



Makuri Catchment Strategy

A coordinated catchment-wide plan to restore wetland habitat, build community connection, and help matuku-hūrepo — the Australasian bittern — return to the Makuri.

24,618

HECTARES OF LAND & WATER

91%

PASTORAL LAND USE

3

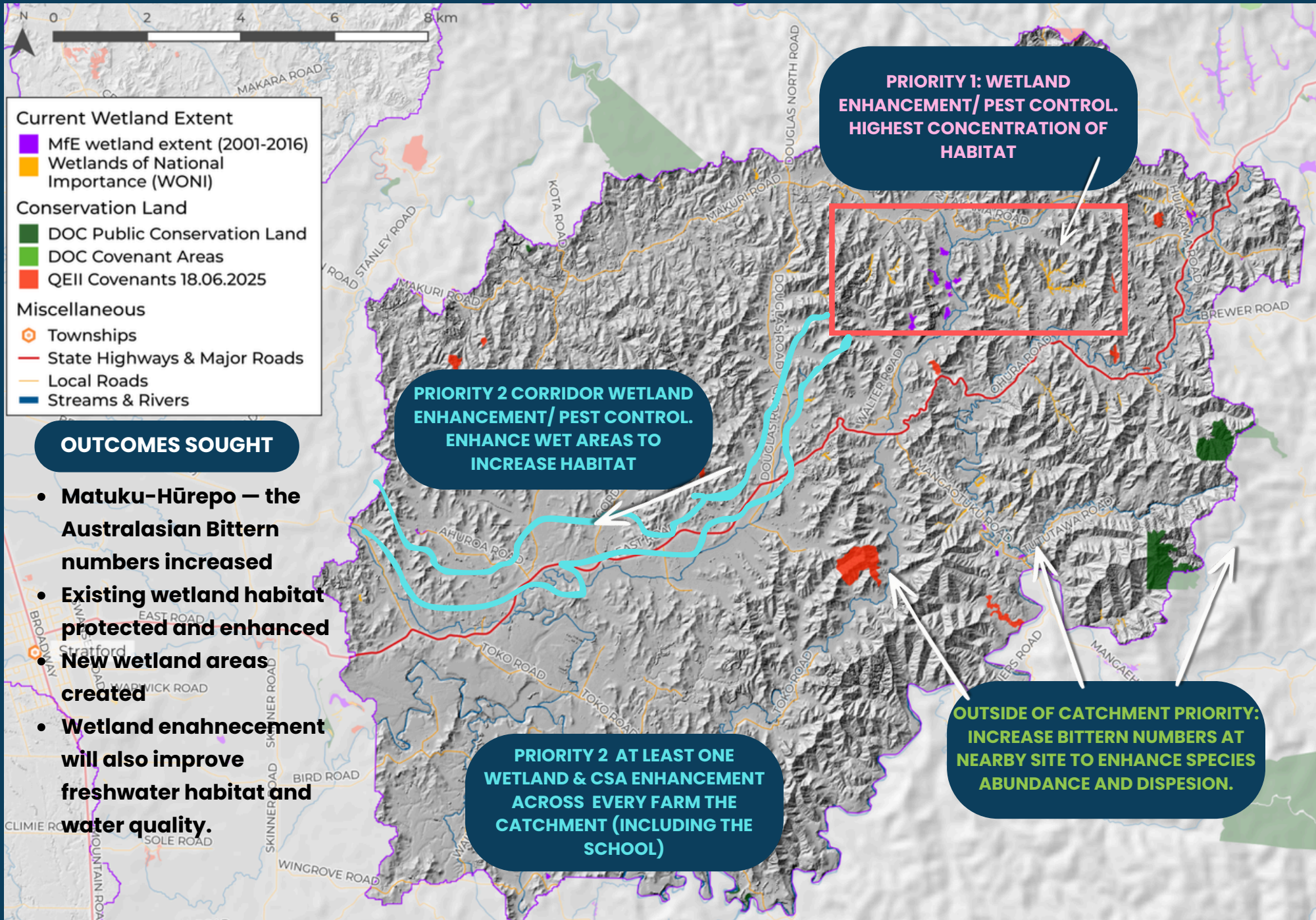
INTEGRATED WORKSTREAMS

1

SHARED CATCHMENT STRATEGY

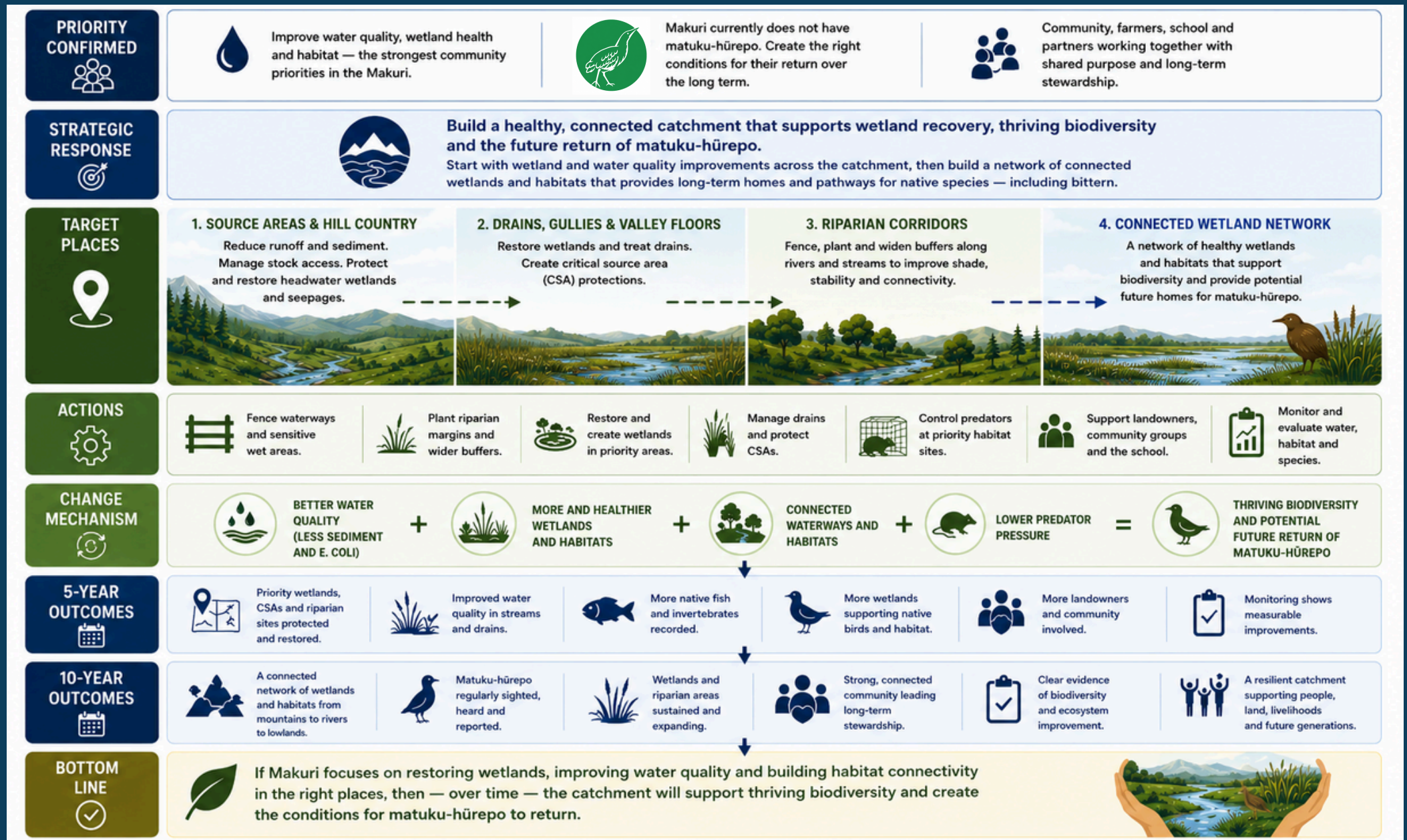
Catchment Strategy Summary

10 YEAR STRATEGY ON A PAGE



Catchment Strategy Logic

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER



Catchment Objective

A connected network of wetlands and habitats established across the catchment, resulting in measurable improvements in biodiversity, water quality, and habitat condition, with evidence of bittern presence over time and the potential for long-term establishment.



ABOUT MAKURI AND THIS CATCHMENT STRATEGY

The Makuri Catchment covers 24,618 hectares of Taranaki hill country, extending from steep sandstone ranges in the upper catchment to valley floors, gullies, drains and lowland pastoral flats. The catchment is largely pastoral, with sheep, beef and dairy farming across much of the landscape.

The Mangaotuku River and Pātea River are the two main waterways, supported by a network of smaller tributaries, drains, gullies and wet areas that connect hillslopes to valley floors and downstream waterways.

This strategy builds on the existing strengths of the Makuri: farmer knowledge, the Huiroa Hall and Domain wetland, Toko School involvement, willing landowners, Love Bittern support, and the catchment group's shared interest in bringing matuku-hūrepo back to the landscape.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Wetland and suitable habitat area is increased by **XX** hectares across the catchment.
- Demonstration sites lead to increased farmer and community uptake of wetland, drain, CSA and matuku-hūrepo habitat actions.
- At least one wetland or critical source area is protected and enhanced on each participating farm.
- Predator control is active at priority habitat sites.
- Farm Environment Plans are used to identify, record, and track progress on priority wetland and CSA actions on participating farms.
- Matuku-hūrepo are sighted, heard and reported in the Makuri Catchment over time.

Catchment State

Biophysical character

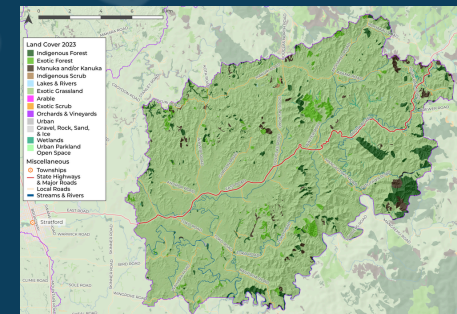
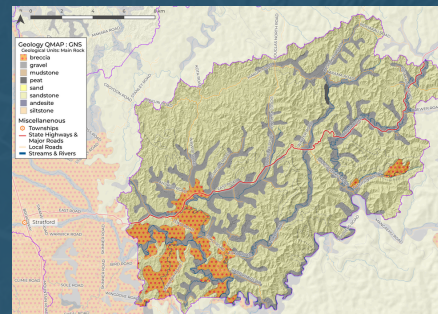
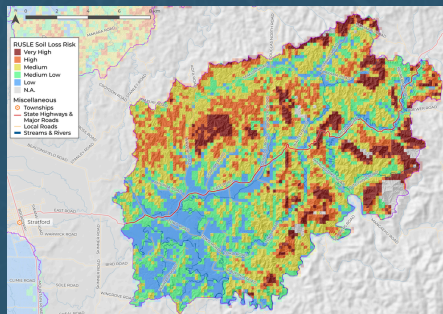
The Makuri catchment covers 24,618 hectares of Taranaki hill country and is largely pastoral. The Mangaotuku and Pātea Rivers are the main waterways, supported by a compact network of tributaries, gullies, drains and wet areas that connect hillslopes to streams.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR WATER QUALITY & HABITAT

- Erosion-prone slopes are key areas for maintaining groundcover, managing stock movement and reducing sediment loss.
- Valley floors, gullies and drainage areas are priority places for wetland restoration, sediment trapping and critical source area management.
- Strengthening stream margins through fencing, planting and wider buffers would improve shade, bank stability, habitat and contaminant interception.
- Existing wetland work, including the school wetland, provides a strong starting point for building a wider network of restored wet areas.
- Freshwater species such as shortjaw kōkopu, longfin eel, brown mudfish and kōura show the catchment still has important ecological values to build from.



VIEW CATCHMENT
MAPS HERE



Community Context

MAKURI CATCHMENT GROUP CATCHMENT STRATEGY 2026

Local Action

The Makuri Catchment Group is in its early stages, with a small but committed group of farmers, community members and the local school already taking action. The group has a clear shared identity — bringing matuku-hūrepo back to the catchment — and is building from visible work already underway.

KEY PROGRESS

- The Huiroa Hall and Domain wetland restoration has been underway since April 2022
- Toko School — an Enviro School and the only school in the catchment — has already agreed to incorporate Bring Back The Bittern into its 2026 learning programme, with principal Alison Eager actively engaged as a community champion for the project.
- Two willing landowners have already been confirmed, and funding has been secured for the farm-scale drain enhancement pilot.
- Love Bittern is already an active partner in the catchment, with engagement underway on bittern habitat requirements and connectivity opportunities from neighbouring catchments.
- A predator control trap library is in its initial stages of establishment, providing participating farmers with access to equipment for key habitat sites as the programme builds.
- The catchment group, coordinator, and two lead farmers are already in place — providing a practical, established platform for coordinated catchment-scale delivery.



Key issues & pressures

WHAT SHAPES THE STRATEGY



Water Quality & Hydrological Pressures

E.COLI

E. coli is the catchment's only measured water quality exceedance. Likely contributors include livestock access to waterways, limited riparian buffering, and flow paths that connect hillslopes, wet areas and streams during wet weather.

RIPARIAN VEGETATION

Riparian margins are mostly low in height, with limited tall canopy cover. This reduces shade, bank stability, contaminant interception and habitat quality for freshwater species.

SEDIMENT

Sediment is not currently exceeding existing standards, but erosion risk is high across steep sandstone hill country, especially in the upper and eastern catchment. Maintaining vegetation cover is important for long-term resilience.

Landscape & ecological pressures

MATUKU-HÜREPO — ABSENT OR UNCONFIRMED

Matuku-hūrepo are not confirmed as currently present in the Makuri. Restoring wetland, drain and valley-floor habitat, alongside predator control, could create the conditions needed for the species to move into the catchment over time.

FRESHWATER CONNECTIVITY

Shortjaw kōkopu, longfin eel, brown mudfish, koaro and kōura are present in or near the catchment. These species rely on connected waterways and good habitat from the coast to the upper catchment.

WETLAND LOSS: EXTENSIVE HISTORICAL DECLINE

Wetlands once extended across valley floors and drainage corridors. Most have been drained or converted to pasture, reducing habitat for wetland species such as matuku-hūrepo.

PREDATOR PRESSURE

Stoats, rats, mustelids and feral cats are a major risk for wetland birds. Restored habitat will need predator control if it is to support nesting and refuge.

Priorities & integrated logic

WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID — AND HOW THE STRATEGY RESPONDS

Priorities were identified through the Makuri Catchment Workshop (March 2026). The voting results below shaped the focus of this strategy — weaving together a practical, farm-focused approach that meets both environmental and community priorities.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES



A connected approach

The strategy starts with what is already known about matuku-hūrepo, wet areas, drains and local farm systems, while taking practical action where habitat opportunities are clear. This avoids waiting for perfect information before acting, while still making sure future investment is targeted to the sites most likely to support habitat, movement and eventual return.

Phase 1 — Years 1–2: Build understanding and start action

- Bring together Love Bittern knowledge, local observations, sighting records, TWI mapping, farmer knowledge and agency information.
- Identify habitat gaps, movement pathways and priority wetland, drain, gully, CSA and valley-floor sites.
- Walk priority sites with willing farmers to understand practical opportunities and constraints.
- Start visible habitat actions where opportunities are clear.
- Begin predator control at priority habitat sites.

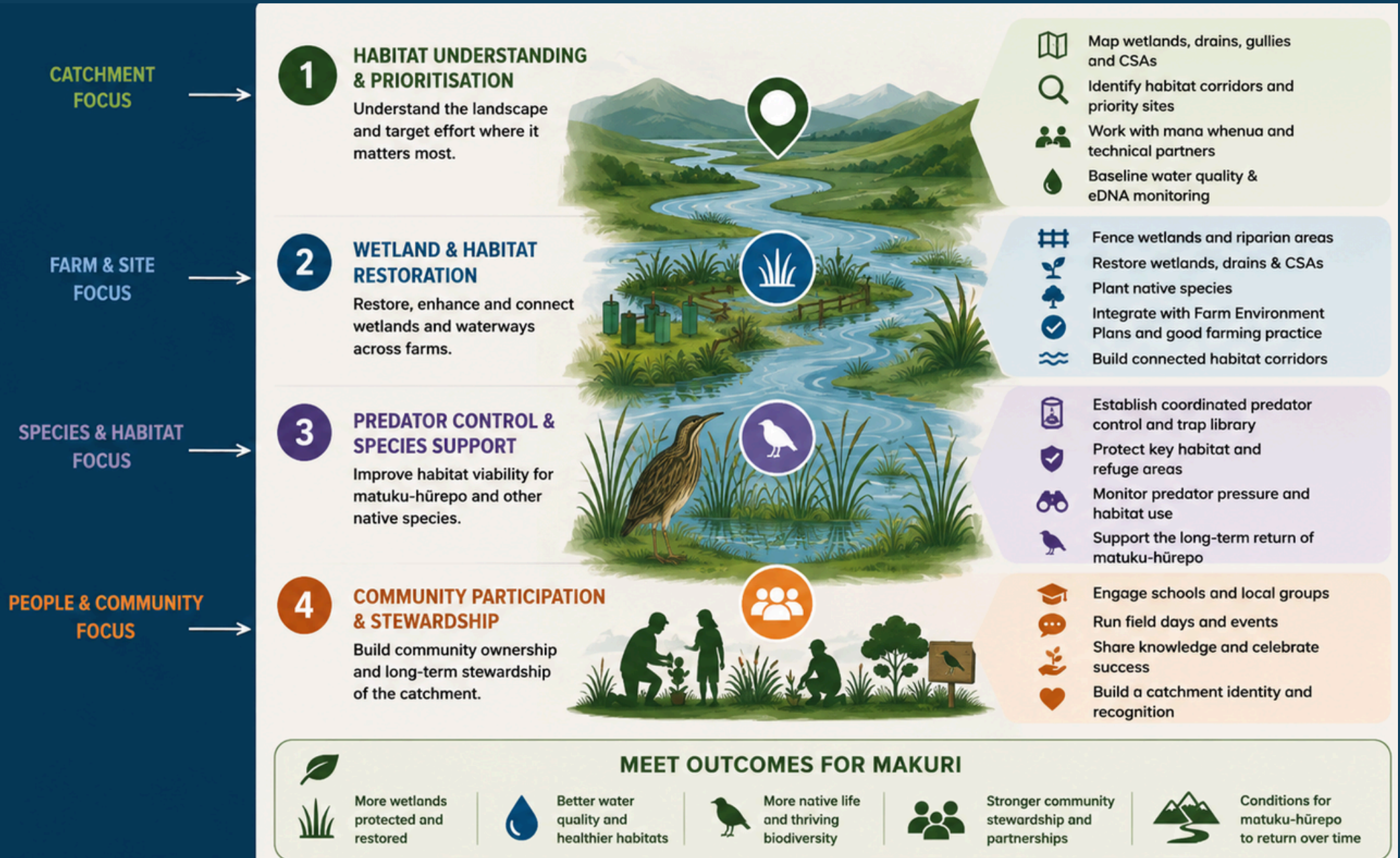
Phase 2 — Years 3+: Build the conditions for return

- Focus investment in priority habitat areas and movement pathways.
- Link wetlands, drains, gullies and stream margins into a connected habitat network.
- Work with neighbouring catchments and wider Taranaki biodiversity projects.
- Continue monitoring sightings, habitat condition and predator control.
- Adapt actions based on what is working.



Meet Outcomes Through Workstreams

THROUGH ALIGNMENT OF FOUR WORKSTREAMS ACROSS DIFFERENT SCALES OF ACTION



Habitat Understanding and Presence

We must understand a thing before you can change a thing

Before investing at scale, the group needs a shared picture of where Matuku-Hūrepo are, where they may be moving from, and which habitats across the catchment are most likely to support their presence or return. This workstream builds that picture – drawing on specialist knowledge, local observations and spatial data rather than commissioning new formal surveys.

The starting point is what already exists: knowledge held by bittern specialists about nearby populations and movement patterns, observations from farmers who know their land, and spatial mapping of wet areas, drains, gullies and flow paths that shows where suitable habitat conditions are likely to occur.



Actions across multiple scales

Individual / Landowner

Walk-Overs with Farmers

Walk wet areas, drains, gullies and stream margins with willing farmers to confirm practical habitat opportunities and understand seasonal water patterns, land history and farm constraints.

Gathering Local Observations

Farmers and residents share past sightings, calls, wet area changes and observations around drains, wetlands and stream margins.

Ongoing Sighting Reports

Set up a simple way for participants to record and share matuku-hūrepo sightings or sounds.

Local / Community

Specialist Knowledge

Bring in specialist advice on matuku-hūrepo habitat needs, nearby populations, movement behaviour and site suitability.

Priority Site Identification

Use a practical session with farmers, the coordinator and specialists to agree priority sites for habitat action.

School Involvement in Observation

Involve the local school through the Bring Back the Bittern programme to build awareness and increase local observation.

Whole Catchment

Presence & Movement Picture

Bring together specialist knowledge, local observations, sighting records and spatial mapping to understand presence, movement and habitat gaps.

Habitat Priority Map

Combine wet area mapping, farm walk-over findings and local knowledge into a shared map of priority habitat sites.

Wider Habitat Network

Understand how nearby populations may move across the landscape and what role Makuri could play in a wider Taranaki habitat network.

On-Farm Habitat Enhancement

Actions across scale

Habitat action starts where opportunities already exist. Demonstrate small scale wetland enhancement with willing farmers. Use farm-scale drain pilots as visible examples of what is possible.

This workstream focuses on protecting and improving wet areas, drains, gullies, riparian margins and CSAs so they provide better habitat, improve water quality and contribute to a connected catchment network.

Individual / Landowner

Identifying Habitat Opportunities on Farm

Walk the property with willing landowners to identify wet corners, drainage channels, gullies, seepage areas and stream margins.

Fencing Wet Areas & Drainage Channels

Exclude stock from priority wet areas and sites to protect habitat, reduce disturbance and improve water quality.

Predator Control at Priority Habitat Sites

Target predator control around priority habitat sites, especially where restoration is creating nesting or refuge potential.

Planting for Habitat Structure

Plant fenced wet areas, drain margins and gullies to build cover, shade, bank stability and habitat connection.

Local / Community

Community Wetland

Continue planting, maintenance and predator control at the community wetland so it remains a visible demonstration site.

Farm Drain Enhancement

Use existing farm drains as practical habitat opportunities, with fencing, planting and minor works used to improve wetland and waterway values.

Whole Catchment

Expanding to Further Sites — Phase 2

As early sites build confidence, expand actions to additional willing farms.

Build habitat connectivity

Link wetlands, drains, gullies and stream margins so habitat functions as a connected network.

Connect to the wider habitat network

Coordinate habitat management and predator control with neighbouring catchments and regional biodiversity programmes.

Regional/ TCC

Support Bittern population health in known Bittern areas

Support enhancement of sites that can enhance existing Bittern populations. Enhancement will increase population and possible dispersal to Makuri.

WORKSTREAM THREE

Building Participation

The Makuri group is small and still building momentum. Growing participation means making progress visible, keeping the shared goal clear, and helping farmers and the community see how each action contributes to the wider catchment.

The Bring Back the Bittern identity, supported by the community wetland, school involvement and farm examples, gives the programme a clear story to share across the catchment.



Actions across scale

Individual / Landowner

Regular One-on-One Contact

Maintain regular contact with participating and prospective landowners, tailored to each farm's context and readiness.

Practical Farm-Level Capability

Support farmers to understand what good wetland and drain habitat looks like, what actions work, and how to recognise improvement.

Recognising Landowner Contribution

Acknowledge participating farmers as active contributors to a shared community goal.

Local / Community

School Partnership

Involve the local school in sighting reports, planting days and habitat observations.

Community Planting Days

Hold planting days at the anchor wetland and participating farms to bring farmers, students, community members and mana whenua together through action.

Field Days on Participating Farms

Use farm sites where habitat work is underway to show neighbouring landowners what practical action looks like in a farm context.

Whole Catchment

Telling the Story of Progress

Use video, photos and written updates to document progress at the wetland, farm pilot sites and school programme, and share the story through community and regional channels.

Sighting Reporting Network

Maintain a simple way for the community to report Matuku-Hūrepo sightings and sounds, with updates shared back regularly to build interest and motivation.

What success looks like

MEASURING PROGRESS ACROSS THE CATCHMENT

Success in the Makuri is measured by outcomes — not just activity. It means habitat is genuinely improving, species are responding, farmers are participating, and the community has a shared sense of ownership and direction. The table below sets out what that looks like at each scale and across each phase of the strategy.

Focus Area	Individual / Landowner	Local Community	Whole Catchment
Habitat Understanding Phase 1	Farmers understand which wet areas, drains, gullies and stream margins on their properties could support habitat.	Local observations, school involvement, specialist advice and farmer knowledge are brought together to identify priority sites.	A shared picture of matuku-hūrepo presence, likely movement pathways and priority habitat areas is developed.
On-Farm Habitat Phase 1	Willing farmers begin fencing, planting, protecting or enhancing at least one wet area, drain, gully, riparian margin or CSA.	Demonstration sites at the community wetland and pilot farms show what practical habitat action looks like.	Early habitat sites are underway in priority areas, supported by predator control and linked to wider catchment planning.
Expansion & Connectivity (Years 3+) Phase 2	Habitat actions are maintained and built into Farm Environment Plans or property planning.	Field days, planting days and shared progress updates encourage more farmers and community members to take part.	Wetlands, drains, gullies and stream margins are progressively connected across farms to form a wider habitat network.
Long-Term Outcomes (10 Year)	Farmers can see visible improvements on their properties, including healthier wet areas, better stream margins and more native species.	The community has a strong shared identity around bringing matuku-hūrepo back to Makuri.	Matuku-hūrepo are sighted or heard in the catchment, and Makuri has a connected network of wetland and stream-margin habitat supporting native species.

The Core Principle

The strategy succeeds by starting with what is already here and building outward with patience and consistency. Habitat recovery takes time, but each fenced wet area, planted site, predator control line and community planting day adds to a catchment that is changing.

Implementation



IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVELY

The Makuri Catchment Group will use a flexible delivery model that matches the resources available at the time.

The group can start with low-cost coordination, shared knowledge and demonstration sites, then increase direct landowner support as funding, partnerships and capability grow.

Different approaches, matched to resourcing levels

LOW RESOURCING

Coordination and influence

Focus on enabling existing action.

- Share habitat maps, guidance and examples.
- Connect farmers with funding and advice.
- Promote alignment with Farm Environment Plans.
- Maintain school, community and landowner communication.
- Keep demonstration sites visible

MEDIUM RESOURCING

Hybrid Delivery

Coordinate local action and targeted support.

- Maintain the community wetland and pilot farm sites.
- Coordinate plants, fencing, predator control and funding applications.
- Run field days, planting days and farm walks.
- Track actions and share progress.

HIGH RESOURCING

Direct Delivery

Work directly with landowners to scale implementation.

- Provide dedicated coordinator or contractor support.
- Develop farm-level habitat action plans.
- Coordinate fencing, planting, drain enhancement and predator control.
- Deliver catchment-wide habitat programmes in priority areas.
- Monitor and report habitat outcomes.

Building Capability



Targeting Investment



Scaling Impact

YEARS 1–2:

Build Foundations

- Build relationships and trust with landowners and community.
- Bring together sighting records, specialist knowledge and local observations.
- Walk farms and map priority habitat sites.
- Establish demonstration sites.
- Begin predator control at priority locations.



YEARS 3–5:

Targeted Delivery

- Increase one-on-one landowner support.
- Expand habitat actions to further willing farms.
- Coordinate funding, contractors and plant supply.
- Build habitat connectivity.
- Protect quiet refuge areas.
- Monitor progress and adapt.



YEARS 5+:

Scaled Impact

- Expand the habitat programme across priority areas.
- Secure longer-term funding.
- Continue sighting reporting and habitat monitoring.
- Coordinate with neighbouring catchments.
- Support matuku-hūrepo return over time.



More resources
More support
Greater impact

Shared kaitiakitanga

A SHARED GOAL FOR THE MAKURI GROUP



This strategy belongs to the Makuri community. Every wetland fenced, drain enhanced, pest controlled and bittern call recorded contributes to the goal: a healthier catchment with stronger habitat connections and better conditions for native species.

The Catchment Bittern Strategy builds from what is already underway in Makuri — a restored community wetland, an engaged school, willing farmers, Love Bittern support and a catchment group ready to act. From here, the strategy provides a practical pathway toward a future where matuku-hūrepo can once again be part of the Makuri landscape.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Want to be part of the catchment group?

Work with your catchment coordinator or Taranaki Catchment Communities to identify where your effort can contribute most — whether that is sharing farm knowledge, hosting a demonstration site, joining planting days, reporting sightings, supporting predator control or helping build the next stage of catchment action.

Read the full TCC Strategy to see how this work connects with wider catchment priorities and locally-led action across Taranaki.

