TARANAKI
CATCHMENT COMMUNITIES

Ratapiko
Catchment Strategy

Healthy Lake, Healthy Catchment

A community-led strategy to improve understanding, water quality and environmental outcomes across the Ratapiko catchment.

6,178 HECTARES OF LAND & WATER	91% PASTURE
10 yr STRATEGY	3 INTEGRATED WORKSTREAMS

This catchment strategy was built by EIS Ltd alongside TCC. The techniques, formats and content cannot be reproduce without consent by both parties.

ENVIRONMENT INNOVATION STRATEGY

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01: Objectives & Approach

ENVIRONMENT
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STRATEGY

Catchment Strategy Summary

Ratapiko

ABOUT RATAPIKO AND THIS CATCHMENT STRATEGY

The Ratapiko catchment is a productive farming catchment centred around Lake Ratapiko, a valued recreational and environmental asset. The catchment includes the Makara and Makino stream systems and supports a range of native freshwater species. The lake influences both catchment identity and environmental priorities.

The catchment is characterised by:

- Lake Ratapiko as a central landscape feature
- Productive pastoral farming
- Strong community interest in water quality
- Existing monitoring programmes
- Opportunities for wetland enhancement
- Good freshwater connectivity
- Active local leadership
- Practical farm-focused solutions

Ratapiko already has many positive environmental actions underway. The opportunity is to improve understanding of catchment processes while targeting practical actions where they will have the greatest impact.

Catchment Strategy Logic

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER ON A PAGE

PRIORITY CONFIRMED

Improve understanding of Lake Ratapiko health and support practical action that improves water quality while maintaining productive farming.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Build a shared understanding of Lake Ratapiko and use that knowledge to guide practical catchment action.
Bring together monitoring, local knowledge, community experience and practical farm solutions to identify priority areas, improve water quality and strengthen catchment stewardship.

FOCUS AREAS

1. UNDERSTAND

Build understanding of lake health and catchment processes.

- Expand lake monitoring
- Monitor inflows, outflows and tributaries
- Improve understanding of E. coli, nutrients and cyanobacteria

2. IDENTIFY

Identify priority areas and opportunities for improvement.

- Map critical source areas
- Understand runoff pathways
- Identify wetland opportunities
- Prioritise key tributaries and locations

3. DEMONSTRATE

Build confidence through practical examples.

- Establish demonstration sites
- Host wetland field days
- Share monitoring results
- Showcase successful projects

4. ACT

Deliver practical improvements across the catchment.

- Critical source area management
- Wetland enhancement
- Riparian improvements
- Waterway protection and runoff management

5. MONITOR & ADAPT

Track progress and improve over time.

- Annual reporting
- Repeat monitoring
- Share results with the community
- Refine future actions

HOW WE WILL WORK

- Community-led and locally focused
- Monitoring and evidence informed
- Practical and achievable actions
- Shared learning and knowledge exchange
- Learn, adapt and improve over time

KEY ACTIONS (WHAT WE WILL DO)

UNDERSTAND

- Complete year-round lake monitoring
- Establish tributary monitoring
- Collate existing information

IDENTIFY

- Map critical source areas
- Prioritise opportunities
- Identify demonstration locations

DEMONSTRATE

- Establish flagship projects
- Host field days
- Share monitoring results
- Tell local success stories

ACT

- Deliver wetland projects
- Manage critical source areas
- Improve runoff management
- Enhance priority waterways

MONITOR & ADAPT

- Produce annual catchment report cards
- Review monitoring trends
- Update priorities and future actions

SUCCESS INDICATORS

Lake health is better understood
Monitoring covers the lake and key tributaries.

Priority areas are identified
Critical source areas and opportunities are mapped.

Practical projects are implemented
Wetland, riparian and CSA projects are underway.

Community participation increases
More landowners are involved in monitoring and action.

Monitoring informs decisions
Actions are guided by evidence and local knowledge.

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

A HEALTHY LAKE RATAPIKO

Monitoring, practical action and community stewardship work together to improve water quality, support biodiversity and maintain productive farming systems for future generations.

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02: What Makes Ratapiko Great

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Catchment State (1 / 2)

Biophysical, Cultural and Community Character

LAND AND WATER

- Lake Ratapiko receives water from multiple tributaries
- Productive allophanic soils dominate much of the catchment
- Gley soils create runoff-prone areas
- Critical source areas influence contaminant movement
- Good freshwater fish connectivity
- Existing wetlands and riparian areas provide opportunities

CATCHMENT HEALTH SUMMARY

- Periodic lake closures due to E. coli
- Limited understanding of nutrient dynamics
- Cyanobacteria risk not well understood
- Water quality monitoring gaps exist
- Good opportunities for targeted intervention
- Strong community desire for practical solutions

CATCHMENT CHARACTER

- 6,178 ha catchment
- Dominated by productive pasture
- Lake Ratapiko central to catchment identity
- Volcanic and sedimentary geology
- Allophanic, brown and gley soils
- Branching stream network
- Located within the Waitara FMU

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Catchment State (2 / 2)

Biophysical, Cultural and Community Character

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Workshop participants highlighted:

- Understanding lake health
- Better water quality information
- Practical farm actions
- Wetland opportunities
- Community learning and knowledge sharing
- Protecting recreational values
- Supporting productive farming

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- Existing lake monitoring programmes
- Community willingness to act
- Wetland discussion and education
- Existing water quality datasets
- Practical CSA management opportunities
- Demonstration sites
- Catchment-wide learning

SIGNIFICANT FRESHWATER SPECIES

- Shortjaw kōkopu (Nationally Vulnerable)
- Longfin eel (At Risk – Declining)
- Īnanga (At Risk – Declining)
- Kōura (Not Threatened)
- Common bully (Not Threatened)
- Shortfin eel (tuna) - At Risk (Declining)
- Redfin bully (At Risk – Declining)

Lamprey (source: DOC)

Redfin Bully (source: DOC)

Longfin eel (source: Auckland Zoo)

Shortjaw Kokopu (source: DOC)

Īnanga (source: DOC)

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Community Context

Building Connections Across Ratapiko

Ratapiko is a productive farming catchment centred around Lake Ratapiko, a valued recreational and environmental asset. Workshop discussions identified water quality, lake health and practical farm management as the key priorities for future action.

Participants consistently highlighted the need to better understand lake health before undertaking large-scale investment. Concerns were raised around periodic lake closures due to elevated E. coli levels, uncertainty around nutrient dynamics and the potential risk of cyanobacteria.

The community favoured a practical, evidence-based approach that combines improved monitoring and understanding with targeted on-farm action. This integrated approach forms the foundation of the Ratapiko Catchment Strategy.

ACHIEVEMENTS & STRENGTHS

Community

- Lake-focused community identity
- Strong willingness to participate in monitoring and learning
- Practical and solutions-focused approach

Land, Water & Biodiversity

- Existing Lake Ratapiko monitoring programme
- Significant stream fencing and waterway protection already completed
- Existing wetland and riparian opportunities
- Good freshwater fish connectivity
- Productive soils and farming systems

WHAT WE HEARD

Lake Health & Water Quality

- Better understanding of lake processes is needed
- Complete monitoring across the full year
- Understand tributary, inflow and outflow contributions
- Use data to guide future investment

Practical Catchment Action

- Focus on critical source areas
- Support practical wetland opportunities
- Demonstrate solutions before wider rollout
- Maintain productive farming systems
- Share examples of what works locally

Local Feedback

ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES

- Lake Health & Water Quality
- Catchment Monitoring
- Critical Source Area Management
- Wetlands & Waterway Enhancement
- Freshwater Biodiversity

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

- Build Community Knowledge
- Demonstration & Learning Sites
- Support Locally-Led Action
- Share Monitoring Results
- Strengthen Catchment Stewardship

Key Opportunities

Future Opportunities for Ratapiko

COMPLETE THE LAKE MONITORING STORY

Expand monitoring to cover the six months currently not monitored and improve understanding of lake inflows, outflows and tributaries.

CATCHMENT WATER QUALITY MONITORING

Develop a coordinated monitoring programme that links waterways, tributaries and lake health.

CRITICAL SOURCE AREA MANAGEMENT

Promote a critical source area management programme across the catchment. Communicate best practice approaches to CSA management.

WETLANDS AND WATERWAY ENHANCEMENT

Support practical wetland, riparian and drainage projects that improve water quality and biodiversity.

COMMUNITY LEARNING

Build community understanding through field days, monitoring, demonstration sites and knowledge sharing.

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03: Direction & Workstreams

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Meet Connected Outcomes

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THREE WORKSTREAMS WITH ONE INTEGRATED OUTCOME FOR RATAPIKO

1 WORKSTREAM 1
Monitoring & Understanding

Builds knowledge and provides the evidence to guide action.

- Lake water quality monitoring
- Tributary, inflow & outflow monitoring
- *E. coli*, nutrients & cyanobacteria monitoring
- Kōura & biodiversity monitoring
- Lake level & hydrology monitoring
- Data management & reporting

2 WORKSTREAM 2
Wetlands, Habitat & Biodiversity Restoration

Protects and restores habitats and improves ecosystem health.

- Wetland protection & enhancement
- Spring & headwater protection
- Riparian planting & fencing
- Fish passage & habitat improvement
- Native vegetation & habitat restoration
- Biodiversity enhancement

3 WORKSTREAM 3
Community Action

Builds long-term capacity for a resilient catchment and an engaged community.

- Farm planning & good management
- Pest management
- Demonstration & learning projects
- Native nursery & plant supply
- Community learning & field days
- Partnerships & shared stewardship

UNDERSTAND Collect and share data and local knowledge to understand our catchment.

RESTORE Apply knowledge to restore habitats, improve water quality and support ecological health.

ACT TOGETHER Community, iwi and landowners deliver projects and build stewardship together.

LEARN & ADAPT Track progress, share learnings and adapt actions based on what works best.

IMPROVE Continuous improvement for a healthier lake and catchment.

OUR OUTCOME

A HEALTHY LAKE RATAPIKO

A catchment where monitoring, practical action and community stewardship work together to improve water quality, enhance habitats and support productive farming for future generations.

CLEANER WATER | THRIVING HABITATS | STRONG COMMUNITY | PRODUCTIVE FARMING

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04: Implementation

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Action planning is a live approach

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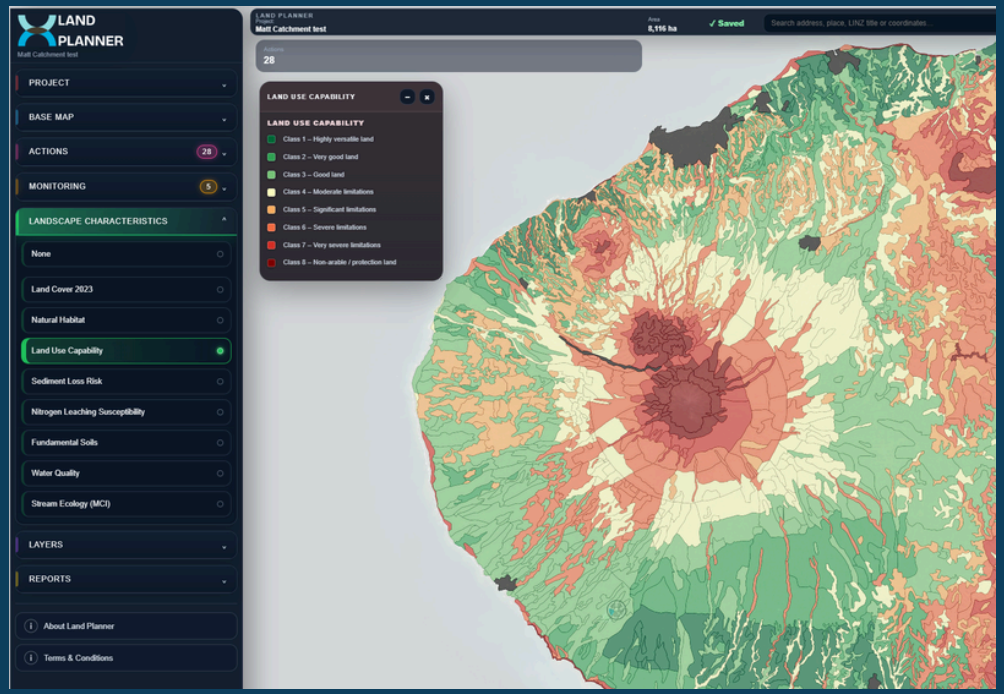
Ratapiko Action Summary

Year	Quarter	Workstream	Priority Action
2026	Q3	Monitoring & Understanding	Expand lake monitoring to achieve year-round coverage
	Q3	Community Action	Confirm Steering Group priorities, demonstration sites and project champions.
	Q4	Monitoring & Understanding	Monitor lake inflows, outflows and tributaries to improve understanding of contaminant pathways.
	Q4	Wetlands, Habitat & Biodiversity Restoration	Identify priority Critical Source Areas, wetland opportunities and demonstration sites.
2027	Q1	Wetlands, Habitat & Biodiversity Restoration	Prepare restoration plans for priority wetlands, riparian areas and Critical Source Areas.
	Q1	Community Action	Deliver first field day on lake monitoring, Critical Source Area management and practical farm actions.
	Q2	Wetlands, Habitat & Biodiversity Restoration	Implement demonstration projects including wetlands, riparian enhancement and Critical Source Area management.
	Q2	Monitoring & Understanding	Review monitoring results and refine restoration priorities using monitoring data.
	Q3	Community Action	Expand demonstration sites, promote knowledge sharing and communicate monitoring results.
	Q4	Monitoring & Understanding	Produce first State of Lake Ratapiko report and annual catchment update.
2028	Q1	Wetlands, Habitat & Biodiversity Restoration	Expand successful restoration projects across additional priority sites.
	Q2	Community Action	Continue field days, strengthen partnerships and increase landowner participation.
	Q3	Monitoring & Understanding	Review monitoring programme and update priorities using three years of data.
	Q4	All	Complete three-year implementation review and prepare the next Action Plan.



Actions planning for this catchment has been templated by EIS into a word document. The key for this approach is that action planning:

- Remains live
- Discussed at regular intervals by the group
- Is adjusted as resources change
- Notes budget requirements for actions
- Includes monitoring and how to tell the story

The Land Planner Software will be avialable for TCC use in September 2026. This will enable visualisation of data, access to monitoring data, planning of actions and reporting.

LAND PLANNER

ENVIRONMENT INNOVATION STRATEGY

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05: Measuring success

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Monitoring

MEASURING PROGRESS ACROSS THE CATCHMENT

Outcome Area	What Success Looks Like	Indicators	Frequency
Lake Health & Water Quality	A healthier Lake Ratapiko with a better understanding of what drives water quality.	E. coli trends, nutrient monitoring, lake condition, monitoring results shared with the community.	Quarterly / Annual
Catchment Action & Improvement	Practical projects are reducing contaminant losses and improving water quality.	Critical source areas improved, wetland projects completed, riparian planting, demonstration sites established.	Annual
Freshwater Habitat & Biodiversity	Healthy waterways and habitats that support native species.	Native fish observations, habitat enhancement projects, wetland protection and restoration.	Annual
Community & Stewardship	Landowners and the wider community are actively involved in improving the catchment.	Field days held, project participation, community-led initiatives, partnerships developed.	Annual
Knowledge, Learning & Adaptation	Better decisions are made using monitoring, local knowledge and practical experience.	Annual catchment report, monitoring programme maintained, lessons applied to future projects, information shared with the community.	Annual

What success looks like

CELEBRATING PROGRESS ACROSS THE CATCHMENT

Success should first be measured by the level of community participation, monitoring and practical action occurring across the catchment. Over time, success shifts from understanding and project delivery toward measurable improvements in lake health, water quality and catchment stewardship.

Lake Health & Water Quality

- A clearer understanding of the factors influencing Lake Ratapiko health.
- Fewer water quality concerns impact recreational use of the lake.
- Catchment decisions are increasingly informed by evidence.

Practical Catchment Action

- Practical actions reduce sediment, nutrient and bacterial losses.
- Wetlands, riparian areas and runoff pathways are enhanced.
- Demonstration projects showcase what works in local conditions.
- Environmental improvements are visible across the catchment.

Freshwater Habitat & Biodiversity

- Native fish populations remain present and connected throughout the catchment.
- Habitat restoration contributes to improved ecological resilience.

Community & Stewardship

- Strong relationships exist between landowners, residents, agencies and community groups.
- More people are involved in monitoring, learning and catchment projects.
- Knowledge and experience are shared across the community.
- The catchment develops a stronger identity around protecting and improving Lake Ratapiko.

Knowledge, Learning & Adaptation

- Monitoring and local knowledge are used together to guide action.
- Annual reporting tells the story of catchment progress.
- Successful projects are expanded and adapted over time.
- The community has confidence that effort is being directed where it will make the greatest difference.

Working Together for Lake Ratapiko

Improving outcomes in the Ratapiko catchment will only happen through the collective efforts of the people who live, farm and care for this place. Every monitoring site established, every wetland enhanced, every critical source area improved and every landowner involved contributes to the long-term health of Lake Ratapiko and the wider catchment.

This strategy builds on the strong interest already shown by the Ratapiko community in understanding lake health and taking practical action where it can make the greatest difference. Rather than focusing on large-scale change, the strategy supports a gradual process of learning, monitoring and targeted action that can build confidence and momentum over time.

The preferred direction identified through the workshop was clear: improve understanding of catchment processes through monitoring, use that information to guide practical action, and share knowledge across the community. Together, these actions can help reduce contaminant losses, enhance freshwater habitats and improve the long-term resilience of the catchment.

Working together, the Ratapiko community can create a future where productive farming, healthy waterways and a thriving Lake Ratapiko are supported through informed decision-making and local leadership.

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 monitoring, managing a critical source area, planting, 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.

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