

Annual Report FY25/26

1 July 2025 - 30 June 2026

Mana oranga: Mana Tangata: Mana ki uta: Mana ki tai: Mana Waituna

*Ensuring the wellbeing of the people, the land, the waters, the ecosystems
and the life-force of the Waituna catchment and lagoon, now and for
future generations through a partnership approach*



Table of Contents

Background	3
Trust Objectives	4
Our People	5
Trustees.....	5
Project Steering Group and Project Office	5
Message from the Co-Chairs	7
FY25/26 Summary	8
Financial Statements and Assets	9
Delivery of Charitable Objectives	10
Rūnanga Reconnection.....	10
Land Transition.....	14
Waterway Redesign	21
Improving Freshwater	22
Local Community	23
Trust Operations	24
Key Challenges in FY25/26.....	26
Looking Ahead to 2026/27	27
Ngā Mihi – Acknowledgements.....	29

Background

Waituna Lagoon and its surrounding wetlands and waterways are an area of great importance both environmentally and culturally and provide an internationally significant ecosystem for wildlife. The lagoon and its catchment have faced significant challenges due to land use change and water quality degradation.

The Whakamana te Waituna Trust (the Trust) is a registered Charitable Trust that was formed in 2018, following several years of collaborative work by the local community, agencies, iwi and others to reduce the impacts of nutrient, sediment and biodiversity losses on Waituna Lagoon/Waipārera. Together, the Trust partners (Awarua Rūnanga, Ngāi Tahu, Southland District Council, Environment Southland, Department of Conservation, and Fonterra) were able to secure \$13.6 million of funding through partner contributions and the Ministry for the Environment Freshwater Improvement Fund (FIF), to complete a 5-year programme of work to restore the mana of the Waituna Lagoon and wetlands.

The programme was unique as it included the purchase and retirement of 584 hectares of farmland to create a buffer around Waituna lagoon, with 403 hectares returned to Awarua Rūnanga to establish a mahinga kai pā. Other mahi included trialling a range of tools to reduce contaminants reaching the lagoon and completing a significant demonstration on Waituna Creek to reduce erosion and improve the quality of instream habitat for native freshwater fish.

The Trust is continuing this mahi to re-establish native biodiversity, improve water quality, and support Ngāi Tahu and Awarua Rūnanga's work to reconnect with the whenua (land). The Trust has a long-term goal of repurposing 10% of the Waituna catchment (2,000 hectares) into other uses that support water quality and biodiversity improvements. This work is foundational for maintaining the health of the lagoon and ensuring its vitality for future generations.



Trust Objectives

The Trust's Charitable Objectives include:

Rūnanga Reconnection

Assisting Te Rūnanga o Awarua in reconnecting with the Waituna whenua and fulfilling their role as Kaitiaki by enhancing the habitats of key taonga species; by utilising traditional Māori knowledge and cultural health indicators and improving access to land for Mahinga Kai gathering and Rūnanga development.

Land Transition

Enhancement of biodiversity and carbon sequestration via land re-purposing, afforestation and wetland creation (also benefits water quality).

Waterway Redesign

Flood mitigation, freshwater habitat improvement and sediment reduction through waterway re-design. Includes riparian planting, bank reshaping, two stage channels and in-stream habitat enhancement.

Improving Freshwater

Protecting and improving freshwater quality and the health of Waituna Lagoon by reducing contaminant (nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment) losses from farming through the implementation of farm system interventions and creating catchment scale wetlands.

Local Community

Supporting a thriving local community by undertaking environmental projects and activities that promote the sustainable future of farming in the catchment.

Trust Operations

Administration and management of the Whakamana te Waituna Trust and Project, including operation of the Project Management Office, finance and auditing, and reporting.

Our People

Trustees

Up to six Trustees may be appointed to the Trust, with two appointed by Awarua Rūnanga and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, one by Environment Southland, one by Southland District Council, one by Fonterra and one appointed by the Trust as an independent Trustee. A Trust advisor role is appointed by the Department of Conservation.

The Trustees are:

- **Jon Pemberton (Co-Chair)** – Jon is a Southland Regional Councillor and Chair of the Council’s Integrated Catchment Management Committee. Jon was appointed as the Council’s representative to the Trust in December 2025.
- **Riki Nicholas (Co-Chair)** – Riki is an Awarua Representative, appointed by the Rūnanga in December 2025.
- **Julie Keast** – Julie is a Southland District Councillor and a founding member of the Trust.
- **John McCarroll** – John is the Te Papa Atawhai/Department of Conservation Operations Manager for Murihiku District and is appointed by DOC to be their Trust Advisor. John has been involved since the Trust was formed in 2018.
- **Maarten Van Rossum** – Maarten is an independently appointed Trustee who joined the Trust in 2024. Maarten is a dairy farmer in the Waituna Catchment.
- **Robb Stevens** – Robb is the Fonterra appointee and joined the Trust in 2024. Robb is the Local Government and Stakeholder Affairs Manager for Fonterra for the South Island.
- **Dean Whaanga** – Dean is an Awarua Representative, a founding member of the Trust and previously Co-Chair. Dean is the Kaupapa Taiao Kaiwhakahaere for Te Ao Marama Inc.

Trust Meetings are held quarterly. Four meetings were held in the 2025/2026 financial year.

Project Steering Group and Project Office

The Trust operational structure includes a Project Steering Group (PSG) made up of representatives from Environment Southland, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Fonterra and the Department of Conservation. A PSG Chair is elected by PSG members to lead the Group and act as the key contact point between Trustees and the Trust’s operational work programme.

The PSG meets regularly (every 2 weeks), with its primary function being oversight of the development and delivery of the Trust's work programme.

A Project Manager is employed by the Trust and reports to the PSG Chair. The Project Manager runs the Project Office, which manages the delivery of the Trust's work programme, including planning and project management, iwi and stakeholder engagement, financial management, funding, reporting, and communications.



Message from the Co-Chairs

As we reflect on the last financial year, we are proud of the significant progress made towards restoring the environmental, cultural and community values of Waituna.

The year marked an important transition for the Trust, with the appointment of new Co-Chairs and the continuation of a strong partnership approach that has underpinned Whakamana te Waituna since its establishment. We acknowledge the leadership and commitment of former Co-Chairs Nicol Horrell and Gail Thompson, whose contributions helped shape the Trust into the organisation it is today.

This year saw several major milestones achieved. The Webster Block was transferred into Trust ownership and the first large-scale restoration planting programme was completed, representing a significant step toward the Trust's vision of restoring native ecosystems around Waituna Lagoon. The ongoing development of the Waituna Nature Credits Pilot also positioned the Trust at the forefront of emerging approaches to financing environmental restoration in New Zealand

We were particularly pleased to see substantial progress made on the Cultural and Education Centre at Pikiraurahi Mahinga Kai Pā. The relocation of the building to site and completion of much of the associated infrastructure moved this project closer to becoming a place for cultural reconnection, learning and restoration.

The achievements of FY25/26 were only possible because of the continued commitment of our Trust partners, Project Steering Group, Te Wai Parera Trust, landowners, contractors, funders and wider community. Together, we continued to demonstrate that enduring environmental outcomes are best achieved through collaboration, mutual respect and a shared vision.

As we look ahead, we remain focused on delivering restoration on the ground, strengthening cultural connections, improving freshwater outcomes, exploring innovative funding pathways, and progressing opportunities for future land transition and ecosystem enhancement.

Riki Nicholas

Co-Chair

Jon Pemberton

Co-Chair

FY25/26 Summary

The following key pieces of work contributed towards the Trust's charitable objectives in FY25/26:

- Webster Block transferred into Trust ownership
- First large-scale restoration planting completed (8,500+ native plants over 6.5 ha)
- Nature Credits Pilot advanced through MfE pilot, Ekos Accelerator Programme, ecological baseline monitoring and project registration process
- Cultural Centre moved onto site at Pikiraurahi and substantially completed
- Long-term maintenance programme established across Trust restoration sites
- New Co-Chairs appointed
- Land transition strategy advanced and restoration planning undertaken for future priority land
- Lower Waituna Creek restoration programme progressed
- Pest control programmes continued
- Historic planting site audit showed strong success from previous restoration investments.

Financially the Trust continued to be well supported by its partner organisations with funding of \$466,957 received. The Trust's outgoings totaled \$784,860 and at the end of FY25/26 the Trust's total equity was \$1,592,607.

Financial Statements and Assets

The Whakamana te Waituna Charitable Trust had revenue in the form of donations, grants and land leases of \$469,569. This included funding of \$165,000 from Te Wai Parera Trust and \$120,000 from Ngāi Tahu to complete the Cultural and Education Centre building at Pikiraurahi.

Donations and grants held by the Trust earned \$54,565 in interest, taking overall revenue to \$524,133. Expenses for the Trust totalled \$784,160 resulting in a deficit for the year of \$260,027.

At the end of FY25/26 the Trust's total equity was \$1,592,607.

Statement of Financial Performance

Whakamana Te Waituna Charitable Trust
For the year ended 30 June 2026

	NOTES	2026	2025
Revenue			
Government service delivery grants/contracts	1	158,757	1,366,972
Non-government service delivery grants/contracts	1	308,200	184,316
Revenue from commercial activities	1	2,612	-
Interest, dividends and other investment revenue		54,565	58,169
Total Revenue		524,133	1,609,457
Expenses			
Employee remuneration and other related expenses	2	152,402	115,943
Other expenses related to service delivery	2	631,758	259,694
Other expenses	2	-	1,912
Total Expenses		784,160	377,550
Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year		(260,027)	1,231,907

For a detailed financial report please contact the Trust: projectmanager@waituna.org.nz

Delivery of Charitable Objectives

Rūnanga Reconnection

Awarua Rūnanga and Ngāi Tahu continued to be actively involved in the Trust, holding a Co-Chair position, Trustee position and as a member of the Project Steering Group.

Pikiraaurahi Cultural and Education Centre – a Place for Cultural Reconnection

One of the Trust's most significant achievements during FY25/26 was the progression of the Cultural and Education Centre at Te Pā Mahika Kai o Pikiraaurahi. Building on the planning, consenting and design work completed in FY24/25, the project moved from concept and approvals into construction and on-the-ground delivery.

The Cultural and Education Centre is being established by Te Wai Parera Trust to support cultural reconnection, environmental restoration, education and community engagement within the wider Waituna catchment. Situated within the Pikiraaurahi Mahinga Kai Pā and overlooking Waituna Lagoon/Waipārera, the facility will provide a permanent base for cultural learning, restoration activities, monitoring programmes and whānau events.

Significant progress was made during FY25/26. Foundations and piles were installed during spring, and on 12 December 2025 the Southern Institute of Technology building was successfully relocated to Pikiraaurahi. This milestone represented the culmination of several years of planning and partnership effort between Te Wai Parera Trust, Whakamana te Waituna Trust, Southern Institute of Technology and project partners.



The project then moved into fit-out and infrastructure development. During the second half of the year, wastewater systems were installed, carparking completed, internal painting and fit-out progressed, and work commenced on verandas, decking and internal services. By June 2026, the building was close to completion and preparations were underway to bring the facility into operational use.

The Whakamana te Waituna Trust played an important role in supporting delivery of the project. The Trust assisted with project management, facilitated contractor engagement, coordinated funding arrangements and provided support to ensure the centre could be delivered efficiently and safely. During the year Te Wai Parera Trust provided funding to support completion of the project, while the Department of Conservation also contributed funding through the Arawai Kākāriki Programme in recognition of the centre's role in supporting mātauranga Māori and environmental restoration.

Beyond the physical building, the Cultural and Education Centre represents a long-term investment in people, place and culture. It will provide a focal point for reconnecting whānau with ancestral lands, increase their mahinga kai and cultural harvesting opportunities, strengthen their role as kaitiakitanga within the Waituna catchment, and support future generations to engage with the restoration of Waituna Lagoon and its surrounding wetlands. It will also provide a practical base for community planting days; education programmes and cultural activities linked to the wider Whakamana te Waituna vision.



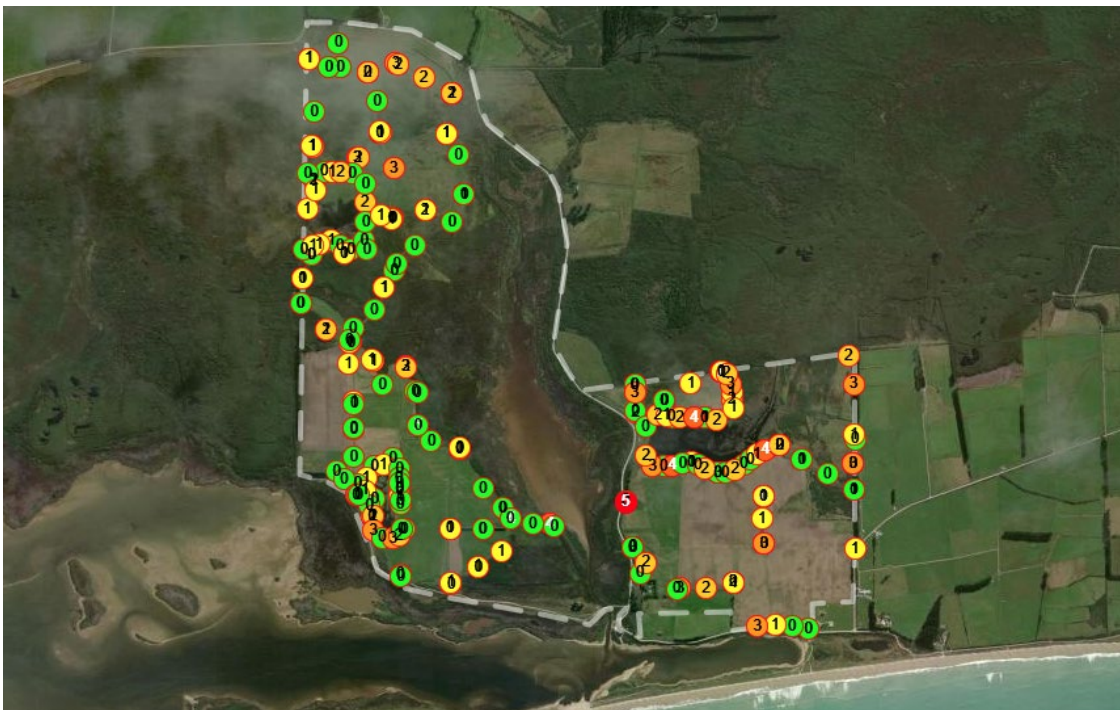
Pikiraurohi Pest Animal Control Programme

The Pikiraurohi Pest Animal Control Programme continued to play an important role in supporting biodiversity restoration and protecting taonga species within Te Pā Mahika Kai o Pikiraurohi during FY25/26. Contractor Karen Andrew continued to manage and monitor the trap network throughout the year, with results recorded through TrapNZ and reviewed regularly by the Trust and Te Wai Parera Trust. Despite challenging weather conditions during winter and spring, including flooding and periods where access to the site was restricted, the trapping programme remained operational and provided ongoing protection for the Mahinga Kai Pā.

The programme successfully maintained a comprehensive trapping network targeting a range of pest species including possums, rats, stoats, weasels, feral cats, mice and hedgehogs. Between July and September 2025 alone, 51 pest animals were removed from the site, demonstrating the continued presence of predator pressure and the importance of ongoing control efforts.

The Trust has continued to support the programme as a key component of the Rūnanga Reconnection workstream and is delighted that from July 2026 Te Wai Parera Trust will be taking on responsibility for the ongoing management of the trapping network. This is a great milestone as the programme remains an important foundation for future restoration outcomes at Pikiraurohi and the wider Waituna catchment.

The following map and table show the locations of Te Wai Parera Trust's traps at Pikiraurohi, and the number of pests trapped between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026. The colours represent the number of catches per trap (green = 0, yellow = 1, orange = 2, etc.)



Month	Bird	Cat	Hedgehog	Mouse	Possum	Rabbit	Rat	Stoat	Weasel	Subtotal
Jul-25	4	4	3	11	8	0	8	0	3	41
Sept-25	0	0	0	4	2	0	2	1	1	10
Nov-25	0	0	0	3	1	1	6	1	0	12
Dec-25	0	1	0	5	3	0	9	7	6	31
Jan-26	0	1	1	3	3	0	10	1	1	20
Feb-26	2	2	4	2	4	0	6	1	4	25
Mar-26	1	3	1	7	2	0	10	0	3	27
May-26	0	3	0	6	3	0	6	1	3	22
Jun-26	0	0	0	5	2	0	9	0	3	19
Subtotal	7	14	9	46	28	1	66	12	24	207



Land Transition

Waituna Nature Credits Pilot – Creating new Pathways to Fund Restoration

Building on the feasibility work completed in FY24/25, the Trust moved from exploring the concept of biodiversity and nature credits to actively developing the systems, partnerships and evidence required to establish a nature credit project.

At the end of FY25/26, work commenced to develop a foundation for the Trust's future focus on engagement and collaboration with potential partners via a Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) process. This will involve several wānanga's (meetings) with Awarua Rūnanga, Ngāi Tahu, Environment Southland, Department of Conservation and other interested landowners to ensure clear information about the project is provided and that parties have the opportunity to give or withhold their consent before activities begin.

The long-term goal of the pilot is to create a sustainable funding mechanism that supports restoration across Waituna. While traditional funding grants remain important, the scale of land-use transition and ecological restoration required to achieve the Trust's vision will require additional sources of investment. Nature credits provide an opportunity for organisations and individuals to invest directly in measurable biodiversity improvements, with those gains independently assessed and accredited against recognised standards.

During the year, the Trust participated in two nationally significant initiatives. The first was the Ministry for the Environment's Nature Credits Pilot, which brought together projects from around New Zealand to help inform the Government's approach to voluntary biodiversity and nature markets. The second was the Ekos Accelerator Programme, where the Waituna project was selected as one of twelve projects to receive specialist support in developing a biodiversity credit programme that meets international best-practice standards.

A major focus of the year was establishing the scientific foundations required to demonstrate biodiversity improvement over time. Following a competitive procurement process, ecological consultancy Nature Positive Ltd was engaged to develop a biodiversity monitoring framework and undertake baseline ecological assessments across the Whakamana te Waituna project areas. This approach created economies of scale and will position the Trust to accelerate restoration activities across multiple sites in the future.

The ecological work completed during the year established permanent monitoring plots and created a robust framework for measuring future improvements in habitat condition, native species diversity and ecosystem health. These baseline assessments will provide the evidence required for future credit issuance and ensuring the Trust can transparently demonstrate environmental outcomes to investors and funding partners.

Alongside this ecological work, the Trust developed its first Project Idea Note for assessment by Ekos. This document outlines the restoration vision, project boundaries, ecological objectives and proposed crediting approach for Waituna. It forms the first step in a multi-stage process leading toward registration under a recognised biodiversity credit standard. Over the course of the year, the Trust worked closely with Ekos specialists to refine project documentation, better understand market expectations, and develop preliminary financial models that could support large-scale restoration and future land transition.

The pilot also began exploring how nature credits might support activities beyond planting native trees. Early work considered how future credits could help finance wetland creation, peatland restoration, biodiversity enhancement and land transition within priority restoration areas of the catchment. Importantly, the project demonstrated how cultural aspirations, ecological outcomes and long-term financial sustainability could be integrated within a single restoration framework.

The Nature Credits Pilot has already generated significant interest from restoration practitioners, government agencies and potential investors. While considerable work remains before credits can be issued, FY25/26 marked the transition from concept development to implementation. By the end of the year, the Trust had established the ecological, technical and governance foundations needed to progress toward project registration and future credit issuance.



Webster Block Restoration – From Pastoral Land to Future Native Forest

FY25/26 marked a landmark year for the Webster Block Restoration Programme, with the transfer of the property into Whakamana te Waituna Trust ownership and the commencement of large-scale restoration planting. What began as a strategic land purchase under the original Whakamana te Waituna Freshwater Improvement Project moved into the delivery phase, transforming plans developed over several years into tangible restoration outcomes on the ground.

The Webster Block is one of three farm properties purchased as part of the original Waituna restoration programme and plays an important role in achieving the Trust's long-term vision of restoring biodiversity, improving freshwater outcomes, and creating a natural buffer around Waituna Lagoon/Waipārera. The site is also a cornerstone of the Trust's Nature Credits Pilot, demonstrating how ecological restoration and innovative financing mechanisms can work together to accelerate landscape-scale change.

A major milestone was achieved in January 2026 when ownership of the Webster Block was formally transferred from Environment Southland to the Trust. This transfer recognised the Trust's growing capability to manage restoration assets and enabled direct stewardship of the site, including responsibility for restoration planning, maintenance, ecological monitoring, and future land-use transition.

Throughout the year, considerable effort was invested in preparing the site for restoration. Boundary fencing was upgraded, weed control programmes targeted extensive gorse and broom infestations, ecological monitoring plots were established, and baseline biodiversity assessments were completed. These activities provided the foundation for measuring ecological improvements over time and ensured the site was ready for large-scale planting.

The highlight of the year was the Trust's first major restoration planting at the Webster Block. Approximately 8,500 native plants were established across 6.5 hectares, creating the first stage of what will ultimately become a much larger native forest and wetland ecosystem. The planting design was based on the Tīmata restoration method, using mānuka as a pioneer or nurse crop to establish native vegetation at lower cost while supporting long-term ecological succession. Approximately half of the planting comprised mānuka, with the remainder including eco-sourced species such as flax, Carex, cabbage trees and Coprosma sourced from the Waituna and surrounding ecological districts.

The restoration programme also provided an opportunity to trial new approaches to native forest establishment. The Trust invested in 2,000 Garto plant guards, a Southland-developed innovation designed to protect plants from wind, rabbits and other browsing animals while creating favourable growing conditions and reducing ongoing maintenance requirements. The Webster Block became one of the largest field trials of the technology

undertaken in the region, with plant performance set to be monitored over the coming years.

Alongside the planting programme, the Trust expanded ecological monitoring across the broader Waituna project sites. Working with Nature Positive Ltd, a biodiversity monitoring framework was developed and eleven permanent monitoring plots established. These assessments provide a baseline against which future improvements in habitat condition and biodiversity can be measured, supporting both restoration planning and the Trust's emerging Nature Credits Programme.

The Webster Block restoration is guided by a long-term vision extending well beyond the current generation. Over time, grazing areas will progressively be retired and replaced with native vegetation, creating an increasingly connected landscape that supports indigenous species, improves freshwater outcomes and strengthens the ecological resilience of the wider Waituna catchment. By 2030, substantial areas of the property are expected to have transitioned from pasture to native habitats.

The progress achieved during FY25/26 represents just the beginning of a restoration journey that will continue for decades to come.



Land Use Transition Strategy – Planning for the Next Phase of Restoration

The Trust's long-term vision is to repurpose approximately 10% of the Waituna catchment through a combination of restoration planting, wetland creation and land-use transition. Achieving this vision will require securing and restoring land in locations that provide the greatest benefit for water quality, biodiversity and cultural outcomes.

Work undertaken during the year built on the Land Transition Strategy developed by the Trust in 2024, which prioritises land based on its potential to deliver environmental outcomes. Priority areas include land suitable for large-scale wetland creation, land vulnerable to inundation around Waituna Lagoon, and areas where ecological corridors could connect existing native habitat and restored ecosystems.

Throughout the year the Trust continued to monitor opportunities within the lower catchment and investigate properties that may support the delivery of strategic restoration outcomes but recognised that bringing additional land into long-term restoration management would require investment beyond its existing financial resources. This highlighted the importance of developing a more structured and targeted approach to future land transitions and restoration opportunities.

The work also identified that future land transition will need to be closely integrated with the Trust's emerging Nature Credits Programme. By combining ecological restoration with innovative financing tools such as biodiversity credits, green lending and philanthropic investment, the Trust aims to create more sustainable funding pathways that reduce reliance on traditional grant funding alone.

While no additional land was brought into Trust ownership or long-term restoration management during FY25/26, important progress was made in positioning the Trust for future growth. The transfer of the Webster Block into Trust ownership demonstrated the Trust's ability to successfully manage restoration assets, while planning also began for the future transfer of Whakamana te Waituna project land currently owned by Environment Southland. Together, these initiatives represent important steps toward establishing a larger portfolio of restoration land across the Waituna catchment.

Maintenance Programme

A significant focus of the Land Transition workstream during FY25/26 was the establishment and implementation of a coordinated maintenance programme for Trust restoration sites. As the area of land being actively restored continues to grow, the Trust recognised the need for a strategic and long-term approach to weed control, site maintenance and restoration support to maximise the success of previous and future planting efforts.

Following a competitive procurement process, Southland Forest Services Ltd (trading as NZ Conservation Services) was appointed to provide maintenance and planting services across Whakamana te Waituna project sites. The new contract consolidated maintenance activities under a single provider, creating efficiencies, improving coordination and supporting stronger restoration outcomes across the catchment.

Key activities undertaken during the year included:

- Establishing a long-term maintenance programme covering Trust restoration sites, some Department of Conservation administered land areas and on-farm restoration areas.
- Undertaking extensive weed control at Lower Waituna Creek, targeting broom, gorse and other invasive species that were threatening previously established native plantings.
- Completing initial weed control work at the Webster Block to prepare planting areas and support future restoration activities. Significant effort was invested in controlling gorse infestations and preparing sites for the first major planting programme.
- Supporting site preparation for the Webster Block planting programme, including spot spraying and weed management around planting zones prior to the establishment of approximately 8,500 native plants.
- Completing an audit of historic Whakamana te Waituna and Living Water planting sites established since 2013. The survey found that most sites had excellent survival rates and native plant growth, with only minor maintenance required in selected locations to control gorse, broom and blackberry. The review also identified opportunities to strengthen ecological connections between restoration sites and native vegetation remnants.
- Developing a more proactive and coordinated maintenance approach, ensuring restoration investments are protected and managed effectively as the Trust's land portfolio and restoration footprint continue to expand.

The maintenance contract has become a critical component of the Trust's restoration strategy. By investing in ongoing weed control and site management, the Trust is helping ensure that native plantings achieve long-term success, biodiversity gains are protected, and restoration projects continue to deliver environmental benefits for the Waituna catchment. The programme also provides an important foundation for future restoration initiatives, including continued planting at the Webster Block and restoration work along Lower Waituna Creek.



Waterway Redesign

The Waterway Re-Design workstream focused on improving freshwater habitat, reducing streambank erosion, and developing long-term restoration solutions for Waituna Creek and its associated waterways. Throughout FY25/26, the Trust worked closely with Environment Southland, the Department of Conservation and local stakeholders to progress a number of initiatives aimed at restoring ecological function and improving waterway health.

Key activities undertaken during the year included:

- Completing detailed planning and the first year of planting for a riparian restoration programme along approximately two kilometres of Lower Waituna Creek. This included developing a staged planting approach focused on establishing *Carex virgata* in priority erosion-prone areas to improve streambank stability, habitat values and water quality.
- Undertaking site preparation and weed control within the Department of Conservation Marginal Strip and Southland District Council Esplanade Reserve to support future restoration planting and improve the success of previous planting efforts.
- Establishing a five-year management agreement with the Department of Conservation to enable the Trust to undertake ongoing restoration activities within the Lower Waituna Creek Marginal Strip, including weed control, pest management, ecological monitoring and native planting.
- Strengthening partnerships between the Trust, Environment Southland and local stakeholders to develop restoration solutions that balance flood management, erosion control and ecological outcomes. Collaborative investigations continued throughout the year to identify suitable approaches that could serve as demonstration projects for other waterways within the catchment.

While significant physical restoration works are planned for future years, FY25/26 was an important year for building the partnerships, consents pre-work, management agreements and restoration plans required to deliver long-term improvements to Waituna Creek and its associated waterways. These activities provide a strong foundation for future streambank stabilisation, habitat enhancement and ecological restoration projects throughout the lower catchment.

Improving Freshwater

The Improving Freshwater workstream focused on supporting projects that reduce sediment and nutrient losses, improve aquatic habitat, and enhance the long-term health of waterways flowing into Waituna Lagoon/Waipārera. During FY25/26, the Trust continued to investigate, support and monitor practical freshwater improvement initiatives both on-farm and across the wider catchment.

Key activities undertaken during the year included:

- Continuing the monitoring of the Jordan Creek Sediment Trap, a large-scale sediment reduction trial designed to intercept sediment before it reaches Waituna Creek and Waituna Lagoon. Monitoring results confirmed that the trap continued to capture significant volumes of sediment during high-flow events while requiring relatively little maintenance. Regular surveys provided valuable information about sediment movement within the catchment and the effectiveness of this intervention.
- Progressing the proposed Moffat Creek enhancement project to the point of submitting resource consent. The project aims to improve freshwater habitat and reduce erosion along approximately 2.5 kilometres of waterway.
- Maintaining the Trust's On-Farm Freshwater and Biodiversity Support Fund, which provides co-funding assistance for projects that improve water quality and biodiversity outcomes within the Waituna catchment. The Trust continued to promote the fund and engage with landowners regarding potential future projects.
- Supporting wider freshwater restoration and monitoring initiatives through collaboration with project partners, including ongoing reporting of Waituna Lagoon health indicators through quarterly health scorecards. These reports provided the community with regular updates on lagoon water quality and ecosystem health.
- Continuing to use information gathered through restoration projects, monitoring programmes and pilot initiatives to better understand the interactions between land use, freshwater quality and ecosystem health within the Waituna catchment.

FY25/26 saw the Trust continue to build the technical knowledge, partnerships and project pipeline necessary to deliver long-term freshwater improvements. These initiatives contribute directly to the Trust's vision of reducing contaminants entering Waituna Lagoon while improving habitat, biodiversity and ecosystem resilience throughout the catchment.

Local Community

The Local Community workstream focused on building awareness, sharing information, strengthening relationships and ensuring the community remained connected to the restoration journey taking place across the Waituna catchment.

Key activities undertaken during the year included:

- Producing and distributing quarterly partner updates that provided regular reporting on Trust activities, project milestones and progress against charitable objectives. These updates helped keep partners informed and strengthened collaboration across organisations involved in the Waituna programme.
- Continuing publication of the Waituna Lagoon Health Scorecard, providing accessible information on lagoon water quality, ecosystem health and environmental trends. The scorecards helped improve transparency and community understanding of the current state of Waituna Lagoon/Waipārera.
- Sharing information about Trust projects through a variety of channels, including community newsletters, partner communications, annual reporting and presentations. Trust activities were also highlighted through organisations such as Fonterra and local community publications.
- Presenting on the work of the Trust to partner organisations and stakeholders, including Environment Southland staff and other interest groups, helping to build understanding of the Trust's vision, restoration activities and emerging initiatives such as the Nature Credits Pilot.

Through these activities, the Trust continued to build community awareness, strengthen partnerships and demonstrate the value of a collaborative approach to restoring Waituna. Effective communication and engagement remain essential to achieving the Trust's long-term vision of ensuring the wellbeing of the people, the land, the waters, the ecosystems and the life-force of the Waituna catchment and lagoon for future generations.

Trust Operations

The Trust Operations workstream focused on strengthening the governance, operational systems and financial management of the Trust to support the growing scale and complexity of restoration activities being undertaken across the Waituna catchment. During FY25/26, significant progress was made in developing the Trust as a mature organisation capable of managing land assets, restoration programmes, funding partnerships and long-term strategic initiatives.

Key activities undertaken during the year included:

- Maintaining effective governance through quarterly Trust meetings, regular Project Steering Group meetings and ongoing reporting against the Trust's work programme, budget and strategic objectives.
- Supporting a leadership transition, including the retirement of founding Co-Chairs Nicol Horrell and Gail Thompson and the appointment of Jon Pemberton and Riki Nicholas as new Trust Co-Chairs. The Trust also continued to strengthen governance arrangements through updates to its Terms of Reference and operational procedures.
- Managing the transfer of ownership of the Webster Block from Environment Southland to the Trust, including legal, governance and financial processes required to complete the transfer and establish ongoing land management arrangements.
- Strengthening financial management systems and oversight, including management of Trust bank accounts, term deposits, contracts, funding agreements and annual budgeting processes. The Trust continued to maintain a strong financial position while balancing investment in restoration projects with long-term financial sustainability.
- Preparing and implementing the FY25/26 work programme and budget while also developing the FY26/27 work plan, ensuring resources were aligned with the Trust's strategic priorities and charitable objectives.
- Securing and managing funding from partner organisations and external sources, including support from the Ministry for the Environment, Te Wai Parera Trust and the Department of Conservation for key projects including the Nature Credits Pilot and Cultural Centre development.
- Advancing organisational policies and systems, including updates to financial delegations, banking mandates, health and safety systems, vehicle-use policies and contractor management procedures.

- Continuing to build organisational capability through the employment of a full-time Project Manager and the operation of an active Project Office responsible for project delivery, financial management, reporting, communications, stakeholder engagement and funding development. During the year, planning also commenced to transition the Project Manager role to a permanent position, reflecting the ongoing nature and maturity of the Trust's work programme.
- Supporting development of major strategic initiatives including the Nature Credits Pilot, Land Transition Strategy, Webster Block Restoration Programme and planning for the future transfer of the Crack's Block. These projects required significant administrative, governance and project management support throughout the year.
- Continuing to strengthen the Trust's risk management and health and safety systems, with regular reporting, hazard reviews and contractor oversight ensuring safe delivery of restoration activities across multiple project sites.

Through these activities, the Administration workstream provided the governance, leadership, financial management and operational support that enabled the Trust to continue delivering restoration outcomes across all charitable objectives. As the scale of the Trust's activities continues to grow, maintaining strong organisational systems and effective governance remains essential to achieving the long-term vision for Waituna.



Key Challenges in FY25/26

While FY25/26 was a year of significant achievement, the Trust also faced a number of challenges that reinforced the importance of long-term planning, collaboration and adaptability.

Waituna Lagoon Opening Consent

The ongoing Waituna Lagoon opening consent process continued to create uncertainty within the catchment. Differing views regarding lagoon management affected community confidence and, in some cases, reduced willingness to participate in new restoration initiatives. This was reflected in lower-than-expected uptake of the Trust's On-Farm Freshwater and Biodiversity Support Fund and delays in progressing some freshwater enhancement projects with landowners. Despite these challenges, the Trust remains committed to a partnership-based approach, and continued to provide regular lagoon health reporting, and worked to maintain positive relationships across the catchment.

Securing Funding for Future Restoration

The Trust's long-term vision of repurposing approximately 10% of the Waituna catchment will require significant investment beyond current funding sources. While a number of priority land transition and restoration opportunities have been identified, securing the resources needed to achieve these outcomes remains a significant challenge. This reinforced the importance of developing alternative funding pathways through initiatives such as the Waituna Nature Credits Pilot and other investment opportunities.



Looking Ahead to 2026/27

The Trust is well-positioned to continue its efforts to support restoration, cultural reconnection, and freshwater enhancement within the Waituna catchment. Key priorities for the next year include:

Rūnanga Reconnection

- Complete and officially open the Pikiraurahi Cultural and Education Centre.
- Support Te Wai Parera Trust with activation and use of the Cultural Centre for education, restoration and cultural activities.
- Ensure a smooth handover of the pest animal control programmes at Pikiraurahi Mahinga Kai Pā to Te Wai Parera Trust.

Land Transition

- Implement the next stages of the Webster Block Restoration Plan and longer-term planting programme through to 2030.
- Progress transfer of remaining Whakamana te Waituna project land held by Environment Southland to Trust ownership.
- Advance the Land Transition Strategy, including restoration planning and investment proposals for priority land.
- Continue pest, weed and maintenance programmes across Trust-owned restoration sites.
- Progress the Waituna Nature Credits Pilot from Project Idea Note stage to full project registration and credit issuance.

Waterway Redesign

- Develop a collaborative restoration programme for Lower Waituna Creek.
- Continue riparian planting projects along Waituna Creek.
- Strengthen partnerships with Environment Southland, DOC and local stakeholders to deliver waterway restoration projects.

Improving Freshwater

- Continue monitoring the Jordan Creek Sediment Trap and evaluate future maintenance requirements.
- Progress freshwater enhancement opportunities on private land where support and partnership opportunities exist.

- Promote uptake of the Trust's on-farm freshwater and biodiversity support programme.

Local Community

- Continue producing quarterly lagoon health scorecards and partner updates.
- Improve community engagement and communications through a targeted engagement plan.
- Share the outcomes and lessons from restoration projects, the Cultural Centre and nature credits work with the wider community.



Ngā Mihi – Acknowledgements

Thank you to the the individuals, organisations and landowners who contributed to our work during FY25/26. The progress outlined in this report reflects a shared commitment to restoring and protecting the environmental, cultural and community values of Waituna.

We thank our Trust partners Te Rūnaka o Awarua, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Environment Southland, Southland District Council, the Department of Conservation and Fonterra whose continued support, investment and participation provide the foundation for the Trust's work and long-term vision. We also acknowledge the contribution of our Trustees and Project Steering Group members for their governance and leadership and recognise former Co-Chairs Nicol Horrell and Gail Thompson for their longstanding service to the Trust.

The Trust acknowledges Te Wai Parera Trust for its ongoing partnership and commitment to cultural reconnection at Pikiraurahi Mahinga Kai Pā. The progress made on the Cultural and Education Centre reflects the dedication of Te Wai Parera Trustees and the many individuals who have contributed to bringing this important project to life.

We thank the contractors, consultants and technical specialists who supported project delivery across ecological monitoring, restoration, pest and weed control, engineering, planning, surveying and design with special mention to Nature Positive Ltd, whose work developing the Trust's biodiversity monitoring framework and baseline ecological assessments has established an important foundation for the Waituna Nature Credits Pilot and future restoration outcomes. We also acknowledge Ekos, the Ministry for the Environment and all those involved in supporting New Zealand's emerging nature credit initiatives.

The Trust is grateful to the many landowners and members of the Waituna community who continue to engage positively with restoration activities, ecological monitoring, freshwater improvement projects and community discussions about the future of the catchment.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the Whakamana te Waituna kaupapa. The achievements of FY25/26 build on the collective efforts of those working to restore and strengthen the mana of Waituna Lagoon/Waipārera and its surrounding landscapes.