri of the awa, unlock tourism opportunities in places like Matatā and Te Awa o Te Atua, support growth, and build resilience to climate change.

When aligned with community needs and aspirations, spatial planning and existing initiatives together can pave the way for thriving and connected communities.



Working together for te whenua me te iwi





TARAWERA
AWA RESTORATION STRATEGY GROUP

tarawera.org.nz