



An introduction to Mahinga kai for Waimakariri farmers

This information sheet has been put together to explain the concept of mahinga kai and its relevance in today's farming environment.

Photo: Electric fishing in the Rakahuri / Ashley River

Why is mahinga kai important in Waimakariri today?

Te toto o te tangata, he kai; te oranga o te tangata, he whenua

Food supplies the blood of people; their welfare depends on the land

**DO YOU HAVE FRESH, CLEAN WATERWAYS?
FRESHWATER CRAYFISH IN YOUR DRAIN?
LIZARDS IN YOUR FLAX?
WHITEBAIT IN YOUR CREEK?**

There is a term for these treasures and the habitats that support them – *mahinga kai*.

To Māori, mahinga kai relates to the traditional value of food resources and their ecosystems, as well as the practices involved in producing, gathering and protecting them.

Waimakariri farmers and landowners are custodians of their land and the resources they contain. Māori also assume responsibility for protection of mahinga kai, as Ngāi Tahu tūpuna (ancestors) did before them.

There is something special about providing the best environment for these treasures, and watching them do well.

Waimakariri farmers' approach is to use farming practices that protect the mahinga kai values the farm already has – enhancing or even creating them.

Farming and recreational activities around waterways require good management practices so the native flora and fauna there can flourish.

WHAT EXACTLY IS MAHINGA KAI?

Ka hāhā te tuna ki te roto; ka hāhā te reo ki te kaika;
ka hāhā te takata ki the whenua

If there are no fish in the lake, there will be no language or culture resounding in the home and no people on the land. However, if there are fish in the lake, language and culture will thrive and the people will live proudly on the land
- Nā Charisma Rangipuna i tuhi.

Mahinga kai areas are likely to be special areas of your property that you are already actively taking care of for their environmental or biodiversity significance – but it could also be things you were not aware of, the little things.

Because it refers to numerous species rather than something specific, there is no single list of exactly what is mahinga kai for any given property. Mahinga kai includes things such as species, natural habitats, materials and practices used for harvesting food, and places where food or resources are, or were, gathered. This can include:

- All waterways, drains (with water), wetlands, and springs
- Native vegetation and riparian areas
- Areas with specific mahinga kai species and their habitats.

For example, īnanga (whitebait) are an important mahinga kai species. Today they are valued by most people in Waimakariri, not just Māori, and can live and spawn in all waterways, including farm drains. Much of their critical spawning habitat occurs along vegetated waterways, particularly near the coast. Their habitat is susceptible to disturbance, particularly from grazing animals and farm operations, which is why protection is essential. Some of the steps you can take include fencing and adjusting farming practices when spawning occurs in autumn.



Waikuku Stream



Regenerating Kanuka



Pātiki (flounder) are returning to the Rakahuri / Ashley Estuary as the water quality is improved by less damaging activities nearby

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS MAHINGA KAI PROTECTION?

Toitū te marae o Tāne; toitū te marae o Tangaroa; toitū te iwi

If the forests of Tāne are protected and the oceans of Tangaroa are protected, so too are the people.

Everyone living in or visiting the Waimakariri district has a part to play in protecting and enhancing mahinga kai, although as the current guardians of the land, there are clear responsibilities on landowners.

While the active protection of mahinga kai is a key foundation of the Treaty of Waitangi, it is also part of wider environmental stewardship (*kaitiakitanga*). Looking after mahinga kai sits alongside ecosystem health and biodiversity as an essential environmental objective in our district.

Farmers are now required to achieve a mahinga kai target when implementing their Farm Environment Plans. This means you need to identify and understand mahinga kai values and risks on your farm, and respond to these when carrying out good management practice.

The management targets will not necessarily limit the way you use your land, but they do require you to manage the risks of farming to mahinga kai.

WHAT SHOULD I BE DOING?

- Ensuring your Farm Environment Plan actions take mahinga kai values and risks to these into account. This will include actions such as:
 - Protecting mahinga kai species and habitats when waterways are managed or cleared
 - Sustaining mahinga kai through management of remnant native vegetation and wetlands
 - Avoiding over-saturation and nutrient loading that will enrich groundwater – this will emerge downstream in springs and waterways

The Industry Agreed Good Management Practices you are already working on will also contribute to restoring mahinga kai, through improving water quality and habitats.



Talk to us – call our Poū Matai Kō (Cultural Land Management Advisor) in the Waimakariri District
Makarini Rupene on **027 520 8903**.

Makarini can help you identify mahinga kai values and risks on your farm, and discuss your practices to manage them.

We can help

Call Environment Canterbury Customer Services on 0800 324 636
Visit our website at ecan.govt.nz