Combined Tairāwhiti Regional Freshwater Planning Advisory Group and Waipaoa Catchment Planning Advisory Group – Hui 12

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Title of report: Outstanding Waterbodies

Report no: 1

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Purpose of this report

This report provides information on **outstanding waterbodies**, specifically what they are and how they are proposed to be identified for the new Regional Freshwater Plan.

Outcomes sought

1. Members of this Advisory Group understand the purpose of identifying **outstanding waterbodies.**
2. Members of this Advisory Group understand Council's proposed approach for identifying **outstanding waterbodies** and provide feedback on if it could be improved**.**
3. Members' practical experience and knowledge of the region's waterbodies helps formulate the list of potential **outstanding waterbodies** for assessment.

Getting ready for the meeting

Please consider the questions in this report ahead of the hui which will aid our discussions.

Contents

1. Background and context

1.1. What is an outstanding waterbody and what is their purpose?

The NPSFM 2011 introduced the concept of Outstanding Waterbodies (OWB). At that time, they were defined as those waterbodies with "*outstanding values including ecological, landscape, recreational and spiritual values.*"

The Ministry for the Environment NPSFM Implementation Guide 2011 expands on this definition by stating:

> *"An outstanding waterbody is one that is exceptional in some way. It may be exceptional in relation to one particular attribute, but it may also have a number of outstanding attributes. An outstanding value is a high threshold. There are expected to be a small number of outstanding freshwater bodies identified and protected by regional councils across the country. A waterbody that is not nationally significant may be outstanding for local reasons. Communities will determine outstanding freshwater bodies in establishing objectives and limits through the regional plans process"*

The purpose of identifying outstanding waterbodies is to protect those exceptional waterbodies, ensuring that activities such as water abstraction, discharges and activities within the beds of these waterways do not jeopardise their significant values.

1.2. Statutory context

Since 2011, the NPSFM has been amended numerous times, but the concept of identifying and protecting the values of OWB has remained.

The NPSFM 2020[1] now requires identification of OWB in each region and protection of their significant values.[2]

The NPSFM 2020 defines an 'outstanding freshwater body' as:

> *"a water body, or part of a water body, identified in a regional policy statement, a regional plan, or a water conservation order as having one or more outstanding value"*.

Clause 3.8(3)(d) of the NPSFM 2020 requires every regional council to identify OWB, if present, within each Freshwater Management Unit (FMU).

No further specific policy direction is provided by the NPSFM 2020 itself and it is open to Council to decide how to identify and protect OWB in Tairāwhiti.

[1] As amended in January 2024.
[2] Policy 8

1.3. Current TRMP Approach

The TRMP seeks to actively protect or improve the values of freshwater bodies that have been identified as outstanding. Five waterbodies are currently identified as outstanding in Schedule G18 of the TRMP:

- Te Arai Headwaters (Waipaoa Catchment)
- Urukokomuka Stream (Waipaoa Catchment)
- Lake Repongaere (Waipaoa Catchment)
- Mōtū River (Mōtū Catchment)
- Ruakituri River (Southern Tairāwhiti Catchment)

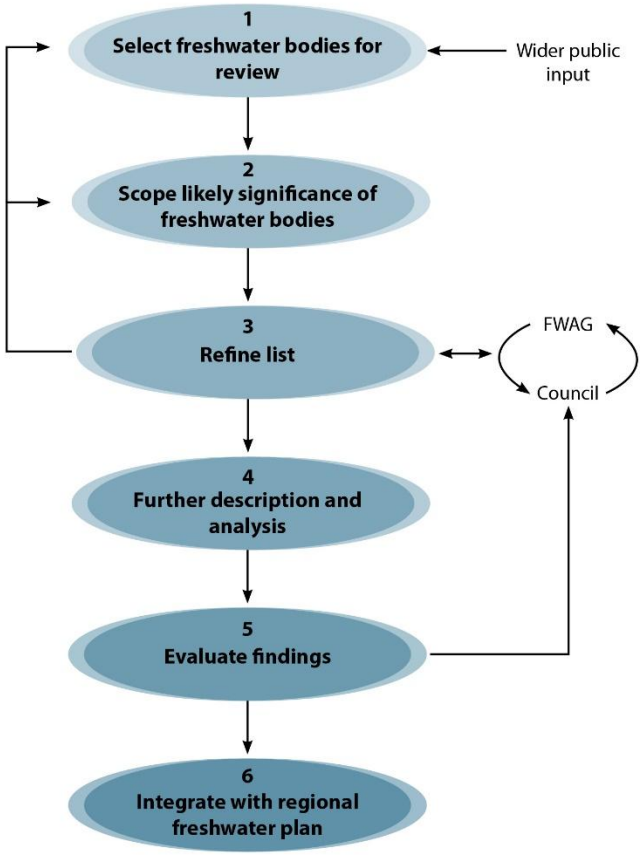
The current plan framework was prepared under the NPSFM 2014. The method used to identify OWB was informed by the 2009 Riverscape and Flow Assessment Guidelines prepared by Boffa Miskell [3]. These guidelines were developed to help Councils make water allocation decisions. The guidelines offer direction on how to set environmental flow regimes taking into account "landscape" or "riverscape" values which include natural character, amenity, and landscape values.

The process for determining the OWB in Schedule G18 is shown in Figure 1.

The initial list of waterbodies that were assessed was developed through FWAG and wider public input.

The 2014 assessment methodology applied criteria across six key values:

- Water quality
- Ecology and natural science
- Cultural and spiritual
- Natural character
- Landscape
- Amenity, recreation and education



Outstanding Freshwater Body Assessment Methodology

[3] Riverscape and flow assessment guidelines: Guidelines for the selection of methods to determine river flows based on landscape, natural character and visual amenity considerations, Boffa Miskell Ltd, June 2009.

All six values have strong connections to the Resource Management Act 1991[4]. The assessment used a simple numeric scoring method, and combined scores were established for each waterbody. Where a waterbody met the outstanding threshold, it was included in the TRMP.

2. Outstanding waterbody identification: Criteria

2.1. Review of previous assessment criteria

An initial review of the criteria used in 2014 has been undertaken to determine if it is suitable for giving effect to the NPSFM 2020. This review has been informed by the new statutory context and approaches taken by other regional councils, including technical reports prepared for those councils.

Based on current practice the following is noted:

- One outstanding value can make a waterbody outstanding.
- Outstanding and significant values are not the same, outstanding values have a higher threshold.
- Being outstanding is a high test. The term 'outstanding' distinguishes something from others based on exceptional qualities – its describes the "best of the best".
- Outstanding is at a regional scale.
- OWB do not have to be pristine.
- A waterbody can only be assessed in the context of its present condition, not its past or potential future condition.
- The OWB can be part of waterbody, such as section of river or tributary.
- Where there is insufficient information to determine if a particular value is outstanding, the value cannot be considered outstanding until the appropriate evidence is provided.

The review of the current methodology has found that:

- Broadly the values identified for assessment are appropriate.
- Changes in statutory context, specifically the NPSFM 2020 and National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPSIB) mean that some amendments are required.
  - Based on the revised statutory context and examples of identifying OWB from other regions, the current values do not include a physical or geology value. This is relevant to the NPSFM 2020 value of "natural form and character".
  - The scoring criteria for some values needs to be amended to reflect the NPSFM 2020 attributes, for example the water quality value only relates to the cleanliness of water for consumption or contact recreation but could be amended to reflect how the water quality meets the NPSFM attributes for ecosystem health and human contact.
  - The ecology value may need to be amended to better align with the assessment of significant natural areas in accordance with the NPSIB.

[4] Sections 6 and 7

2.2. Proposed assessment criteria

Based on the initial review, the proposed values and attributes to be assessed are set out in the table below. Appendix 1 includes this summary and the full draft narrative states to assess each attribute.

At this stage, these values and attributes are in a working draft and following feedback from the Advisory Group will be tested with experts.

Table 1: Proposed Values and Attributes to identify OWB	
Waterbody values	**Attributes**
Water Quality	Contact recreation
	Ecosystem health
Ecology	Quantitative measure of ecological value
	Presence of rare or threatened species
	Absence of invasive species
	Functioning component of a wider ecosystem
Cultural and spiritual	Presence of waahi tapu
	Coherent part of wider cultural landscape
	Contemporary significance
Natural character	Modification to bed and riparian margin
	Modification to flow
	Modification to catchment
Landscape	Scenic / aesthetic importance
	Rarity
	Natural science and legibility value
Amenity, recreation and education	Recreation (contact, secondary contact and terrestrial value -such as visual)
	Fishing, kai gathering, customary resource gathering (e.g. hangi stones)
	Education and historic heritage
	Access and amenity potential
Physical	Geomorphological, geological or hydrological features

Questions for the Advisory Group

- Do you have any feedback on the values and attributes in Table 1?
- Are there any values or attributes missing?

2.3. Threshold for Outstanding Status

The methodology used to identify the current OWB in the TRMP combined scores for each criterion of a value to give a "value score" and then combined the value scores to establish the overall score. Where those overall scores met the outstanding threshold, the waterbody was listed in the TRMP. This approach was consistent with the 2014 NPSFM.

The NPSFM 2020 has an amended definition of the OWB which now refers water bodies having "*one or more outstanding values*". Based on this revised definition, the current approach of aggrading scores is not appropriate. Rather, each value of each waterbody must be assessed and if one value is identified as being outstanding, then that waterbody is classified as an OWB.

Due to this change in definition the scoring categories have been amended to reflect this terminology.

3. Implementing the criteria

Once the assessment criteria is finalised, the process to determine which water bodies to assess needs to be determined. How those waterbodies that are evaluated are checked, reviewed and refined also needs to be finalised. The process proposed at this stage is set out below for feedback.

3.1. Step 1: Developing shortlist for assessment

At this stage a similar process to that in 2014 is proposed. This Advisory Group and other catchment advisory groups will suggest potential OWB for evaluation.

Science staff within Council will review this initial list and add other potential OWB if required based on their knowledge of the region.

3.2. Step 2: Evaluation of OWB

The assessment criteria will be used to evaluate each of the potential OWB. It is proposed that this will be completed by Council staff initially, relying on their own expertise and technical reports that have been prepared on specific values (such as Landscape assessments). If necessary, further assistance from expert panel members, or separate technical advice will be commissioned.

The end product of this process will be a report outlining how each of the potential OWB aligns with the criteria and a list of waterbodies which have one or more outstanding value.

3.3. Step 3: Review and refinement of OWB

The list of OWB identified through the initial evaluation phase will be tested with the advisory group and other catchment groups to determine how the assessment sits against local knowledge. The draft list will also be taken to Council's TRMP Committee for review.

3.4. Step 4: Incorporation into the draft regional freshwater plan

Following review of the OWB list, any changes necessary will be made and then it will be drafted as a schedule to be incorporated into the new regional freshwater plan. From here, provisions can be drafted to protect the significant values of these waterbodies.

Questions for the Advisory Group

- Do you have any comments on the process for creating an initial list of potential OWB? How can we target public engagement on this?
- From your local knowledge, are there any waterbodies you consider should be on the shortlist?

4. Next Steps

To complete the assessment criteria and process for identifying OWB staff are planning to:

- Test the values, criteria and scoring narratives with experts and amend if necessary
- Finalise the process for establishing the shortlist of waterbodies

To complete the identification of OWB, it is proposed to:

- Collate the shortlist of potential OWB
- Evaluate waterbodies and prepare evaluation report
- Report the evaluation findings back to FWAG and other catchment groups for review and refinement
- Finalise the OWB list for inclusion in the new regional plan

Appendix 1: Proposed values, criteria and narrative scoring methodology to identify OWB

Overview

Waterbody values	Statutory context	Attributes	Assessment method	Scoring
Water quality	RMA S5	Ecosystem health		1-4
	NPS Freshwater Management 2020	Contact recreation	Narrative attribute states	1-4
Ecology	RMA S5, S7(d)	Quantitative measure of ecological value		1-5
	National Policy Statement for Freshwater 2020	Presence of rare or threatened species		1-5
	National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023	Absence of invasive species	Narrative attribute states	1-5
		Functioning component of a wider ecosystem		1-5
Cultural and spiritual	RMA S6(e), S8	Presence of waahi tapu		1-5
	Waitangi settlements	Coherent part of wider cultural landscape	Narrative attribute states	1-5
	Iwi management plans	Contemporary significance		1-5
Natural character	RMA S6(a)	Modification to bed and riparian margin		1-5
	National Policy Statement for Freshwater 2020	Modification to flow	Narrative attribute states	1-5
		Modification to catchment		1-5
Landscape	Environment court case law	Scenic / aesthetic importance		1-5
		Rarity	Narrative attribute states	1-5
		Natural science and legibility value		1-5
Amenity, recreation and education	RMA S7(c)	Recreation (contact, secondary contact and terrestrial e.g visual)		1-5
	S6(e), S6(g), S7(h)	Fishing, kai gathering, customary resource gathering (e.g. hangi stones)	Narrative attribute states	1-5
	S6(f)	Education and historic heritage		1-5
	S7(c)	Access and amenity potential		1-5
Physical	National Policy Statement for Freshwater 2020	Geomorphological, geological or hydrological feature	Narrative attribute states	1-4

Part 1 - Water quality

Scoring of current attribute states:

4 = A band

3 = B Band

2 = C Band

1 = D Band

Rivers:

Attribute	A Band	B Band	C Band	D Band	Score
Ammonia (toxicity)					
Nitrate (Toxicity)					
Dissolved Oxygen (2A)					
Suspended fine sediment					
E.coli					
Dissolved Oxygen (2B)					
Dissolved Reactive Phosphorus					
Overall Score					

Lakes:

Attribute	A Band	B Band	C Band	D Band	Score
Total nitrogen					
Total phosphorus					
Ammonia (toxicity)					
E.coli					
Cyanobacteria					
Lake bottom dissolved oxygen					
Mid-hypolimnetic dissolved oxygen					
Overall Score					

Water quality	Total score
Outstanding water quality	25-28
Regionally significant water quality	21-24
Moderate/Minor water quality	1-20

Part 2 – Ecology

Quantitative measure of ecological value

4 = MCI >130; QMCI >6.5

3 = MCI 100 - 130; QMCI 5.5 - 6.5

2 = MCI 90 -110; QMCI 4.5 - 5.5

1 = MCI <90; QMCI <4.5

Presence of rare or threatened species

5 = 4 or more rare or threatened indigenous aquatic or associated riparian or littoral species

4 = 3 rare or threatened indigenous aquatic or associated riparian or littoral species

3 = 2 rare or threatened indigenous aquatic or associated riparian or littoral species

2 = 1 rare or threatened indigenous aquatic or associated riparian or littoral species

1 = No rare or threatened indigenous aquatic or associated riparian or littoral species

Absence of invasive species

5 = No invasive or pest aquatic or associated littoral species

4 = 1 invasive or pest aquatic or associated littoral species

3 = 2 invasive or pest aquatic or associated littoral species

2 = 3 invasive or pest aquatic or associated littoral species

1 = 4 or more invasive or pest aquatic or associated littoral species

Functioning component of wider ecosystem

5 = Provides an identifiable component of high importance to the functioning of the wider system. There are no barriers to fish passage. Land use impacts are low.

4 = Provides an identifiable component of significant importance where its absence or degradation would impact on the functioning of the wider system. There are few if any barriers to fish passage. Land use impacts are minor or potentially minor.

3 = Provides an identifiable component of the functioning of the wider system, representative of its type, and important at a reach level. Barriers to fish passage are minor and land use impacts minor to moderate, and may be readily mitigated.

2 = Provides a partially functioning component of the wider system, modifications impacting on its role. There may be moderate barriers to fish passage, and moderate land use impacts that may be difficult to mitigate.

1 = Does not provide a functioning component of the wider system, and there is little or no available habitat. There may be major barriers to fish passage, and there are significant land use impacts that may be difficult to mitigate.

Ecology	Total score
Outstanding ecological values	16-19
High ecological values	10-15
Moderate/Minor ecological values	4-9

Part 3 – Cultural and Spiritual

Presence of waahi tapu
5 = Waahi tapu present
1 = Waahi tapu not present

Coherent part of wider cultural landscape
5 = An integral and readily identifiable component of a wider cultural landscape.

4 = An important and recognised component of a wider cultural landscape.

3 = Recognised as a potentially important component of a wider cultural landscape, requiring further research.

2 = Not believed to be a significant component of the wider cultural landscape.

1 = Not recognised as a component of the wider cultural landscape.

Contemporary significance
5 = Very high contemporary significance. Waterbody has a prominent role in local creation stories; highly valuable as a source of tribal identity. Continues to be highly valued and regularly accessed for cultural purposes.

4 = High contemporary significance. Waterbody has a notable role in local creation stories and contributes to tribal identity. Continues to be valued and accessed for cultural purposes.
3 = Moderate contemporary significance. Waterbody is recognised in local creation stories or historical accounts. Continues to be valued and accessed for cultural purposes.

2 = Some contemporary significance. Waterbody has a minor role in local customs and practices. Rarely / sporadically used or accessed for cultural purposes.

1 = No contemporary significance

Cultural and Spiritual	Total score
Outstanding cultural values	12-15
Regionally significant cultural values	7-11
Moderate/Minor cultural values	3-6

Part 4 – Natural Character

Modification to bed and riparian margin

5 = A highly natural waterbody with little or no modifications to either bed or riparian margins.

4 = A highly natural waterbody displaying occasional pockets or individual minor modifications to bed or riparian margins.

3 = A waterbody displaying a mosaic of natural and human elements that constitute a 'cultured' or moderate natural character.

2 = A highly modified waterbody with significant changes to bed and riparian margins. Some reaches however still retain a degree of naturalness.

1 = A very highly modified waterbody (ie straightened or channelised, engineered banks) with significant changes to bed and riparian margin.

Modification to flow regime

5 = Highly natural flow regime with no modifications to the flow pattern.

4 = Relatively low levels of modified or diverted flow

3 = Moderately modified or diverted flow

2 = Highly modified or diverted flow (e.g., small-scale dams, irrigation or flood channels).

1 = Very highly modified or diverted flow/ water-take

Modification to river catchment

5 = Largely indigenous landscape with little human modification.

4 = A mosaic of indigenous and rural landscape elements, with no greater than minor impacts on hydrological or fluvial characteristics.

3 = A settled rural landscape including a mosaic of pastoral agriculture and plantation and indigenous forest elements, with potential for moderate impacts on hydrological or fluvial characteristics.

2 = Intensive or semi-intensive agricultural or peri-urban landscape, with moderate to significant impacts from both diffuse and point sources.

1 = Strongly modified urban or intensive agricultural landscape with little woody vegetation and significant point source and diffuse discharges.

Natural Character	Total score
Outstanding natural character	12-15
Regionally significant natural character modified	7-11
Moderate/Minor natural character modified	3-6

Part 5 - Landscape

Scenic / aesthetic importance

5 = A highly scenic waterbody, widely recognised for its beauty.

4 = A scenic waterbody, regionally significant for its aesthetic value.

3 = An attractive water body.

2 = A locally recognised waterbody with some aesthetic value.

1 = A waterbody considered to have little or no scenic or aesthetic merit.

Rarity

5 = Natural and/or cultural components of the water body and adjacent landscape context are exceptional.

4 = A distinctive water body, exhibiting significant but not regionally unique qualities.

3 = A good example of its type showing some interesting natural and/or cultural qualities.

2 = A water body considered to be typical of its type with minor natural and/or cultural points of interest.

1 = A water body considered to be typical of its type with few, if any, natural and/or cultural points of interest.

Natural science values

5 = Exceptional natural science values

4 = Highly distinctive natural science values

3 = Good natural science values that add to the landscape experience

2 = Some natural science values that add to the landscape experience

1 = Little or no natural science value

Landscape	Total score
Outstanding landscape values	12-15
Regionally significant landscape values	7-11
Moderate/Minor landsacpe values	3-6

Part 6 – Amenity, Recreational and Education

Recreation importance
5 = Water body is widely used and recognised as an important site for primary and/or secondary contact and associated land-based recreation.

4 = Water body is often used for primary and/or secondary contact recreation and associated land based recreation.

3 = Water body is of some importance for secondary contact and/or informal recreation, and occasionally for primary contact recreation.

2 = Water body has some importance for informal recreation.

1 = Water body is of limited or no importance for recreation.

Fishing and customary resource gathering
5 = Water body is used and recognised as an important site for fishing and customary resource gathering, and is known for the quality and abundance of resources.

4 = Water body is a well-known site for fishing and customary resource gathering. Water body may have high enhancement potential.

3 = Water body is a known source of fish and customary resources, although these may have been impacted by land use practices. The water body has potential for enhancement.

2 = Water body has some limited value for fishing and customary resource gathering. Species may be limited in number or of variable quality.

1 = Fish or customary aquatic and littoral resources are rare and are generally considered unsuitable for gathering.

Education and historic heritage
5 = Water body has very high historic and/or geophysical heritage, reflecting important aspects of, and contributing significantly to, an appreciation and understanding of the region's character and development.

4 = Water body has high historic and/or geophysical heritage, providing good educational opportunities, and contributing to the community's appreciation and sense of place.

3 = Water body has moderate historic and/or geophysical heritage, including that which is locally important.

2 = Water body may have limited heritage and educational significance, although with some potential.

1 = Water body is of little or no known heritage or educational significance or potential.

Access and amenity potential

5 = Water body has very high amenity values that are widely recognised, and there are few, if any, limiting barriers to access.

4 = Water body has high amenity values, and there are only limited barriers to access.

3 = Water body has good amenity values, although there may be some limits on access. There is, however, potential for enhancing amenity values and access further.

2 = Water body has little amenity value, and limited access. Potential for enhancement is also limited.

1 = Water body has no known amenity value, and little current access. Potential for enhancement is also limited.

Amenity, Recreation and Education	Total score
Outstanding amenity, recreation and educational values	16-20
Regionally significant amenity, recreation and educational values	10-15
Moderate/Minor amenity, recreation and educational values	4-9

Part 7 Physical

Physical/Geology

4 = Water body has exceptional geomorphological, geological or hydrological feature which is largely undisturbed and is dependant on the waterbody's condition and functioning.
3 = Water body has significant geomorphological, geological or hydrological features which may be disturbed but retains significant characteristics and is dependant on the waterbody's condition and functioning.
2 = Water body has a geomorphological, geological or hydrological feature that is important at the local level, it may have a moderate level of disturbance and is dependant on the waterbody's condition and functioning.
1 = Water body has a geomorphological, geological or hydrological feature of limited significance, it may be disturbed or altered, and it is dependant on the waterbody's condition and functioning.

Physical/Geology	Total score
Outstanding physical values	4
Regionally significant physical values	3
Moderate physical values	2
Minor physical values	1