



Judges' Report

CATEGORY:

Landscape and Habitat

Linkwater Catchment Group

INTERVIEWED

Tim and Tania Murdoch, Karen, Nigel and Christine Morrison, Jason and Amber Templeman, Tanya, Sophie and Troy Frost

DATE

2 December 2024

JUDGES

Roy Grose, Wendy Sullivan and Helen Ballinger (remotely)

INTRODUCTION

The Linkwater Catchment Group, consisting of six dairy farms, was established in response to water quality monitoring by the Marlborough District Council (MDC). The monitoring revealed that water quality in the area was either degraded or at risk of degradation. United by a shared vision and commitment, the group aims to better understand the impact of their farming practices on water quality and collaborate to enhance the overall health of the catchment.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Linkwater is an area located between the Pelorus Sound/ Te Hoiere and Queen Charlotte Sound/ Tōtaranui. The hills are covered in native bush at higher altitudes and production pine forests on the lower slopes, while the river flats are predominantly used for dairy farming. The three main streams in the area are Cullen Creek, Linkwater Stream and Ada Creek.



Cullen Creek: Flows into the Mahakipawa Arm and is part of the Te Hoiere Project boundaries. The Te Hoiere Project, launched in 2019, is a multi-partner initiative aiming to revitalise the Te Hoiere/Pelorus catchment from mountains to sea (ki uta ki tai). It serves as a national exemplar for community-driven environmental restoration.

Linkwater Stream: Flows into Grove Arm and is part of the Marlborough District Council's Catchment Care Programme, launched in 2020 to collaborate with local communities in protecting and enhancing river catchments.

Between 2013 and 2017, MDC's State of the Environment (SoE) programme monitored both Cullen Creek and Linkwater Stream. Results classified their water quality as either fair or marginal, with Linkwater Stream listed as degraded and Cullen Creek identified as at risk of degradation in the Proposed Marlborough Environment Plan (PMEP).

Landowners were already undertaking environmental improvements as part of their Fonterra Farm Plans and personal goals. The Linkwater Catchment Group was formed in 2021, with support from the Te Hoiere Project and the Catchment Care Programme, to address these challenges. Their primary goal was to identify the sources contributing to degraded water quality, using water monitoring and catchment surveys, and work collaboratively to implement solutions.

Farmers have tailored improvements to their individual properties, with actions including:

- Realigning farm laneways to avoid run-off.
- Introducing dung beetles.
- Fencing off waterways and wetlands.
- Planting riparian zones with native vegetation.
- Installing culverts or pivot bridges to remediate barriers to fish migration.
- Conducting soil testing to optimise fertiliser use and applying effluent to improve soil fertility and waste management.



THE JUDGES WERE IMPRESSED BY

The judges commended the Linkwater Catchment Group for their innovative and community-focused approach:

- Establishing a 50-year vision for their catchment's future.
- Conducting an intensive two-year water sampling programme to identify critical source areas and target actions.
- Fostering collaboration and a no-blame culture, ensuring all members work cohesively toward shared goals.
- Building strong relationships with the council and other agencies and leveraging expertise and opportunities.
- Engaging the local school in planting days, stream education, and dung beetle releases.

- Hosting open-gate events such as field days, workshops on soil health and fish passages, and providing a public 'reserve' for community use.
- Promoting awareness through media and Te Hoiere communication channels.

PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

The group was formed to address a significant issue: degraded water quality. By working collaboratively rather than individually, they accelerated on-the-ground actions. Support from initiatives like the Catchment Care Programme and the Te Hoiere Project provided resources such as planting labour, plant materials, and financial subsidies. Each farmer customised their approach, supplemented by contractors or voluntary working bees.

SUMMARY

The Linkwater Catchment Group showcases the power of collaboration within a farming community in addressing environmental challenges. By adopting a data-driven approach, they identified critical issues and implemented targeted actions. They have effectively leveraged available resources, including subsidies and expert advice, to enhance their initiatives, and in return, have been open to sharing their experiences with the wider community. Despite this support, the personal commitment and contributions from each farm remain pivotal to the group's success.



SUGGESTIONS

- Engage with businesses to support restoration through corporate social responsibility initiatives, such as funding or volunteering for planting days.
- Develop a Catchment Plan to determine priority actions for the next 5, 10, and 50 years to maintain focus on long-term objectives.
- Connect with other wider Mahakipawa/Tōtaranui community members undertaking predator trapping, particularly focusing on the estuarine species such as fernbird and banded rail.