



Inland Mata-au Clutha

Integrated Catchment Group

Workshop 2

03 August 2026 - Omakau

On a day of sun, rain, wind and everything in between, we gathered at the Ōmakau Golf Club for our second workshop. We achieved a lot: electing our chairs, assessing catchment health, and discussing the pressures affecting the environment, with constructive conversations around some significant and complex topics.



As a group, we successfully elected **Kelly Heckler** and **Greg Shepard** as co-chairs. Congratulations, and thank you both for taking on this important role.



Our first exercise focused on key environmental attributes (KEA).

"Key environmental attributes are the physical, chemical, biological, social and cultural characteristics of the environment that need to remain healthy and function well for the things people value to continue over time."

They provide a basis for assessing the current health and condition of the catchment(s).

The **key environmental attributes** were drawn from the recurring themes identified in workshop one. Many attributes are relevant across multiple parts of the landscape and provide an integrated way of looking at the catchment.



Our catchment health assessment was guided by a scale ranging from **very good to very poor**. The ratings provide a structured indication of the current health of each key environmental attribute, rather than a precise scientific measurement.



Very good

Exceptional status; requires no intervention for maintenance; ecosystem functioning well.

Good

Desirable status; requires little intervention for maintenance.

Fair

Within acceptable range of variation; some intervention required for maintenance

Poor

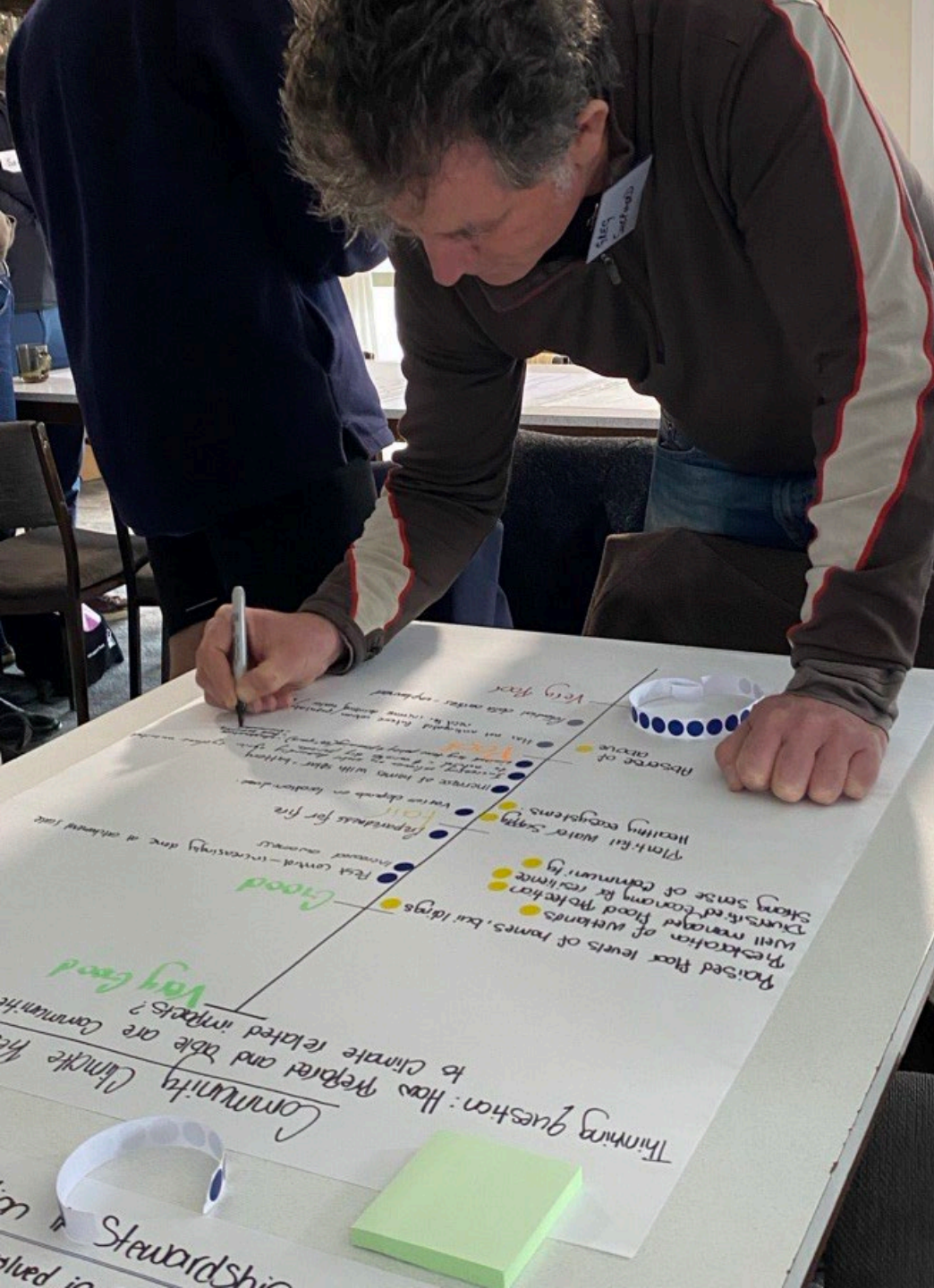
Outside acceptable range of variation; requires human intervention.

Very poor

Restoration increasingly difficult; may result in permanent degradation.

The health of an attribute can vary significantly between locations, so we recorded multiple ratings along the scale. Equally important are the places where monitoring results and community experience differ. Understanding why these perspectives align, or why they do not, is an important part of building a shared understanding of catchment health.





Prior to the workshop, the Project Support Team (at ORC) assessed the health of each key environmental attribute using available monitoring and technical expertise. Their ratings are shown by the **yellow dots**.

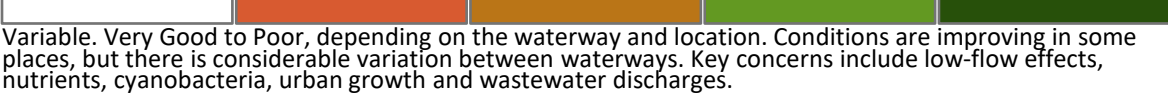
We then completed the same assessment using our lived experience and local knowledge. Our ratings are shown by the **blue dots**.

Placing both perspectives side by side helps show where they align, where they differ, and where we may need to learn more.

Catchment Health Scorecard

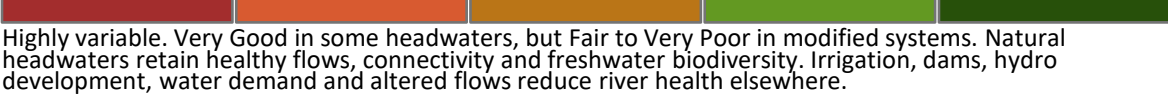


Water quality



Variable. Very Good to Poor, depending on the waterway and location. Conditions are improving in some places, but there is considerable variation between waterways. Key concerns include low-flow effects, nutrients, cyanobacteria, urban growth and wastewater discharges.

Water quantity, flows, water security & hydrological function



Highly variable. Very Good in some headwaters, but Fair to Very Poor in modified systems. Natural headwaters retain healthy flows, connectivity and freshwater biodiversity. Irrigation, dams, hydro development, water demand and altered flows reduce river health elsewhere.

Repo/wetland extent, condition & function



Good in some upland wetlands; Fair to Poor more broadly. Important wetlands remain in upper catchments, with growing awareness and restoration effort. Drainage, grazing, weeds, abstraction, altered hydrology and poor knowledge of many wetlands remain concerns. The extant of wetland loss is large, impacting the value of wetland to Papatūānuku. Wetlands are not able to fully function to act like the kidneys of the whenua (land) and filter the water.

Native vegetation extent



Good in some isolated managed uplands; Poor to Very Poor across many lowland and dryland areas. Restoration, pest control and reduced burning are helping some native vegetation recover. Historic clearance, fragmentation, weeds and poor condition of remaining ecosystems remain major issues.

Native wildlife abundance & diversity



Poor to Very Poor overall, despite some positive examples for particular birds. Some species benefit from restored or human-created habitat. Predators, habitat loss, degraded waterways and dramatic declines in insects, lizards and native fish remain concerns.

Taoka (treasured, native) species



Fair overall. Taoka species are known and appreciated in the catchment, but their value to the ecosystem is not always recognised, and abundance and diversity have declined.

Habitat connectivity



Generally Poor across freshwater and terrestrial habitats. Higher country areas and interventions such as fish ladders and weir removal provide some positive examples. Drying waterways, fragmented native habitat, dams and fish-passage barriers continue to restrict movement.

Air quality



Variable. Good to Fair generally; Poor to Very Poor in winter hotspots. Rural and high-country air quality is generally considered healthy. Winter inversions, home heating, vehicle emissions, burning and dust create localised problems.

Soil health & productive capacity



Good on productive and irrigated land; Fair to Poor on marginal, arid and high-country land. Well-managed irrigation and nutrients can support productive, healthy soils. Erosion, depleted carbon, rabbits, burning, compaction, pugging and sediment runoff reduce soil condition elsewhere.

Sustainable land use



Fair to Poor overall, with some Good practices and improving awareness. Best-practice awareness is growing, and some pastoral, cropping, horticultural and viticultural systems are performing well. Historic land-use change, intensification, urban growth and loss of wetlands and tussocklands remain concerns.

Community climate resilience



Fair to Very Poor overall, with preparedness varying between locations. Some increased awareness and practical adaptation were noted, but most comments focused on gaps in future preparedness. Water-demanding land use, limited long-term planning and future growth are key concerns.

Recreational access & opportunity in nature



Highly variable. Good overall, but ranging from Very Good to Very Poor between places. Swimming, fishing, watersports and other nature-based recreation are highly valued and access is improving in places. Dewatered rivers, low summer flows, limited high-country access and maintenance pressures remain concerns.

Te ara tawhito (ancient trails)



Very poor overall. Ancient trails are not widely known and appreciated. They hold stories and knowledge of old waterways, wetlands and taonga (treasures) and this knowledge is underutilised.

Community participation in stewardship



Variable. Good where groups are active; Fair to Very Poor where participation is limited. Catchment groups, EnviroSchools, planting and intergenerational involvement are important strengths. Participation can be fragmented, with limited volunteer capacity and some people and perspectives not being included.

Enabling conditions for change



Fair to Poor, with some Good progress in knowledge and practices. Knowledge is growing and people have increasing ability to improve environmental practices. Funding, monitoring gaps, limited baseline information and low wider-community knowledge still constrain action.

Mahika kai



Poor overall. Mahika kai areas and their significance to ecosystem health are underappreciated and not widely known. Abundance, diversity, access and knowledge of use has declined.

Wild & self-sustaining sports fisheries & game bird populations & habitats

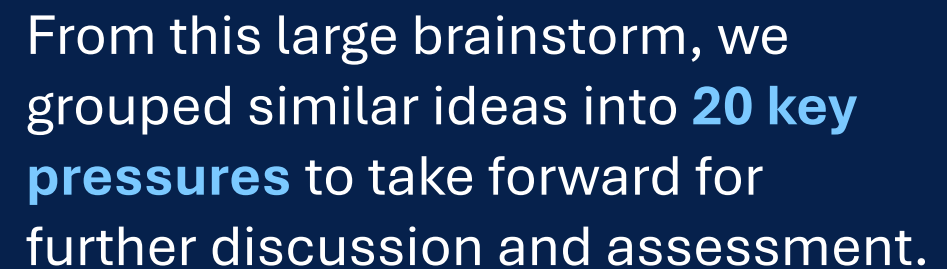


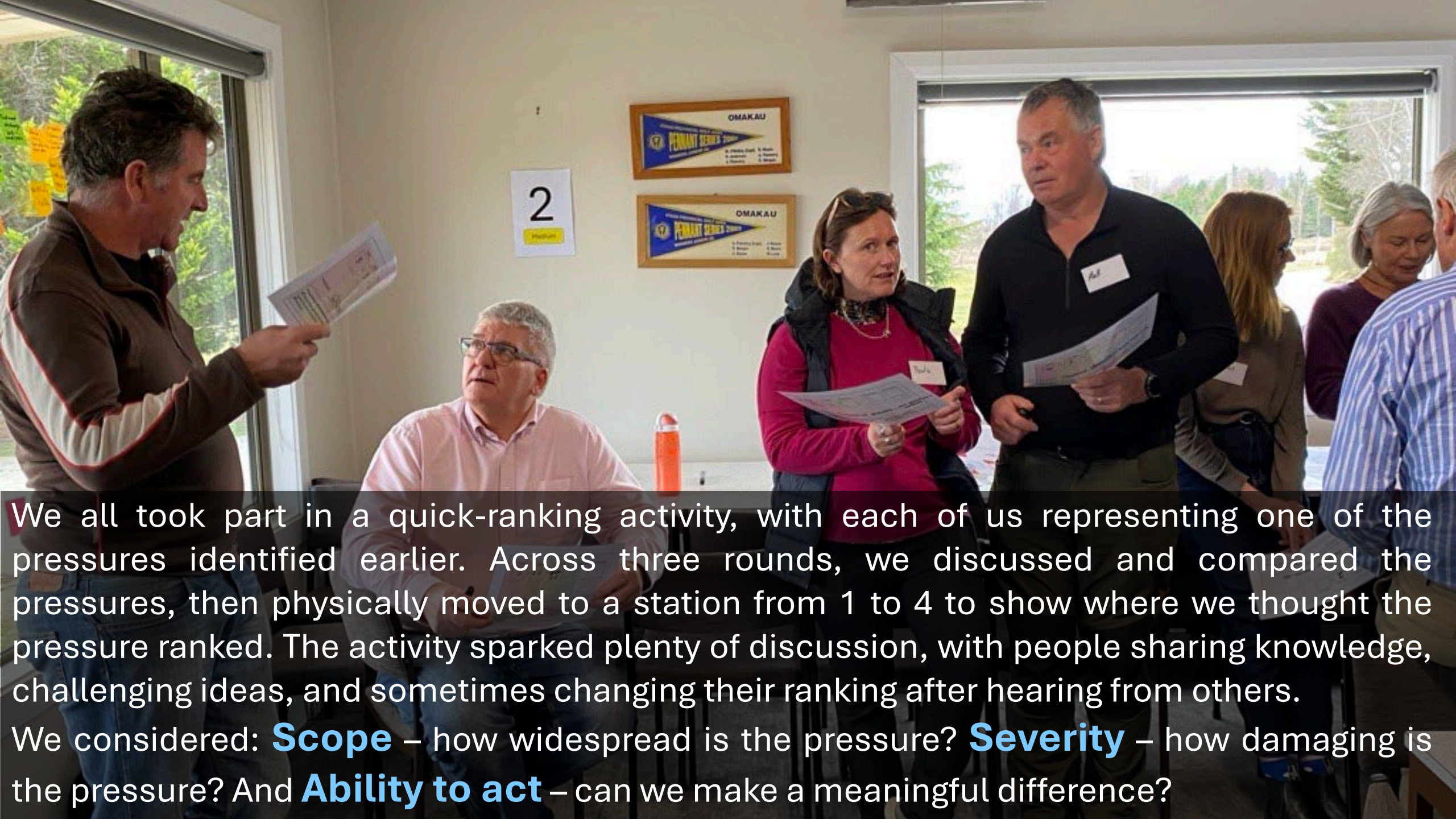
Good in large lakes and the Clutha main stem; Fair to Poor elsewhere. Large lake and river fisheries remain strong, alongside valued collaboration with agencies and researchers. Habitat loss, predators, fish-passage barriers, overallocated waterways and poor connectivity remain concerns.

Our afternoon activity focused on identifying the pressures affecting catchment health. To help guide the discussion in systems-thinking, we used three key terms:

- A **"driver"** is a root cause or underlying force leading change.
- A **"pressure"** is a human activity or human-caused process that places stress on the catchment.
- A **"stress"** is the resulting damage to the catchment health







We all took part in a quick-ranking activity, with each of us representing one of the pressures identified earlier. Across three rounds, we discussed and compared the pressures, then physically moved to a station from 1 to 4 to show where we thought the pressure ranked. The activity sparked plenty of discussion, with people sharing knowledge, challenging ideas, and sometimes changing their ranking after hearing from others. We considered: **Scope** – how widespread is the pressure? **Severity** – how damaging is the pressure? And **Ability to act** – can we make a meaningful difference?

What did the quick-ranking tell us?

Pressure (ordered by magnitude)	Scope - how widespread is the pressure?	Severity - how damaging is the pressure?	Magnitude (scope + severity)	Ability to act - can we make a meaningful difference?
Invasive plants (excluding conifers and willows)	4	4	8	2
Introduced predator mammals	4	4	8	2.5
Wood burners and wet wood	4	3.5	7.5	2.5
Dams and instream structures*	3.7	3.7	7.4	2
Wilding conifers	4	3	7	2.5
Fast-track and changes to policies	3	4	7	1
Climatic variation	4	3	7	1
Rabbits	3.5	3	6.5	3
Land-use change to urban	3.5	3	6.5	3
Diseases/pathogens, e.g. bird flu	3.5	3	6.5	1
Water extraction and use	3	3	6	3
River channel management	3	3	6	3
Willows	3	3	6	2
Financial pressure, e.g. debt servicing	4	2	6	2
Fertilizer and chemical use	4	2	6	2.5
Intensified land use (productive land)	3	3	6	2
Fire risk	3	2.5	5.5	2
Public perception/awareness	2.5	3	5.5	2.5
Sewage discharge and septic systems	3	2	5	3
Feral large herbivore mammals (pigs, goats, deer)	2.4	2.1	4.5	2.5
Introduced fish species*	2	2.5	4.5	2.5
Wallabies	2	1	3	3
Geese	1	2	3	3.5

Rows marked with an asterisk (*) were added after the workshop for completeness.

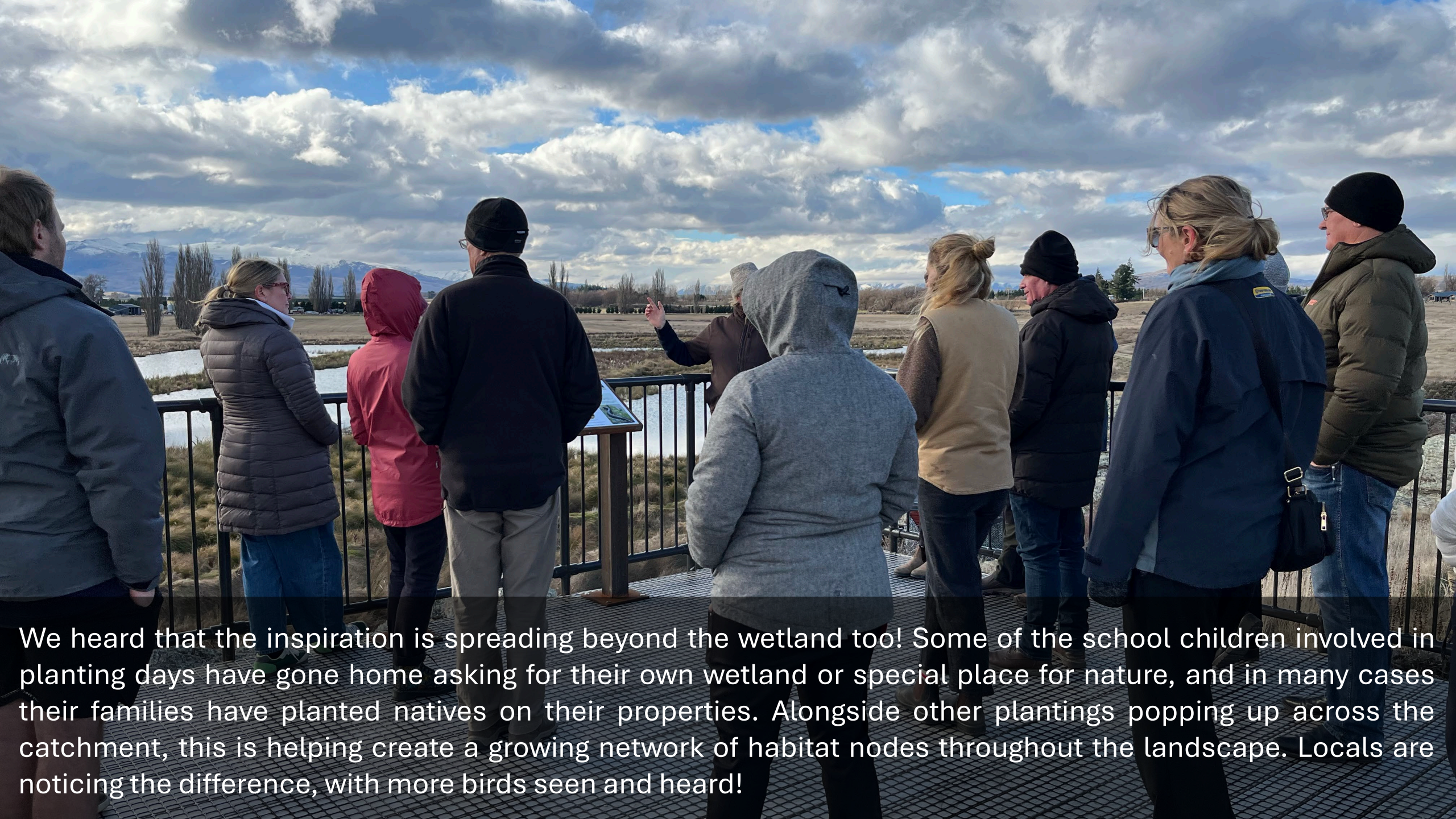
The results give us an indication our overall thinking and help us see which pressures may warrant more attention. Importantly, the ranking is a tool to support discussion — it does not make decisions for us. These results will be considered alongside the best available evidence as we develop the plan



After the workshop, local farmer Anna Gillespie kindly guided us on a walk to Orkney Wetland and shared the story of the project. Orkney Wetland is part of the farmer-led Thomsons Catchment Project, established to improve water quality. Since restoration began, farmers, volunteers and the wider community have worked together on planting and habitat restoration, helping transform the wetland into a thriving place for wildlife and a source of pride for the community. The project is linked to the wider Manuherekia Catchment Exemplar Project and funded by the Ministry for the Environment's Jobs for Nature programme. [Find out more at www.mcg.org.nz/thomsons-project/](http://www.mcg.org.nz/thomsons-project/)



We had plenty of questions about what had worked, what had been challenging, and what had helped keep the project going over time. As Anna reflected on the years of school children involved in annual planting days, it felt like a project counted not in years, but in local children growing up alongside the wetland! And while we talked, pūkeko jostled with each other across the wetland - a fitting backdrop to a place that has become richer with life over time.



We heard that the inspiration is spreading beyond the wetland too! Some of the school children involved in planting days have gone home asking for their own wetland or special place for nature, and in many cases their families have planted natives on their properties. Alongside other plantings popping up across the catchment, this is helping create a growing network of habitat nodes throughout the landscape. Locals are noticing the difference, with more birds seen and heard!

Where to from here?

Workshop 2 gave us a much clearer shared picture of how our landscape is doing, the pressures affecting it, and where we may have opportunities to make a difference.

The conversations don't end here. We'll carry what we heard, including the different perspectives, questions and ideas raised throughout the day, into our next workshop as we continue working towards what we want for the catchment and what we can do together to get there.

Our visit to Orkney Wetland was a good reminder that change can start locally, build over time and spread well beyond a single project.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their time, knowledge and energy to the day.

