

Ko te Whakahaumanu o te Rakitata Awa

The Rakitata River Revival Strategy

The Rakitata (Rangitata) River Revival Strategy sets the vision, aspirations and direction we are collectively working towards for the whole catchment.

Tō tātou tūru apō **Our vision**

With our community, we value, protect, and restore the mauri of the Rakitata awa (river), ki uta ki tai (from the mountains to the sea).

Tō tātou kaupapa **Our mission**

Bringing together Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua as Manawhenua and kaitiaki of the Rakitata awa, government agencies and the community, our collective mahi will support restoring a long-term healthy mauri of the awa, ki uta ki tai.

We seek a healthy braided river ecosystem on the Rakitata where native taonga are abundant and healthy, and people and communities can connect and thrive.

This non-statutory strategy reflects our collective commitment to a healthy future for the river and the communities connected to it.

It provides the kaupapa (platform) to develop an integrated work plan for partner agencies and Rakitata community. The strategy will be reviewed regularly – at least every five years – to keep it relevant.

**We have been offered this special whakataukī (proverb) by
Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua Upoko Tewera King to guide our work.**

Te whāriki kia mōhio ai tātou ki a tātou

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi
ki te raranga i te whāriki
kia mōhio ai tātou ki a tātou.
Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu,
mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga,
ka oti tēnei whāriki.
I te otinga
me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai
ka puta mai
a tana wā, me titiro hoki
ki ngā raranga i makere
nā te mea, he kōrero anō kei reira.

The tapestry of understanding

The tapestry of understanding
cannot be woven
by one strand alone.
Only by the working together of strands
and the working together of weavers will
such a tapestry be completed.
When it is complete
let us look at the good
that comes from it
and, in time we should also look
at those dropped stitches
because, they also have a message.



Artistic representation of what a restored coastal lagoon could look like. Image: Mark Neilson ©

Restoring the mauri of the awa

Mauri is an essential element of the spiritual relationship of Kāi Tahu (also known as Ngāi Tahu) with the awa, embodying the physical and spiritual elements that make up the life force of all things. All elements of the natural environment possess a life force, and all forms of life are connected.

All awa carry their own mauri and have their own mana (status).

The Rakitata River was once an area of incredible abundance, home to unique braided river plants and animals, habitats and ecosystems. Today the mauri of the awa has declined with losses in water quality and biodiversity from modern human-induced pressures including encroachment, land use change, water abstraction, climate change, invasive plants and animals, and pollution.

Ki uta ki tai is a philosophy that reflects the Kāi Tahu view of environmental and resource management. It is a traditional concept encompassing kaitiakitanga (guardianship) from the mountains and great inland lakes, down the rivers to hāpua (lagoons), wahapū (estuaries) and to the sea. Ki uta ki tai encapsulates the interconnectedness of the whole environment and the need for an integrated approach in managing the awa.

Tatai raranga ka kōrero | Weaving our stories

Te awa | The river

The intertwining braids of the mighty Rakitata support many people who live and work in its catchment area of more than 177,000 hectares, weaving a rich contemporary tapestry of overlapping cultural, environmental and social values.

The name Rangitata (Kāi Tahu pronunciation Raki-tata) speaks of the significance of the awa as a travel route for Manawhenua.

Rakitata literally means *the stairway to Ranginui* the sky father.

Rangi means *heavens* or *sky father*, signifying the ascension to the wananga, a place of learning and spirituality, where communion with the atua (gods) can take place, and tata means *close by*.

Other interpretations allude to the physical attributes of the catchment, variously translated as *shrouded peak* or *day of the lowering clouds*.

The Rakitata is an alpine-fed river with flows generally lowest in winter and highest in early summer, due to snowmelt.

The headwaters of the Rakitata rise from the eastern slopes of the Kā Tiritiri o te Moana /Southern Alps. The Te Awa o Tukua /Havelock River and Te Awa o Moinaina /Clyde River are the two major tributaries that converge to form the Rakitata awa.

Other tributaries include the Lawrence and Potts Rivers while smaller tributaries include O Rae Korokio/Bush Stream and Totara/Forest Creek. Further downstream, the river narrows into the Rakitata Gorge, which divides the river into distinct upper and lower reaches.

The upper reach is defined by its mountainous backdrop, where there are extensive ecologically rich spring-fed streams and wetland habitats.

The lower reach traverses the flat Canterbury Plains/Kā Pākihi-whakatekateka-a-Waitaha before flowing into the Pacific Ocean approximately 30 km northeast of Te Tihi-o-Maru/Timaru. The Canterbury Plains/Kā Pākihi-whakatekateka-a-Waitaha have become the focus of more intensive dairy farming over the last 20 years. Here the river is constrained within the terraces of the northern bank and existing flood control protections on the southern bank. Outside the constrained main channel, the south and middle branches are ephemeral dryland swales that only carry water during floods.

The hāpua (river mouth lagoon) is another distinctive feature of the Rakitata. The hāpua forms a long, narrow, and shallow river mouth lagoon partially enclosed by a gravel barrier beach. The hāpua is predominantly freshwater, unlike estuaries that are more saline. Unlike many smaller rivers along the Canterbury coastline with hāpua, the mouth of the Rakitata is nearly always open, with closures being rare.

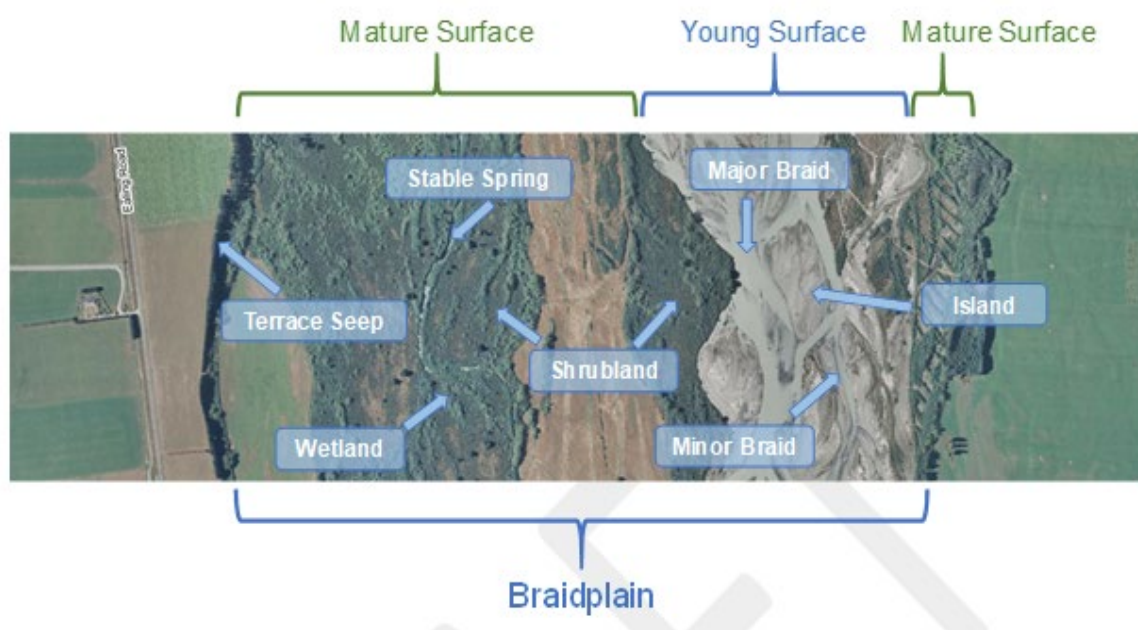
The catchment is home to an array of incredibly diverse ecosystems and habitats that support rare native birds, algae, plants, invertebrates and fish.

The Rakitata awa | An iconic 'braided river'

Braided rivers are endangered ecosystems, comprised of a mosaic of habitat types that contribute to their biodiversity value. These habitats occur across a 'braidplain', a term that encompasses both the young alluvial surfaces of the frequently disturbed floodplain and the more mature, less frequently disturbed surfaces towards the edge of the river.

Major and minor braids carry most of the river's flow and traverse a relatively young alluvial surface. While regular floods restrict productivity within the braided channels, floods also maintain gravels that are relatively free of vegetation, which is preferred habitat for rare native birds.

The more mature surfaces of the braidplain are peppered with groundwater seepages and springs that provide stable, productive habitats for algae, plants, invertebrates and fish. (Gray et al. 2018)



Aerial view of the Ealing reach of the Rakitata River, showing the braided habitat mosaic. Terminology is adapted from Gray (2018) and the aerial image is courtesy of Environment Canterbury.

Key threats

All is not well with New Zealand's rivers and there is increasing public concern about their state. Rivers have special intrinsic values that are being incrementally lost. Understanding the key pressures of this loss is important in undertaking restoration of the Rakitata.

Braided rivers are under threat from multiple sources, including introduced predators, weed invasion, water abstraction, pollution, modified flow regimes, river protection works, gravel extraction, climate change and human disturbance. While data is lacking for many of the potential threats listed above, encroachment is a known, quantified and pervasive issue for Canterbury rivers. A recent study on river encroachment found that the Rakitata River was one of the most severely affected rivers in Canterbury.

The state of the awa, including key pressures and opportunities, is explored in the report 'Rangitata Catchment River Values' (2019) by Instream Consulting. This report was commissioned by the Department of Conservation to inform this project and can be found [via this link](#) or by searching 'Rangitata River Catchment Conservation Values' online.



Te Rakitata, Kāi Tahu me Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua

The takiwā (territory) of Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua, extends from the Rakaia to the Waitaki River, inland to Ka Tiritiri-o-te-Moana, the Main Divide of the Southern Alps.

Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu has a strong cultural, spiritual, historical and traditional association with the Rakitata. This connection with the awa was recognised by the Crown through the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998.

The river is a taonga of great cultural and spiritual significance to Manawhenua, Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua and Kāi Tahu.

The river was sometimes used by Kāi Tahu parties from Canterbury as part of a trail to Te Tai Poutini (the West Coast). The tūpuna had an intimate knowledge of navigation, river routes, safe harbours and landing places, and the locations of food and other resources on the river. The river was part of a network of trails that were used to ensure the safest journey, with known locations along the way used for camping overnight and gathering kai.

The Rakitata was an important mahinga kai (food gathering area) for Canterbury Kāi Tahu. Mahinga kai is about living and connecting in this world. For Kāi Tahu, it is about thriving, about maintaining those things that sustain and nourish us, and that bring us wellbeing – clean water, clean air, clean soil and sufficient shelter. It includes access to clean and healthy kai, with consideration for future generations.

Manawhenua, Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua, hold considerable knowledge of whakapapa, traditional trails and tauranga waka, places for gathering kai and other taonga, including ways in which to sustainably use the resources of the river by acknowledging the relationship of people with the river and their dependence on it, and tikanga for the proper utilisation of resources.

This knowledge is maintained today by whānau and hapū and is regarded as a taonga. Some people are disconnected from the natural world and from the awa. Allowing them to express whakapapa back to the awa can both re-establish traditional connections and enhance the awa.

Te hāpori whānui o Rakitata | The Rakitata community

Many people in our community are also intertwined over multiple generations with the awa, as a central feature of their life and work.

The success of Ko te Whakahaumanu o te Rakitata Awa rests on community support and we are actively seeking opportunities to work together to meet our goal of restoring the mauri of the awa.

We'll be continuing conversations with the community to talk about plans, get feedback and see how we can support the work that many are already doing to restore the mauri of the awa, to tell community stories and hear how you'd like to get involved.

Ā tatou mahi | Our role

We are Manawhenua and six government agencies with various responsibilities for the Rakitata. We are collaborating for the wellbeing of the river and the community connected to it, and we are committed to the development and implementation of this restoration strategy.

Manawhenua is held by whānau with whakapapa to the takiwā of Arowhenua, represented by Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua.

The agencies are Environment Canterbury Kaunihera Taiao ki Waitaha, Land Information New Zealand Toitū te Whenua, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai, Central South Island Fish and Game, Timaru District Council Te Kaunihera ā-Rohe o Te Tihi Manu and Ashburton District Council.

The partnership grew from the Department of Conservation's Ngā Awa river restoration programme with partner Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua, and their commitment to working in wider partnership to restore the Rakitata.

Each of the partners has a current role in aspects of managing land use, the landscape, water, weed and pest control, and biodiversity. These responsibilities often overlap.

We all respect and value the living status of the awa to which our communities are deeply connected.

By working together to restore and protect the awa, our goal is to enhance the health and wellbeing of our community now and for generations to come.

Steering group

In December 2019, a staff group from each agency was formed to oversee the work. Representatives came together in a non-statutory alliance committing each agency in a collaborative partnership to meet the vision statement for the river for improved cultural, environmental and social outcomes.

Working group

A working group was formed with representatives from Manawhenua and each agency's operational staff, and tasked with developing a river restoration plan and annual workplan for steering group approval.

The mahi of the working group includes maximising the impact of individual work programmes, developing joint solutions, coordinating activities on the Rakitata and working with the community, based on a shared vision and shared values to restore the mauri of the awa.

Statutory obligations

The role of the working group is not to make statutory decisions, but to seek interagency alignment, progress works and make informed comment to the steering group in matters of statutory interest to the vision. Statutory matters (for example resource consents, plan changes and changes to lease agreements) will still proceed through the processes prescribed in relevant legislation.

Setting the pou

Ngā mātāpono | Our values

These are the key shared values that honour the river and underpin the revival strategy and work programmes.

1. The mauri of the awa, ki uta ki tai | A whole-of-river approach

We acknowledge and value the living status of the awa and the need for an all-encompassing approach.

Mauri is sometimes translated as life force. It is an energy that binds and animates everything in the physical world.

Awa means river, but we share a much more expansive view that describes an interconnected, holistic living system extending from the water in the river, to the riverbed, to the margins, the vegetation, wetlands and beyond.

Ki uta ki tai is a philosophy that reflects the Kāi Tahu view of environmental and resource management. It is a traditional concept encompassing kaitiakitanga, sometimes translated as guardianship, all the way from the mountains and great inland lakes, down the rivers to hāpua (lagoons), wahapū (estuaries) and out to the sea. Ki uta ki tai encapsulates the interconnectedness of the whole environment and the need for an all-encompassing approach to managing the awa.

2. Whakapapa | Lineage and connection

We respect the many ways in which people are connected to the Rakitata awa.

Whakapapa is about descent and connections. Kāi Tahu history and whakapapa are deeply embedded in the landscape and resources of Te Waipounamu (the South Island).

Kāi Tahu are linked not just to each other over many generations, but to the land, the sea, and the wider environment. In the Rakitata, Manawhenua learned to survive and thrive in the area and have nurtured a long-standing and close intergenerational relationship to the Rakitata.

Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua acknowledge ancestry from Kāi Tahu, Waitaha, Hawea, Rapuwai and Ngāti Mamoe, who have continued to live in the area and on the awa for over 700 years.

3. Rakatirataka | Leadership and autonomy

The leadership of Manawhenua is central to achieving our goals.

Rakatirataka (leadership) is about the traditional authority to make decisions about how a resource should be used and managed, traditionally embodied within the concept of manawhenua.

Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua represent Manawhenua as kaitiaki of the Rakitata. The exercise of rakatirataka is linked to and guided by mātauranga; scientific, historic, local and traditional knowledge.

The Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act grants a Deed of Recognition and Statutory Acknowledgement that requires consent authorities to give regard of the association of Ngāi Tahu to the Rangitata River.

4. Kaitiakitaka | Intergenerational sustainability

We can all play a part in restoring the Rakitata for future generations.

Often translated as guardianship, kaitiakitaka is about protecting and guarding the environment. It is a deeply held inherited responsibility, and an active obligation to the landscape, its waterways, and people.

Kaitiakitaka means looking after the environment both now and for future generations so that it can continue to sustain our communities.

A cornerstone of kaitiakitaka is mahika kai, the food resources that are hunted, gathered, cultivated and nurtured for the benefit of those who come after them.

Mahika kai literally means ‘to work the food’ and includes the practices involved in producing, procuring and protecting these essential resources.

In this way, kaitiakitaka is also closely linked to rakitirataka giving the ability to manaaki (host, care for) manuhiri and matāwaka (visitors) to the area with the provision of local foods and safety, once rakitirataka was acknowledged by them.

Abundant and thriving mahika kai is a key indicator of the health of our rivers. Everyone has a part to play in protecting and enhancing mahika kai, as an important part of sustainable environmental management.

5. Manaakitaka | Healthy rivers, healthy people and communities

We respect and acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between people and the awa.

For people to be healthy, our environment must be healthy. Manaakitaka expresses the responsibility to support all who live within our community and our environment. It also demands recognition of mana, of status, and the resulting obligation to return mana in relationships. Reciprocity is key.

The lives and livelihoods of many people in the Rakitata region are profoundly interwoven with the awa.

Therefore, we respect the mana of the awa to which our communities are deeply connected and honour our obligation to look after the awa as it looks after us.

Kā matatika | Our objectives

The whole braided river system is maintained, and habitat loss and functionality are addressed.	Catchment land and water supports indigenous biodiversity.
The traditional roles of kaitiakitaka and rangatirataka are restored to Manawhenua.	Connections between awa, land and marine habitats are managed to support viable populations of the species that depend on them.
Mahika kai, taonga, threatened and native species are in abundance.	The living status of the awa is respected.
Culturally significant and critical or rare ecosystems are protected and enhanced.	The community is enriched by the awa.

Glossary

Definitions for te reo Māori words are sourced from Te Aka, [the Māori Dictionary](#) or cultural consultants for Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua.

A note about dialect

In the 19th century many Ngāi Tahu, particularly in the southernmost reaches of the South Island, spoke a distinct dialect of the Māori language - as do Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua today. The Kāi Tahu dialect from southern Te Wai Pounamu substitutes 'k' for 'nga' which means that Rangitata becomes Rakitata for example. This dialect is used here as the living reflection of te reo Māori in the Rakitata region.

Biodiversity: all the different kinds of life to be found in an area.

Catchment/whaitua: an area of land where rain flows into a common river, lake or other body of water.

Ecosystem: a community of living and non-living things that work together.

Encroachment: new structures or changing land uses within the braidplain, which could interfere with or constrain the river and its individual channels.

Hapori: section of a kinship group, family, society, community.

Hapū: kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe – section of a large kinship group and the primary political unit in traditional Māori society. It consisted of whanāu sharing descent from a common ancestor, usually being named after the ancestor, but sometimes from an important event in the group's history. A number of related hapū usually shared adjacent territories forming a looser tribal federation (iwi).

Hāpua: pool of water, lagoon, pond.

Iwi: extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race – often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.

Kaitiaki: trustee, minder, guard, custodian, guardian, caregiver, keeper, steward.

Kaupapa: platform, matter for discussion, policy, plan, purpose.

Mana: prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma – mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object.

Mātauranga: knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill

Rakatirataka: chieftainship, right to exercise authority, chiefly autonomy, chiefly authority, ownership, leadership of a social group, domain of the rangatira, noble birth, attributes of a chief.

Raranga: weaving.

Rūnaka: council, tribal council, assembly, board, boardroom, iwi authority – assemblies called to discuss issues of concern to iwi or the community.

Taonga: treasure, anything prized – applied to anything considered to be of value including socially or culturally valuable objects, resources, phenomenon, ideas and techniques.

Tipuna: ancestors, grandparents – plural form of tipuna and the eastern dialect variation of tūpuna.

Whakatauki: proverb, significant saying, formulaic saying, cryptic saying, aphorism. Like whakatauāki and pepeha they are essential ingredients in whaikōrero.

Whānau: extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people – the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members.

Appendix 1

Whakatakotoranga | Structure: Objectives

The vision for the Rakitata has eight high-level interrelated objectives.

1	The whole braided river system is maintained, and habitat loss and functionality are addressed.	<p>The Rakitata has room to remain dynamic and can act as a living braided river.</p> <p>River encroachment (artificial loss of ‘braid plain’) is the single largest threat to braided rivers in Canterbury, including the Rakitata. Braided rivers are dynamic by nature, in a constant state of both creation and destruction of the very habitats that make it unique. The awa requires both water and room to allow these natural processes to play out.</p>
2	The traditional roles of kaitiakitanga and rangatiratanga are restored to Manawhenua.	<p>Ensuring the voice of Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua is heard and acknowledged as kaitiaki of the Rakitata.</p> <p>The exercise of rakatiratanga is linked to and guided by mātaranga; scientific, historic, local, and traditional knowledge.</p> <p>The Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act grants a Deed of Recognition and Statutory Acknowledgement that requires consent authorities to give regard of the association of Ngāi Tahu Manawhenua, Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua.</p>
3	Mahika kai, taonga, threatened and native species are in abundance.	<p>Restoring populations and protecting the iconic life and mahinga kai of the Rakitata. Te Rūnaka o Arowhenua view all native species as taonga.</p> <p>Braided rivers are internationally rare ecosystems and the plants and animals that live on the Rakitata are often unique. They rely on the awa for their lifecycle and have developed adaptations and behaviours that allow them to inhabit the dynamic systems of the awa.</p>
4	Culturally significant and critical or rare ecosystems are protected and enhanced.	<p>This is about restoring those special places of the Rakitata.</p> <p>There are a wide range of important natural habitats throughout the river such as; springs, tarns, wetlands, seeps, low terraces, stone fields, riverine dune systems, tussock lands, glaciers and snowfields, shrublands, forested catchments, estuary/hāpua and coastline. Each of these habitats hold natural and cultural values and providing protection for all supports ecosystem resilience.</p>
5	Catchment land and water supports indigenous biodiversity.	<p>Processes and activities within the wider catchment support the health of the Rakitata.</p> <p>The water in the main stem of the Rakitata is predominantly alpine sourced which means water quality is relatively good. This living water provides the environment for all braided river plants and animals.</p>

		<p>Intensification of land use across the catchment has seen declines in the extent and quality of natural wetlands which are like the kidneys of the awa absorbing large quantities of water, filtering pollutants, and helping to prevent floods.</p> <p>We've also seen increased sediment loading, E. coli and nitrates, particularly of creeks and springs that feed the awa and provide critical habitats for much river life. Alpine and spring-fed systems in the upper catchment are highly sensitive to sediment and nutrient impacts which affect the specialised community of non-migratory fish and invertebrates.</p>
6	<p>Connections between awa, land and marine habitats are managed to support viable populations of the species that depend on them.</p>	<p>Environmental and process connections across the awa and the wider landscape allow plants and animals to thrive.</p> <p>Plants and animals require space and the ability to move across resources to feed, reproduce, make homes, and spread. Connections (or corridors) are often simply envisioned as vegetated areas providing these linkages but can be more subtle such as maintained water flows, nutrient flow paths, barriers caused by exotic species dominance, and having functional interfaces of the awa with terrestrial (wetlands) and marine environments (hāpua).</p>
7	<p>The living status of the awa is respected.</p>	<p>For people to be healthy, our environment must be healthy. Many in our community hold a special connection with the awa. Helping all of us to connect with the Rakitata and each other, is a way of showing our respect and supporting collective action to restore the mauri of the awa.</p> <p>Manaakitaka describes not only the way that we care for others, but also demands recognition of mana, of status, and the resulting obligation to return mana in relationships. That is, reciprocity is key.</p> <p>Therefore, we respect the mana of the awa to which our communities are deeply connected and honour our obligation to look after the awa- as it looks after us.</p>
8	<p>The community is enriched by the awa.</p>	<p>The Canterbury community draws deeply from the Rakitata to support its economic, social, and cultural wellbeing. This is about ensuring the community benefits from the intrinsic values the Rakitata carries now and into the future.</p>