

# DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES OF ACTION WITHIN CATCHMENTS

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## Abstract

Many catchments in New Zealand have issues to address. Addressing biophysical issues means engaging with human behavioural issues, attitudes and beliefs. A key assumption is things will change for the catchment when people engage in collective action towards a common goal.

Central government has set an agenda expecting more rapid change across multiple areas of work between now and the end of 2024. Giving effect to Te Mana o te Wai connects several areas of reform.

There has also been a growth of interest and establishment of catchment community groups across the country and within Hawke's Bay.

Much of the work of Regional Councils across these areas of activity involve working with groups. Integrating engagement with different groups is necessary to reduce engagement overload and to develop connected communities of action.

Across and between catchments within a region, there are a range of catchment issues and policy requirements, resulting in a matrix of approaches and priorities.

## Background and context

Water quality issues in New Zealand catchments have been a large focus of public attention and concern over recent years. Issues vary from catchment to catchment. "Impaired ecological health is evident at almost two-thirds of monitored river sites" based on Macroinvertebrate Community Index (MCI) classification<sup>1</sup>. In 2020, 76% of New Zealanders were very or extremely concerned about pollution of lakes and rivers in New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> This was their third greatest concern overall (after the cost of living and the health system). Rivers and lakes (catchments) are perceived to be the worst managed parts of the environment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LAWA River Water Quality National Picture Summary 2021

<https://www.lawa.org.nz/explore-data/river-quality/>

<sup>2</sup> UMR survey results reported in [https://ruralleaders.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Mourits-Anthony\\_rural-freshwater-quality-whats-perception-whats-reality\\_K43-3.pdf](https://ruralleaders.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Mourits-Anthony_rural-freshwater-quality-whats-perception-whats-reality_K43-3.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://research.lincoln.ac.nz/resources/general/Public-Perceptions-of-New-Zealands-Environment-2019\\_2021-01-25-032756.pdf](https://research.lincoln.ac.nz/resources/general/Public-Perceptions-of-New-Zealands-Environment-2019_2021-01-25-032756.pdf)

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Both urban and rural people see water pollution and quality as the most significant environmental issue facing primary industries in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> The same survey shows people think that central and regional government and farmers are not doing enough to improve water quality. We share the problem and the perception.

### **Regulatory context: Pressures for change**

Against this background, in August 2020 central government announced the “Essential Freshwater” package of reforms with changes to the Resource Management Act (RMA), the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) and the National Environmental Standard for Freshwater (NES-FW). A number of areas within the NES-FW came into force in September 2020. This package of reforms includes New Zealand wide regulations setting bottom-line expectations for stock exclusion, Freshwater Farm plans, intensive winter grazing and other activities.

There are different roles and responsibilities within this. Farmers are responsible for making the required changes on farm. Regional councils are required to develop and notify plans for all catchments by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024. These plans must give effect to Te Mana o te Wai.

Those regionally developed catchment plans then need to be implemented. Action plans must be developed and reviewed in consultation with tangata whenua and the community.

The ‘business as usual’ rate of change and improvement has been viewed as too slow.

The aim of these reforms is to stop further degradation, show material improvements within 5 years, and restore our waterways to health within a generation.

The shared context for the primary sector and councils is that we are operating in a challenging environment of change, with a lot to do within short timeframes. Organisations and primary sector businesses are lacking time and resources; enough people, skills and funds. This is reportedly leading to increased stress<sup>5</sup>.

A focus on human welfare is important in this. Primary sector organisations and councils need to be well connected and work together to increase clarity and reduce stress by helping people find a staged pathway through this raft of requirements.

### **Catchment Groups**

At the same time, and in response to these pressures there has been an increase in interest and formation of catchment groups across the country and in Hawke’s Bay.

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<sup>4</sup> Colmar Brunton 2020 survey results reported in [https://ruralleaders.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Mourits-Anthony\\_rural-freshwater-quality-whats-perception-whats-reality\\_K43-3.pdf](https://ruralleaders.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Mourits-Anthony_rural-freshwater-quality-whats-perception-whats-reality_K43-3.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Hawke’s Bay Primary Sector – Pan Sector group 2021

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There are currently 35 catchment-based groups in Hawke's Bay at some stage of formation from interested to active. Eighteen of these meet regularly, and half that number have a formal legal structure.

The importance of catchment groups is based on the understanding that small groups working together can solve difficult problems better than even the best individuals working alone. Catchment issues are fundamentally community issues. Solutions will include the need to build communities of action and support around these issues. These communities include the agencies that can provide support. It is important that these agencies use their limited resources to work effectively in this task by cooperating rather than duplicating or competing for the same space.

### **Role of Regional Councils**

The TANK catchment plan for four Hawke's Bay catchments (Tutaekuri, Ahuriri, Ngaruroro, Karamu) recognizes and makes provision for the formation of catchment collectives as a way for landowners to collectively build and implement local solutions for catchments.

Farmers and other participants in the TANK process and farmer reference group were interviewed on their views of the barriers and enablers of success for these catchment collectives. There was a consistent view across all interviewees of the need for a council relationship role. This was seen as critical for the success of catchment collectives. A diagrammatic representation of that relationship is included in Fig.1 below from the report.

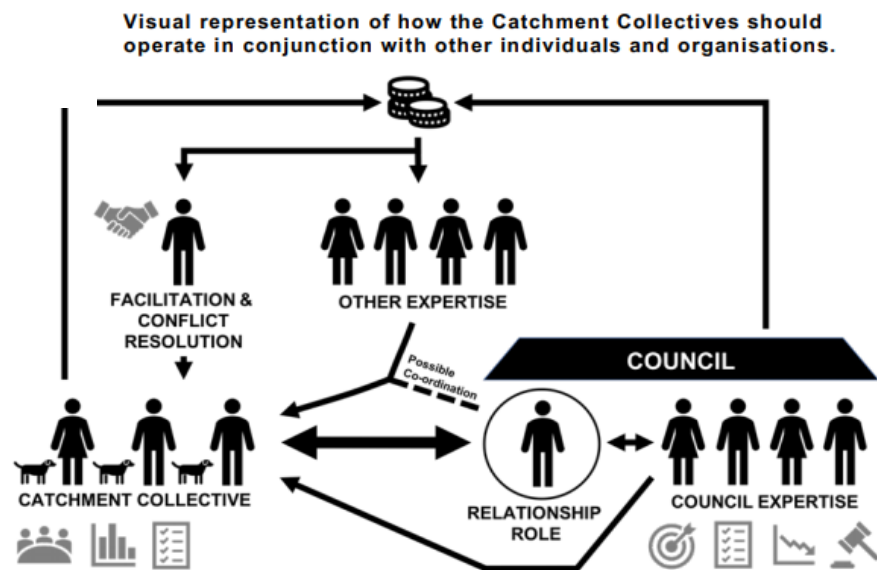
That relationship role can provide access to other council expertise such as environmental science and water quality monitoring results for their catchment. This role can also provide local level coordination and access to other agencies who can offer support. The role requires "implementation entrepreneurs"<sup>6</sup> who can work flexibly to find connections and solutions.

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<sup>6</sup> Bob Hudson, David Hunter & Stephen Peckham (2019) Policy failure and the policy-implementation gap: can policy support programs help?, Policy Design and Practice, 2:1, 1-14, DOI: 10.1080/25741292.2018.1540378  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2018.1540378>

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**Figure 1. From Connelly 2018**



Five main nodes of people (group or individuals) are identified in the diagram: The Catchment Collective itself, Council expertise; a *relationship role* at Council (which is shown in a circle to highlight its importance); other expertise; and independent facilitation and conflict resolution. The elements highlighted in grey indicate the various elements of the possible Catchment Collective agreements

### **Council role: Investment and Action**

In the past regional councils have commonly invested in individual farmer contact and subsidised programmes for on-ground environmental works. Their regulatory action has focused on setting bottom line expectations. As well as this, there is a need to go further to connect people to their awa and provide catchment context for understanding its health and needs.

Councils have an identified role in the national freshwater farm planning proposal, to provide catchment context to inform the development of farm plans that better address the issues that exist within the catchment.

Catchment groups and communities are made up of diverse individuals who are at different stages of commitment. Groups themselves will also vary in their stage of development. This means implementation support will need to be flexible to be effective. Councils are well placed to ensure that support across various agencies is coordinated at the regional level.

### **Catchment group needs**

In our work with catchment groups as they form and develop there are some common needs where outside support has helped. In the initial formation stage, help to clarify the purpose of the group has been appreciated. Providing facilitation and leadership development and bringing separate groups together to create co-learning opportunities has helped.

Groups often struggle with a shortage of volunteer time. Funding for time can help ease that barrier.

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30 catchment groups in Hawke's Bay were surveyed last year to ask what they were most interested in covering in a one day workshop. The top 3 information needs were:

- Funding
- Water quality monitoring / citizen science
- Te Mana o te Wai. Tangata whenua engagement and involvement

### **Requirements create opportunities**

There are a large number of requirements for councils and for farmers in the reforms mentioned earlier. Successful implementation will require a structure to coordinate the various parts to clarify and simplify the messages and the public engagement.

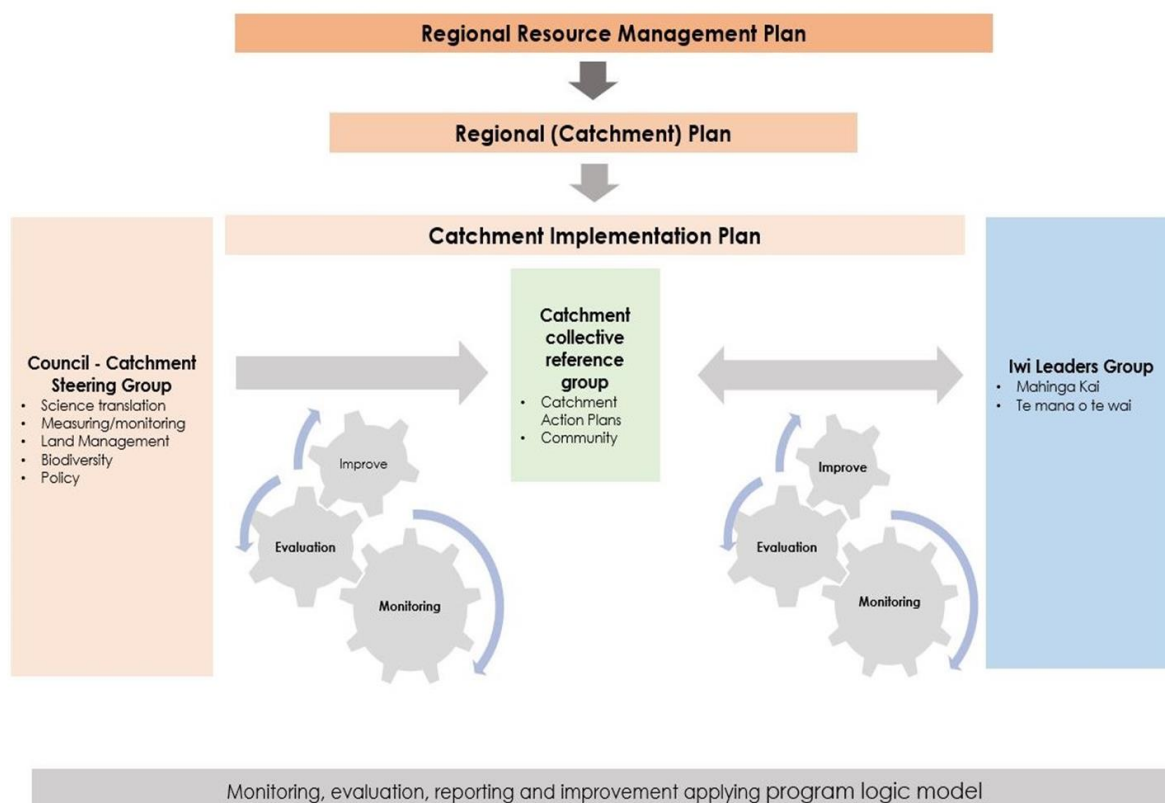
The requirement to have "action plans" presents an opportunity to do the work that needs to be done and engage and involve people effectively. Figure 2. below outlines a way this could fit together, creating a clear structure that integrates the needs for council activity, catchment community activity, tangata whenua involvement in decision making and doing this in a way that does not create unreasonable time demands particularly on tangata whenua and other participants to resource.

In figure 2 the box on the left represents an internal council steering group to coordinate the range of cross-council work taking place within a catchment. The middle box represents a community reference group that could include representatives from each sub-catchment group or collective. There would also be an Iwi representative group at the catchment level. Some members of each of these groups would move between the groups to maintain the connections and communication flow. The catchment reference group and the Iwi leaders group would be involved in the development of the catchment action plan. They would also receive progress reports and input to the live learning and improvement of implementation. This maintains a live connection to these groups rather than engagement at the beginning of the action plan and 5 years later at review time.

Critical to implementation is an increase in the sophistication and level of monitoring to measure impact of practices.

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**Figure 2. A Possible Structure for Connecting Action, Engagement and Improvement Within a Catchment**



### **Agency interests and alignment**

Catchment groups commonly form with a focus on catchment issues. Agencies are interested in catchment groups because a catchment community approach has more opportunity to achieve collective targeted action that will be significant enough to achieve catchment level care and improvement.

These groups have potential to achieve more than just water quality improvements. There are wider social benefits that can result in improved resilience and long-term gains for the community.

When engaging with agencies, it will help catchment groups if they have a strongly developed purpose to begin with. Particularly when funding is involved, a group can be in a position of being the service delivery vehicle for a contract. They need to assess and consider the alignment of any potential contract relationships alongside their own purpose and goals.

External funding and contracts will have an end date. Having a structure with some form of cooperative self-funding will help catchment groups to endure and have a future beyond the end of these contracts.

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