



Lower Mata-au/Clutha

Integrated Catchment Group

Workshop One

30 June 2026

On a clear winter morning in Tapanui, with low sun, a light frost, and a crisp feel in the air, we gathered for our first Lower Mata-au workshop.

We came together to get to know each other, get ready to plan, understand the process, and begin exploring the environmental values that matter across this landscape. This storybook chapter documents the workshop outputs — the first pieces of the Catchment Action Plan we are building together.



Understanding the process

Before moving into the workshop activities, we talked about the wider process we are part of.

Integrated Catchment Management is about people working together to agree on shared values, make informed decisions, and act together for the natural resources of their catchments. It includes land, water, biodiversity and people.



The **Catchment Action Plan** will be a practical, community owned, non-regulatory plan that identifies actions over and above the rules and helps coordinate effort across the catchment.

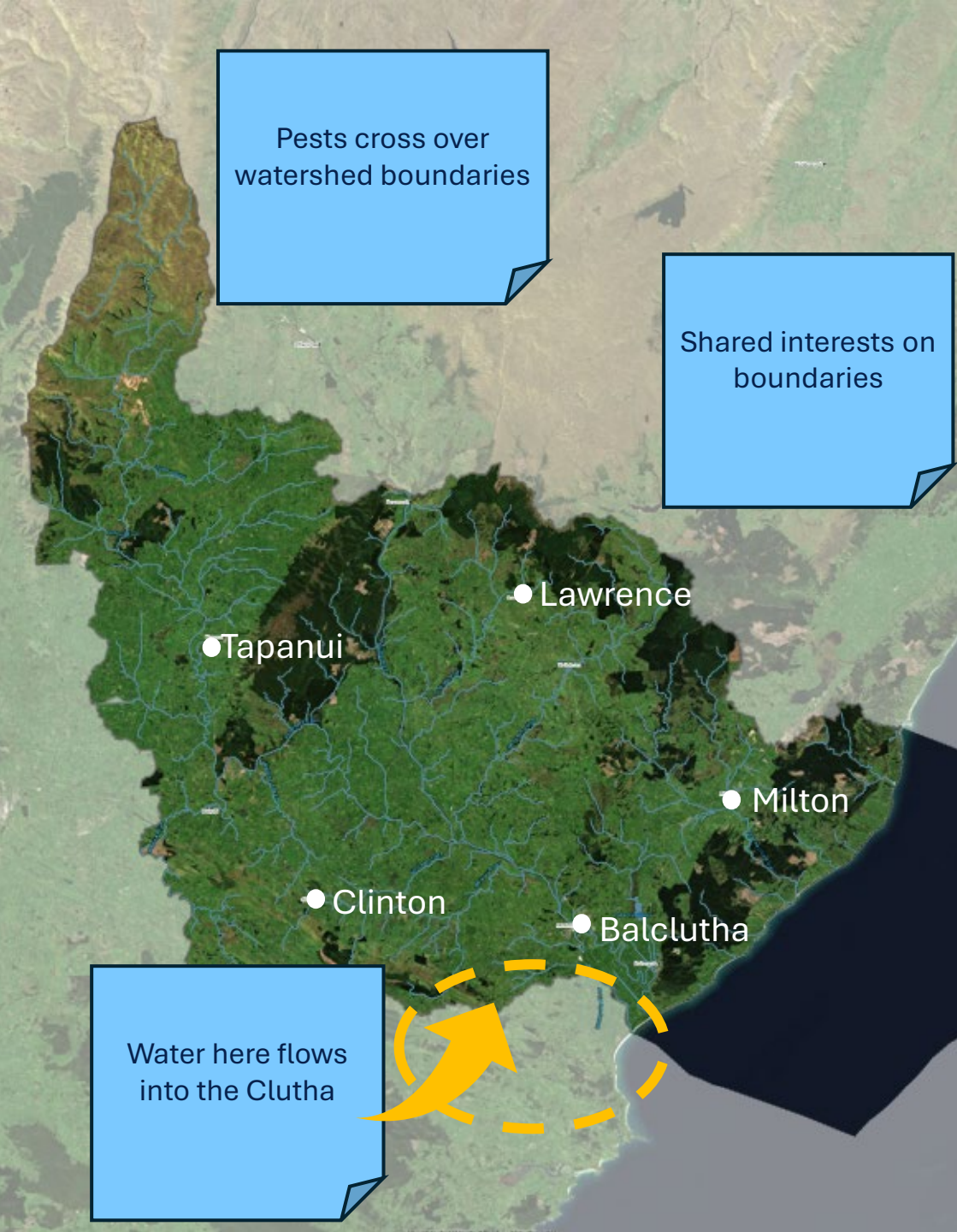
The **Integrated Catchment Group** brings local knowledge, practical experience, and understanding of the landscape into the plan. We will participate in six workshops, and this was the first one.

How we will work together

The group brainstormed what good participation looks like across the six workshops. These ideas have been shaped into a short code of conduct to guide how we work together.

1. Respect people's views, be honest and bring humour and humility.
2. Listen well, communicate clearly, stay open to learning, and be prepared to change.
3. Focus on issues, not people. Stick to the brief, stay outcomes focused, and agree to disagree when needed.
4. Keep the big picture in mind. Don't go down rabbit holes or get tied up in detail. Look at the big picture.
5. Be willing to share knowledge, offer support, acknowledge similar outcomes, and build sustained relationships.





Defining our scope

The group examined the mapped plan boundary and how this area interacts with the wider Mata-au / Clutha catchment. They identified the importance of thinking mountains to sea, recognising shared interests at the boundary, and understanding how water, pests, and environmental issues move across mapped lines.

A key discussion was the area south of the Clutha Mouth (circled in yellow on the map), which is included in the Catlins Catchment Action Plan and already picked up through their strategies. Rather than treating the boundary as a hard line, the group discussed how the Lower Mata-au / Clutha and Catlins Catchment Action Plans could work together where issues overlap, especially around pests, waterways, and coastal connections.

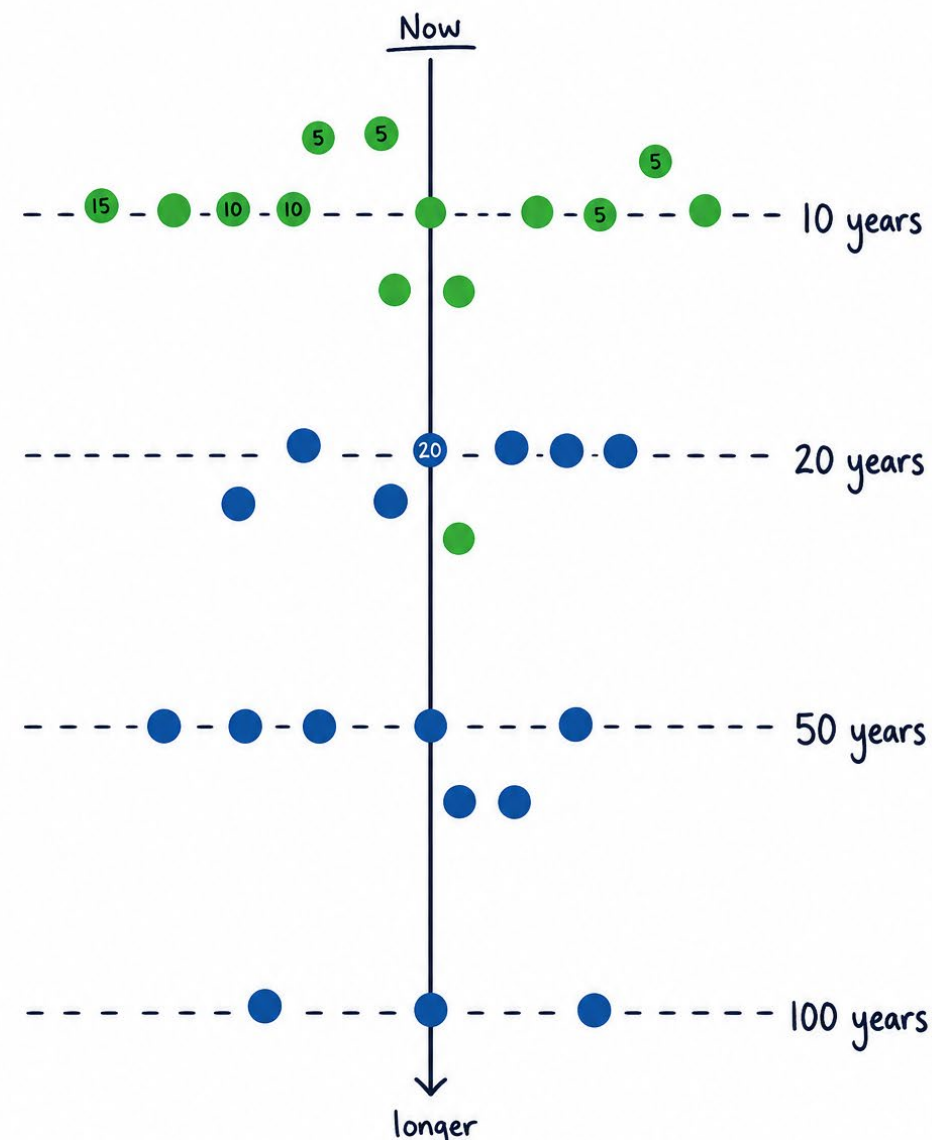
Defining our scope

The group also considered the useful time scope for the action plan and vision. The results indicate that the action plan should focus on the next **10 years**, while the vision can look further ahead, generally around **50+ years**.



What timeframe feels right for this catchment Action Plan?

- Green dot = action plan (what can the plan realistically start & support?)
- Blue dot = vision (the longer-term future we want for the catchments)



In scope for this plan



Natural environment

Land, water, air, climate,
rivers, wetlands, coast,
estuaries and marine
environment



Biodiversity Biosecurity

Native biodiversity, native
species, fisheries, pests
and weeds



Land use

Agriculture, forestry,
industry, energy, mining,
tourism and sustainable
economy



People & values

Community wellbeing,
community connection,
recreation, access,
heritage, mana whenua
values



Planning & action

Collective impact,
coordination, solutions,
monitoring and private
funding opportunities

Out of scope for this plan

Setting rules and limits, changing regulations or consenting
decisions. Roads, public transport, three waters. A promise of
funding.

What belongs in this plan?

It was important for the group to discuss what is **in scope** and **out of scope** for the Catchment Action Plan, and to ask questions early. This helped build a shared understanding of what the plan can focus on, what sits outside the process, and how to keep the work clear, realistic, and useful.



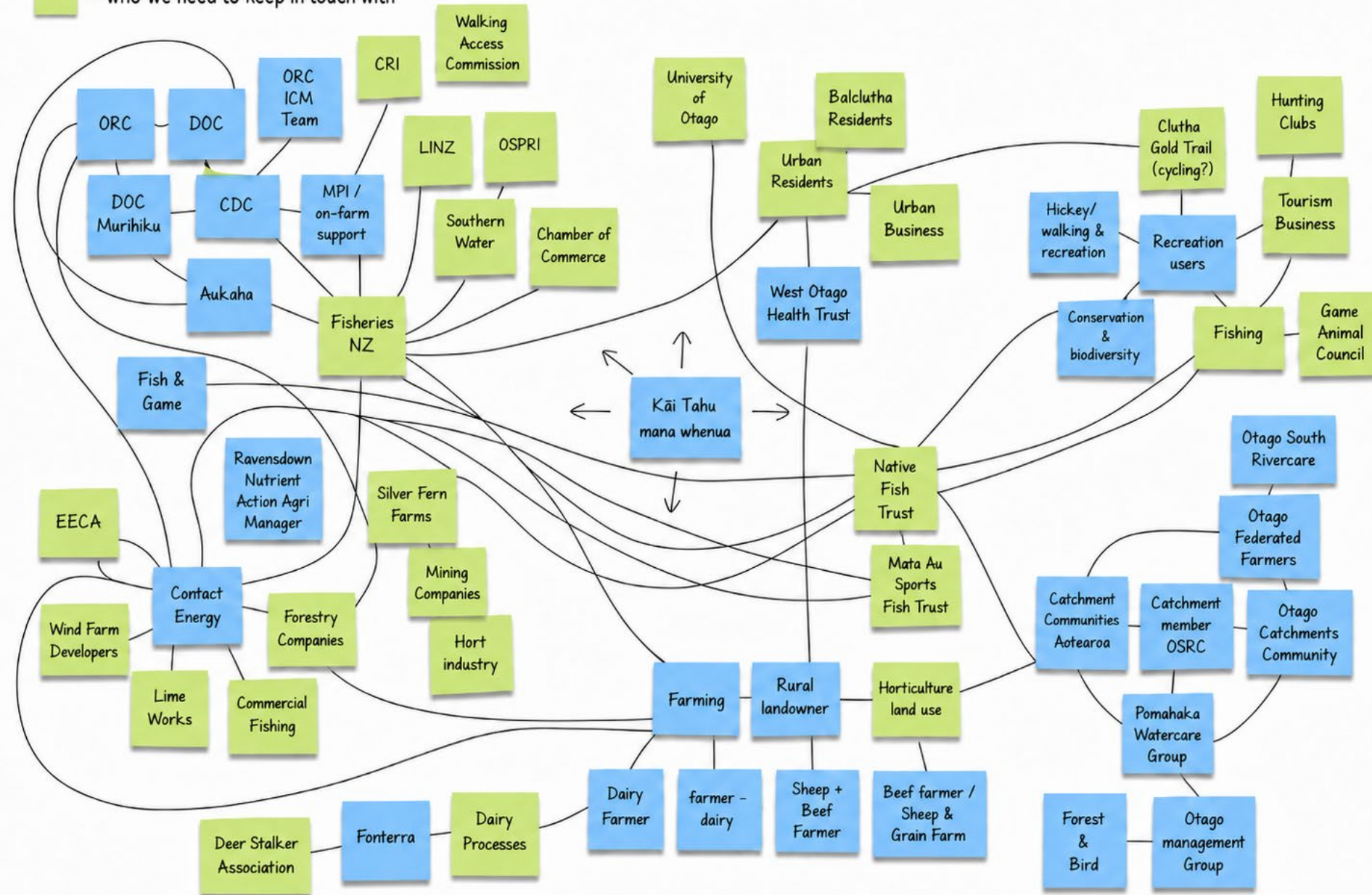
= who we have in the room
 = who we need to keep in touch with

Our Network

Activity 1 - Station 3

Our people and our connections

We mapped our wider network to see who is already in the room (blue), who we need to keep in touch with (green) and relationships between groups. This helped show existing relationships, identify gaps, and guide future engagement so the plan reflects a broad range of knowledge and perspectives.



Understanding our values

The group looked at six connected parts of the landscape:

- Rivers, lakes, groundwater and aquifers
- Marine, coast and estuary
- Wetlands
- Terrestrial ecosystems — forest, shrub and tussock
- Productive land systems — farms, forestry, etc
- Urban and residential spaces, and air

For each part of the landscape, the group considered what has changed over time, what is valued now, what pressures are being seen, and what kind of future the group wants to work toward.

The following pages show the past, present and future the group described.



Rivers, lakes, groundwater and aquifers

Past

We look back to rivers that were free-flowing, with no dams, fewer barriers, natural flushing and abundant biodiversity. Mahika kai was part of the landscape, with tuna (eels), kanakana (lamprey) and īnaka (whitebait) supported by healthy habitat. Rivers were drinkable and swimmable.

Present

Today we see waterways that have been altered, confined, channelised and straightened. Culverts and dams create barriers to fish passage, ecosystems are fragmented and urban, and rural run-off is affecting water quality. We also see research on kanakana (lamprey), more recreational use, and restoration work already happening.

Future

We want sustainable use of water, restored habitat, and a more balanced approach to the water resource. We see the need for drinkable and swimmable water everywhere, stronger biodiversity, nature-based solutions, better fish passage, and re-established kanakana (lamprey), tuna (eels) and īnaka (whitebait).

Marine, coast and estuary

Past

We look back to dynamic coastlines with natural checks and balances, where estuaries were not full of sediment, and species could move more freely. Biodiversity was high, with mahika kai values, mobile species like birds and sea lions, and kelp forests supporting marine life.

Present

Today we see coastlines treated as fixed, with degraded estuaries, developed coastlines, blockages, flood gates and stop banks. There is a lot of recreational use, overfishing, pests, litter, algal blooms and less water flow. Some fish and shellfish are still there, but biodiversity has declined and some species are close to extinction.

Future

We want high biodiversity, sustainable fisheries, restored kelp forests, and stronger marine protection. We want to see less sediment, fewer pests, no unnatural algal blooms, and coastlines and dunes with native resilience. We want people to respect wildlife, reduce litter, and protect access for recreation and mahika kai.

Wetlands

Past

We look back to extensive wetlands: bogs, seepages, marshlands, swamps, fens and tarns. They were important for mahika kai, moderated flows, stored and filtered water, and acted as a nutrient sink. They supported habitat for aquatic species, including kōura (freshwater crayfish), galaxiid fish, tuna (eels), birds, kākahi (freshwater mussels), and kāki (black stilt).

Present

Today we see wetlands that are significantly depleted by drainage, with some upland wetlands dried out by forestry. Remaining areas, such as Roto-Nui-a-Whatu (Tuakitoto), are managed more for flood control than ecological values. We also see constructed wetlands beginning to support nutrient management and water retention.

Future

We want to see the re-establishment of wetlands, starting in upland areas, to hold and purify water and reconnect hydrological systems. We want a future network of wetlands in the right places, creating natural corridors from bush to wetland, with more love for wetlands and farmers brought along in a win-win way.

Terrestrial ecosystems: forest, shrub and tussock

Past

We look back to indigenous forest, with beech in the hills, matai, kōwhai, and tussocklands in the upper catchments. Forests were in better health, with native species like mohua (yellowhead), bellbird, tūi, kererū (wood pigeon), pīwakawaka (fantail), whio (blue duck), and falcon part of the landscape.

Present

Today we see patches of natives, but also sycamore, pine, wilding pines and gorse replacing native ecosystems. We see pressure from ungulates, stoats, possums and cats, and loss of understory. Native species are still present, including falcon, bellbird, tūi, kererū (wood pigeon) and remnant mohua (yellowhead) in the Blue Mountains.

Future

We want to create stronger native ecosystems by building up corridors, connecting patches, and regenerating native bush. We see the need for non-productive land to support biodiversity, carbon forests to be replaced by natives, and ecosystems that support native species.

Productive land systems: farms, forestry, etc

Past

We look back to a time when there was production at all costs, with production as the priority and less knowledge of environmental effects. There were few rules, burn-offs and landscape clearing, draining of wetlands, sheep dips, and DDT. Dairy did not always work well because of poor infrastructure, and forestry was not well regulated.

Present

Today we see a time of change and uncertainty but also increased environmental awareness and more connected communities. Learning has improved through water quality data, better technology, and more careful input management. We see catchment groups forming, improved forestry practice, and production becoming more environmentally considered.

Future

We want a future with targeted input management, improved support for catchment groups, and better environmental outcomes. We see the need for clear limits, minimum flows, fewer regulatory barriers to making environmental improvements, and production that responds to emissions, impacts, and consumer demand.

Urban and residential spaces, and air

Past

We look back to urban spaces established near rivers for water, sewage, transport, and food. Housing was poorer quality, often using materials like native timber and asbestos, and air quality was affected by smelly coal and burning plastic. But there was also strong community contribution, local schools, and a practical sense that if it needs doing, it gets done.

Present

Today we see communities trying to keep residents, with lower house prices and first-home opportunities. But infrastructure has not kept up, services are more centralised, and people often travel further for schools. We also see issues with air quality from coal, inversion layers, and burning plastic, alongside reliance on councils and funding.

Future

We want more sustainable urban spaces, with less sprawling development, better density, improved services, and underground infrastructure that remains affordable. We see the need for better recreation and nature connections, stronger community contribution, improved air quality, and communities that stay connected while living within our means.

Key environmental attribute

The draft "key environmental attributes" shown below have been extracted from the group's past, present and future descriptions of catchment values. The attributes give an initial idea of themes to be understood, measured, protected, or strengthened through the plan.

These key environmental attributes help turn broad community values into clearer planning questions, measurable indicators, and support evidence-based decision-making. They will be further developed and refined with ORC's internal Project Support Team to align with current monitoring, information, and advice.

River flows **Hydrological connectivity** **Native biodiversity abundance**
Mahika kai abundance **Habitat extent and condition** **Swimmability**
Water quality **Naturalness** **Habitat connectivity**
Recreational opportunity **Water use sustainability** **Coastal natural dynamics**
Estuarine sediment health **Birdlife presence** **Fish and shellfish abundance**
Community connection to nature **Wetland extent and function**
Landholder collaboration **Native vegetation extent and condition** **Landscape productivity**
Sustainable land use **Environmental awareness** **Air quality**
Community connection and involvement

Visioning our future

The group used a set of future-focused prompts to think beyond today's issues and imagine what success could look and feel like across the catchment. They considered what might be celebrated at a future environmental festival, what problems people may no longer need to worry about, and what young people might casually talk about as normal in the future.

What we see in our future

