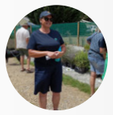
OUR TEAM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OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERS

OUR SUPPLY PARTNERS

Tiaki Maniototo
Edition: #05
September 2025

THE SCROLL

The Newsletter of Tiaki Maniototo, an Environmental Project of the Upper Taieri Wai Catchment Group

UPPER TAIERI WAI
CATCHMENT GROUP

"One of New Zealand's most significant wetland areas".

DEPARTMENT OF CONVERSATION

THE FUTURE OF TIAKI MANIOTOTO

After five years of successful environmental restoration, our project enters the next phase of its existence in 2026. So what does Tiaki 2.0 look like? P.3

PROJECT MANAGER'S REPORT

The Taiari/Taieri River catchment is home to several world-class wetlands, many of which I've been lucky to work on. Of these, the Upper Taieri scroll plain stands out as perhaps the most exceptional example.

It is one of the world's most significant examples of a naturally occurring scroll plain, and one of the largest freshwater wetlands in New Zealand. What makes it so unique is the wide range of wetland features - oxbows, old braids, backwaters, salt pans, and both permanent and temporary shallow marshes.

Much of the system is ephemeral, wet only seasonally when high river flows cover the floodplain, creating a dynamic mosaic of habitats. The scroll plain is bordered by productive farmland, and invasive pressures from the likes of feral geese and crack willows make it a complex and constantly shifting environment.

Certainly we are still learning how to best protect and restore the scroll plain. The ephemeral areas support fragile and rare turf species (very small plants) as well as some declining larger wetland species. Some of these are highly palatable to stock, yet grazing may also be the reason some of them still exist. It is also likely that some form of grazing might play a transitional role in the restoration of the scroll plain, although this is site dependent.

Tiaki Maniototo, through our MfE project and strong landowner support, has made a solid start in protecting and restoring the scroll plain. We have also improved the knowledge on how best to do so, but there is still much work to be done. By protecting and restoring this unique environment, we are also protecting the health of the Taiari/Taieri River, the resilience of the wider catchment, and the well-being of the communities who ultimately depend on it.

UPPER TAIERI WAI CATCHMENT GROUP

Much has been happening behind the scenes in the Upper Taieri Wai space. A dedicated group of local farmers and interested stakeholders have put hours of work into the development of a Catchment Action Plan for the area. We hope to have the near final draft back within the next week so that we can get this out for feedback to the wider community. We are conscious that not one single group or small cross section of our community can be responsible for and have the permission from you all to write such a plan. With this in mind we view the next stage as the most important part of this process and will value all the feedback we receive, please watch your inbox for more details regarding this.

As the Tiaki Maniototo project gets nearer to the end we have been discussing succession post project. As part of these discussions, we have decided to transition the Tiaki Maniototo Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings to Upper Taieri Wai members meetings, inviting all that are members to join us and hear and learn of all of the incredible things happening to support the Upper Taieri Catchment. These meetings have been one of the many strengths of the Tiaki Maniototo project through building relationships, learning from experts, hearing of new initiatives, as well as challenging our thinking as a committee. These meetings go for about 2 hours, and you never leave feeling like it was a waste of your time.

We encourage you to join as a member and take part in these meetings with us. If you would like to come along and just see what we are about before joining you are also most welcome, we love sharing all that is underway out there and celebrating the successes of the project. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution and work that was carried out in this catchment by ORC in the autumn with the spraying of Willows between Patearoa Power Station and Cogans Bridge. As we head into spring we will start to see the impact of this work. It will be messy for a while as the tree's breakdown, but this is just a step in the process.
ORC has also awarded Upper Taieri Wai with an eco-fund towards further Willow work over the next two years on the river.
This funding will enable farmers to knock back the issue to make it more manageable for them long term.

HEALTHY TAIERI PROJECT

Healthy Taieri is one of Upper Taieri Wai's projects - it is funded by MPI's Integrated Farm Planning fund and is providing farmers with guidance and resources to support farm planning and management informed by a catchment scale approach. A quick look at the project's recent work:

Water Quality:
Comprehensive water quality assessments have been completed across the Taieri catchment. Results at www.taiariwai.co.nz
We're now turning this data into action through free site visits, helping farmers understand what the results mean for their own land and how to apply the findings in their day-to-day management or farm planning. Contact us at the email address below if you are interested.

Biodiversity:
To support landowner engagement, a user-friendly biodiversity guide was created to highlight the unique ecological values of the Taieri catchment. A catchment-scale biodiversity map has been developed to inform land managers on some of the natural values that may be present on or near their land, and to support an understanding of how or where to prioritise management.

Pest Management:
We're exploring ways the project can support pest management, building on the great work already undertaken by Maniototo Pest Management and others.

Climate Change
The project has also linked up with a recent study looking at the potential vulnerabilities of the catchment to climate change. For more information, please visit /www.taiariwai.nz or contact project manager Sally Dicey sally.dicey@whirika.co.nz.

Healthy Taieri

WAR ON SEDIMENT

Sediment is one of the major contaminants in our waterways, says Craig Simpson, of Watershed Solutions and Otago Catchments Community. "It can smother the bed and impact the ecosystem. The little spaces between rocks can be smothered, and that's often where our invertebrates and fish live."

Phosphorus and nitrogen in the sediment can promote excess algal growth. The worst case scenario is a river devoid of life, that no one wants to swim, boat or gather food in. "It's a massive impact on our freshwater systems," says Craig.

Sediment, says Craig, is a natural part of any river system, but human activity exacerbates it. Dust from gravel roads, eroding banks, stock pugging and poor grazing practices can all contribute excessive sedimentary loads to our streams and rivers.

As well as taking care to farm sympathetically to freshwater, farmers can also help tackle the problem with sediment traps. Craig recently helped Maniototo farmers Dawn and David Sangster install one on a drain flowing through their property. The idea of the trap is that water flow is slowed, allowing sediment to drop. It can then be scooped out and redistributed to paddocks. Craig says that while sediment traps aren't ideal for every waterway (and are only permitted on intermittently-flowing streams), they can be a great tool for protecting waterways and stopping valuable topsoil washing away off your farm. Please contact us here at Tiaki Maniototo for more information.

OTAGO CATCHMENT COMMUNITY INC

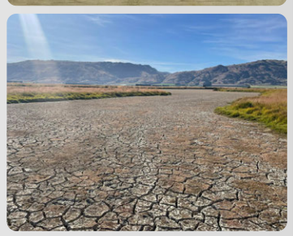
Sediment Trap on Glenfield Station

FARMING ALONGSIDE BIODIVERSITY: WITH CATHY RUFAUT

Cathy Rufaut is the Queen Elizabeth 2 Trust Representative for Coastal Otago North. She has a special interest in the saline ecosystems of the upper Taiari/Taieri. These rare salt-tolerant plant communities were once more widespread across Otago, but are now found only in a few places, where they haven't been ploughed or irrigated over, or heavily stocked.

Cathy's experience working in the Maniototo has given her a great oversight of farming systems and how conservation and farming can exist side-by side.

It's often not possible or practical, she says to think about restoring landscapes to a pristine, pre-human state over human time-scales.



"I think as you sort of move up with experience and familiarity with this landscape," she says, "and you start talking about management and enhancement and maintenance, that's when you need to get a bit more expansive with the knowledge you start drawing on and the vision that you have for the place."

That, she says, means finding ways for farming and other land uses to sit alongside conservation and restoration on the same property. In short, it means farming with some specific positive outcomes for the farm's natural environment.

QEII NATIONAL TRUST
Ngā Kairauhi Papa Forever protected

"I've become quite a fan of sheep and beef farming alongside biodiversity," says Cathy, "because I see that playing out over and over again in Otago.

"Even though sheep and beef is becoming more intense, with winter cropping and irrigation, landowners who still farm with some of the old ways, like their grandparents and parents, seem to maintain a point of balance where some indigenous flora and fauna exists alongside production."

WETLANDS – NICE TO HAVE, OR INDISPENSABLE?

Just this month, The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands released it's Global Wetland Outlook for 2025. The report examined the importance of wetlands to communities globally. It looked at what wetlands provide for us, and attempted to put a monetary value on those services. This breaks down the services into three categories:

- **Provisioning services,** like food, water, fuel and fibre.
- **Regulating services** – flood and erosion control, water purification and climate regulation.
- **Cultural services;** these include recreational opportunities and tourism opportunities.

The report found that when all these services are accounted for, wetlands contribute a staggering $39 trillion to the global economy. That's around 7.5% of global GDP. What's also staggering is the rate of wetland loss around the world – around half a percent annually. In New Zealand, we have lost 90 percent of our original wetlands to drainage. While a fraction of their former size, these wetlands are estimated to contribute $59,000 return per hectare annually by providing the above services.

The Ramsar report notes that while wetland restoration efforts are underway around the world, restoring wetlands is hugely expensive and politically difficult. It's far better to preserve them as they are before losing them and having to rebuild. The Maniototo contains one of the New Zealand's most significant wetlands in the Upper Taiari/Taieri scroll plain. While it is highly modified, it nonetheless contains many areas of rare and endangered plant life. It provides habitat for native birds and other animals. As a landscape feature, the wetland slows water moving down the river, regulating flood impact.

The upland areas surrounding the wetland are crucial for water harvest, providing the water that powers agriculture and fills our drinking reservoirs. The area provides a significant source of food for many people and is a traditional mahika kai site for Kāi Tahu.

Finding a balance, says Hugh Robertson of the Department of Conservation, who led the report, is crucial.

He says we need to be looking broadly at a wide range of land uses, rather than narrowly focussing on conservation of specific sites.

"When you just look at a conservation solution to something, without considering how it may benefit other sectors (such as) health, recreation, urban development or agricultural systems, we often fail."

The Taieri Scroll Plain has, in years gone by, been considered for recognition as a Ramsar wetland site – a wetland of special ecological significance. We currently have seven of these in New Zealand. Having this certification, says Robertson, would greatly aid in in future restoration and conservation efforts on the scroll plain.

"It becomes like a focal point, and that often leads to funding and partnerships, because it's then recognised by the Department regional councils, local iwi and the community as "this is an important place. What do we need to do to look after it?"

WILSON ROAD SITE COMMUNITY SITE

On July 25th, we opened the Wilson Road Taiari/Taieri river access site on farmland owned by the Winmill family. The Winmill family, who farm at Rotherwood, have been incredibly generous with their desire to open up this site to public access. "We didn't approach them and ask them for public access," says Caitlin Daley, Tiaki Maniototo's project manager. "They approached us saying they had this area and they wanted to allow the public in there."

Tiaki Maniototo has worked closely with the Winmill family and Herenga ā Nuku (the Outdoor Access Commission) to develop this site, creating signage and planting out the area in flood-tolerant natives. Herenga ā Nuku funded the signs.

Amie Pont of Herenga ā Nuku has been involved in the project since its inception. "Most of our mahi for this project has been to work with the group in advising what the tenure of land is," she says. "But in this instance it was great to be able to offer the landholders our Walking Access Easement instrument, creating public access in perpetuity so it is secure for generations to come. The easement has enabled the Winmills to be quite specific in how it can be accessed (such as allowing dogs under control but no firearms) while encouraging safe access to the Taieri / Taiari."

Nina Winmill says her young family have enjoyed many adventures down at the river, and they wanted the public to be able to share this special place too. "It's a really cool area," she says, "There's a lot of wildlife down here, and it's an area of land we're not using. It would be great to get some families down here, having a look at the planting that's been done, and going for a walk".

For Caitlin, having the opportunity to open up a site like this, only about 15 minutes's drive from Ranfurly, is a major win for the community and for our project "The Taiari scroll plain doesn't have a huge amount of public access," she says. "I think it's really important that the community does have access to the river to learn more about it."

"It's one thing to be able to talk about these places and tell people about them, but it's a completely different thing for people to be able to experience them for themselves. "Many of the native plants have been put in by locals on one of our community planting days. The students of St Johns School have visited twice, putting hundreds of plants in on each occasion. The site features a short walk that leads visitors from a parking area to a small oxbow lake near the river. The hope is that in time, the site will become a rich spot for birdlife.

Directions to the Wilson Road Community site can be found on Google Maps, or on our website www.tiakimaniototo.co.nz

Tiaki Maniototo

Nursery

Specialising in native plants, grown from local seed stock for our Central Otago conditions.

Nursery open by appointment, contact Margo on 021 052 8255 during working hours or email nursery@tiakiamaniototo.co.nz to place an order or arrange a visit.

NURSERY UPDATE

We are very proud of our nursery, which is found on the site of the former Patearoa school. Over the last three years we've managed to build an amazing community asset – a nursery packed full of native plants grown to suit the harsh local conditions of the Maniototo. We see this nursery as not only a source of great plants, but also a centre for education and community involvement.

At the end of 2024, we built a shade house, and in January, we began pricking out seedlings. The seed, which was collected from across the Maniototo where possible, was germinated by our Project Manager, Caitlin, as we do not yet have an appropriate facility for this.

By early February, over 10,000 seedlings had been transferred (pricked out) into 7cm pots, with a very high survival rate. They are thriving, and the shade house has proven to be a great success. These seedlings will remain in the shade house until spring. The mature plants in the nursery have been growing exceptionally well, requiring some regular maintenance, including light pruning to encourage lateral growth.

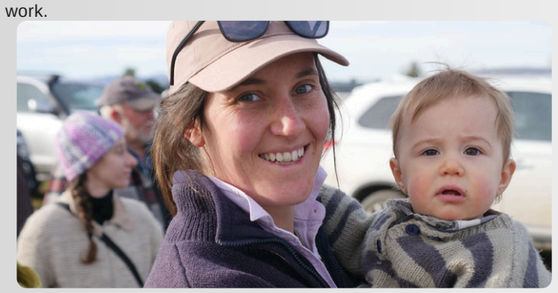
WINTER ROADSHOW

Our winter road show on July 25th was a great success, with around 50 people from across the region coming around to see our planting sites, recreation site, native shelter belts and a sediment trap on Dawn and David Sangster's place.

It was a great opportunity to show off the work we've done over the last four years – getting almost 100,000 native plants into the Maniototo environment, an area where so much native biodiversity has been lost, and getting farmers on board with fencing and planting. We've made a great start in this landscape.

We enjoyed presentations from farmers Mark Dowling and Dawn Sangster, as well as Craig Simpson from Otago Catchment Community and Sarah Mukai from Trees that Count

As we look to the next phase of Tiaki's existence, we aim to build on these gains and keep our momentum up to carry on this crucial work.



THE FUTURE OF TIAKI MANIOTOTO

Janine Smith, our project executive, grew up on a farm in the Maniototo and still farms near Patearoa. In her entire farming life, she says, she had only heard a bellbird twice, and seen one tūi on the flat land of the Maniototo.

That was until Tiaki Maniototo happened. The restoration project, funded in 2021, has seen over 112,000 native plants reintroduced to a part of New Zealand that was previously almost completely devoid of native vegetation.

The success of the project, Janine says, has been astounding. The challenges of getting native plants to grow in the harsh Central Otago climate have been well and truly overcome. "A lot of the plantings that have had two years of regular water and maintenance are now managing on their own, untouched."

"At the beginning of the project we did not plan to be planting shelter belts of natives, but with the right conditions and care, and landowner confidence, we are achieving this. We also didn't expect to be involved with transitioning shelter belts of *Pinus contorta*, which are a super spreader in wilding terms, to natives but ith great collaboration with the Central Otago Wilding Conifer Group, DOC and landowners, this project is well underway."

And, for the first time in Janine's life, the birds are coming back. In the past couple of years year there have been numerous reports of kererū, tūī and bellbird across the basin. There are even two tūi living in our nursery at Patearoa. The rapidity of the change has taken Janine off guard. "I can't believe how quickly it's happening," she says. "I really hoped we would eventually see a return of some native birds but I'm really excited to actually see and hear them already. I'm hoping the same is going on at a level largely unseen and unheard too, like lizards, galaxiids and invertebrates".

The Tiaki Maniototo project is not just about planting either. Almost 100km of subsidised riparian fencing has been completed, five recreation sites have been created or improved, sediment traps have been constructed and the effort to control pest plants and pest animals is on-going. Alongside all of this is our fabulous nursery. It was just three words on the original work plan - construct community nursery. We are very grateful to the residents of Patearoa and CODC for giving us the opportunity to create the nursery on the old school grounds. It is working very well, offering employment for up to six people from September to April, and producing 10,000 seedlings from locally sourced seeds annually.

Tiaki Maniototo was funded through the Jobs for Nature scheme, initiated by the previous Labour government. That funding comes to an end in 2026. The future for the project is positive, however. A successful application to the Otago Regional Council's EcoFund allows us to continue our crack willow control work in 2026, while the nursery business is ramping up, with over 19,000 plants pre-ordered for the season. It's not possible to germinate all of these in-house so we continue to work closely with the commercial nurseries who have been supporting us from the start.

The immediate future for Tiaki Maniototo, says Janine, will be smaller funding allotments, like the EcoFund, which will allow us to keep our momentum going until such time as larger government funding is available to undertake more wide scale projects. The passion and commitment of the Tiaki Maniototo team will drive it forward into the next phase of its existence, and that, says Janine, is crucial. We can't afford to take our foot off the pedal now; "the job's just started."

TAIARI WAI RIVER FESTIVAL 2026

Planning is underway for the 3rd annual Taiari Wai festival, which is planned for Saturday 10th January, 2026. As with previous years, we'll be featuring a top line-up of bands and music. There'll also be great talks and this year we're introducing am exciting new kite-flying element. Stay tuned for more information on this. Thanks again to all of the wonderful sponsors of last year's event: