

REFRESHED

Vision and Strategy for the Lakes of the Rotorua district

2025-2050



Rotorua
Te Arawa Lakes
Programme

Prepared by

ROTORUA TE ARAWA LAKES STRATEGY GROUP

<https://www.rotorualakes.co.nz>

Our Vision



The lakes of the Rotorua district and their catchments are preserved and protected for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations, while recognising and providing for the traditional relationship of Te Arawa with their ancestral lakes.

E tiakina ana, e manaakitia ana hoki ngā roto o te rohe o Te Arawa hei painga mō tātau me ngā whakatipuranga e ara mai nei, ā, me te aro anō ki te hononga tuku iho o Te Arawa ki ū rātau roto

Mihimihi

Toitū te Wai, Toitū te Whenua,
Toitū te Tangata
Tihē Mauri Ora
Te Arawa wai Māori
Te Arawa wai Karekare
Te Arawa wai Marino
Te Arawa wai Wera
Te Arawa wai Ora
Te Arawa wai Ariki
Anei ngā taonga tuku iho
Ā Te Arawa ki te motu
Whano Whano
Houa mai te Wai Tapu
Haumi e! Hui e!
Taiki e

FROM 2013 STRATEGY



Kupu Ārahi | Foreword

[placeholder]

The Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes are a source of immense beauty, ecological richness, and cultural heritage. These lakes are woven into the history and identity of Te Arawa iwi and hapū, providing sustenance, spiritual connection and shaping the very essence of our communities. They are taonga – treasures that deserve our reverence, unwavering care and protection.

Over the past two decades, our journey to safeguard these lakes has been one of learning, collaboration, and resilience. From the first Strategy in 2000, through the 2013 update, to this refreshed 2024 version, we have seen the power of coming together as one: tāngata whenua, councils, landowners, scientists, and everyday people who love these lakes. We have faced challenges head-on, celebrated successes, and, most importantly, deepened our understanding of the interconnectedness between the environment, culture, and people.

This refreshed Lakes Strategy represents a new chapter in our collective care of the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes. It acknowledges our past achievements while responding to the present and future needs of our lakes.

By working together, we can create a future where our lakes flourish, where customary practices thrive, and where all who visit or live in this extraordinary place can enjoy and appreciate its unique beauty.

Let us weave the strands of our efforts into a strong, enduring whāriki (woven mat) that honours our past, addresses our present, and protects our future.

The path ahead may be complex, but with shared vision and commitment, we know that together, we can achieve a thriving future for the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes.

Arapeta Tahana
Pou Tākiwaiora | Independent Chair
Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes Strategy Group

Navigating this Strategy

At the heart of this Strategy lies a whāriki (woven mat) symbolising interconnectedness, collaboration and collective strength. It represents the interdependence of all elements vital to the long-term wellbeing of the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes.

Each strand in the mat supports and strengthens the whole, just each Strategy Group partner and initiative contributes to the shared vision for the lakes. Anchored by the Te Arawa Lakes Settlement Ac 2016, this framework ensures our cultural and environmental obligations are met with respect and dedication.

As we weave together traditional knowledge and modern science, cultural values and ecological principles, we strengthen our collective efforts and impact to keep the lakes a source of life and pride for generations to come.

PART A: TE PŪTAKE O TE WHĀRIKI OVERVIEW	1
1. About our Strategy	2
2. Reach of this Strategy	3
3. About the Lakes Strategy Group	4
PART B: TE WHAKAPAPA O TE WHĀRIKI OUR JOURNEY TO DATE	5
4. Where we have been	6
5. Where are we now	8
PART C: TE ARATAKI O TE WHĀRIKI STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT FOR THE LAKES	9
6. Our collective vision for the lakes	10
7. Our guiding principles	11
8. Our measures of success	12
PART D: NGĀ MUKA HERE PATHWAYS FORWARD	13
9. Our strategic priorities	14
10. Our enablers	16
11. Implementation and review	17
12. Monitoring and reporting	17

PART A:

Te Pūtake o te Whāriki | Overview



Rotorua
Te Arawa Lakes
Programme

"Te Pūtake o te Whāriki" translates to "The Root or Source of the Whāriki."

It signifies the foundational elements upon which this Strategy is built, much like the origins of a woven mat that set the structure and strength for everything that follows.

1 | About our Strategy

This Strategy reaffirms our agreed vision for the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes:

The lakes of the Rotorua district and their catchments are preserved and protected for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations, while recognising and providing for the traditional relationship of Te Arawa with their ancestral lakes.

Building on the solid foundations established by our 2000 and 2013 Strategies, this document aims to ensure effective and coordinated action to achieve that vision.

While our collective vision remains unchanged, this refreshed Strategy embodies the evolution of strategic planning and management which is values-driven, and outcomes based. It provides an updated framework to guide collective and adaptive action, reflecting the lessons learned over the past two decades while adapting to emerging challenges such as new biosecurity threats, continued biodiversity loss along with the potential impacts of a changing climate.

This refreshed Strategy has been shaped to ensure it is effective in progressing towards the vision, while honouring the values and voices of all who are connected to these special lakes.

As we weave the next chapter of the Lakes Strategy, we pay tribute to the incredible work and dedication of those who have come before us. The journey of protecting and enhancing the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes is an intergenerational commitment, one that we carry forward with the knowledge that our actions today will shape the future for generations to come.

ROTORUA TE ARAWA LAKES ('Lakes')

The Rotorua Te Arawa lakes catchment includes the rivers, streams, tributaries and land area that feed into 12 lake catchments.

ROTORUA TE ARAWA LAKES STRATEGY GROUP ('Strategy Group')

A permanent joint-committee and collaborative partnership, established by the Te Arawa Lakes Settlement Act 2006, comprising:

- Te Arawa Lakes Trust
- Bay of Plenty Regional Council
- Rotorua Lakes Council

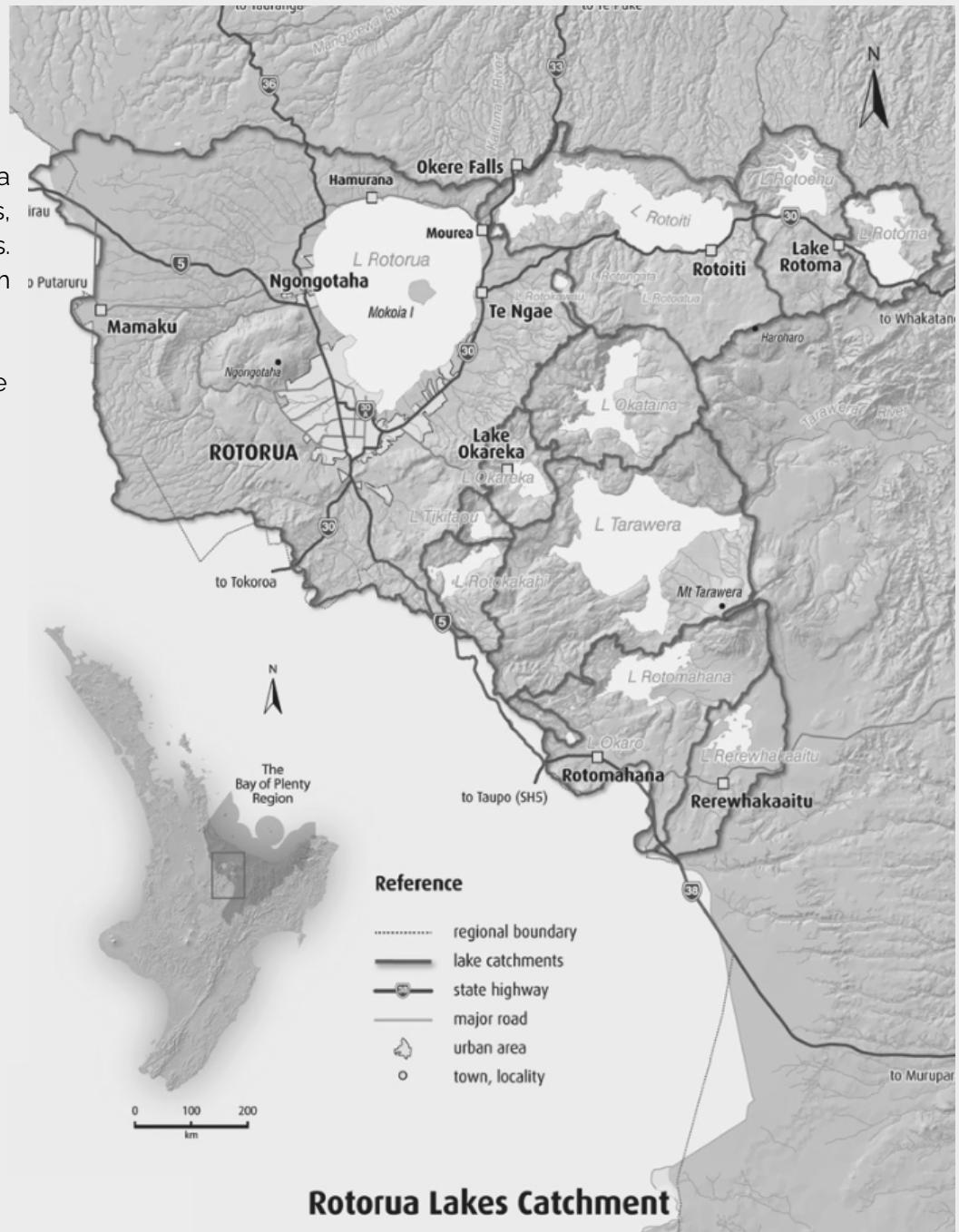
2 | Reach of this Strategy

The area, to which this Strategy applies, is the Rotorua Te Arawa lakes catchment. The area includes the rivers, streams, tributaries and land area that feed into 12 lake catchments. However, what happens in these catchments has downstream effects (Kaituna River, Maketū Estuary and Tarawera River).

This Strategy acknowledges the concept Mai i ngā maunga ki te moana - from the mountains to the sea.

The Rotorua Te Arawa lakes catchment includes:

- Lake Ōkāreka
- Lake Ōkaro (Ngakaro)
- Lake Ōkataina (Te Moana-i-kataina-a-Te-Rangikaroro)
- Lake Rerewhakaaitu
- Lake Rotoehu
- Lake Rotoiti (Te Roto-kite-a-Ihenga-i-Ariki-ai-a
- Kahumatamomoe
- Lake Rotokakahi⁴
- Lake Rotomā
- Lake Rotomahana
- Lake Rotorua (Te Rotorua-nui-a-Kahumatamomoe)
- Lake Tarawera
- Lake Tikitapu



⁴ Under legal guardianship of the Rotokakahi Control Board.

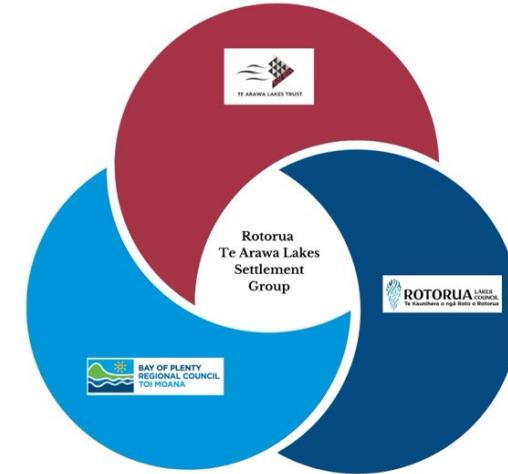
3| About the Lakes Strategy Group

Established by the Te Arawa Lakes Settlement Act 2006, the Lakes Strategy Group is a permanent joint-committee and collaborative partnership, comprising:

- Te Arawa Lakes Trust
- Bay of Plenty Regional Council
- Rotorua Lakes Council

The role of the Lakes Strategy Group is to

- Provide leadership to the organisations and the community in relation to implementation of the Vision and Strategy for the Lakes of the Rotorua District.
- Identify significant existing and emerging issues affecting the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes and respond appropriately.
- Approve, monitor, evaluate, and review agreements, policies and strategies and all other proposals to achieve integrated outcomes for the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes.
- Identify, monitor, and evaluate necessary actions by the partner organisations and other relevant organisations.
- Receive reports on activities being undertaken by the partner organisations and other relevant organisations.
- Participate in the preparation of statutory plans in relation to significant issues. Such plans include but are not limited to Iwi and hapū management plans, district and regional plans, reserve management plans and annual plans.
- Participate in applications for activities in relation to significant issues not addressed by existing policies of the partner organisations. Such activities include but are not limited to resource consents, designations, heritage orders, water conservation orders, restricting access to the lakes (during special events or in particular circumstances), and transferring and/or delegating of statutory authority.



PART B:

Te Whakapapa o te Whāriki | Our Journey to date



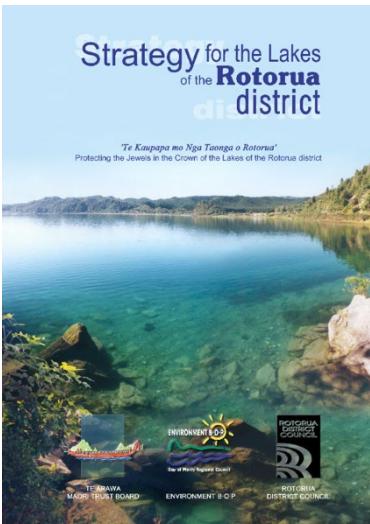
4 | Where we have been

Me huri whakamuri, Ka titiro whakamua
In order to plan for the future, we must look to the past

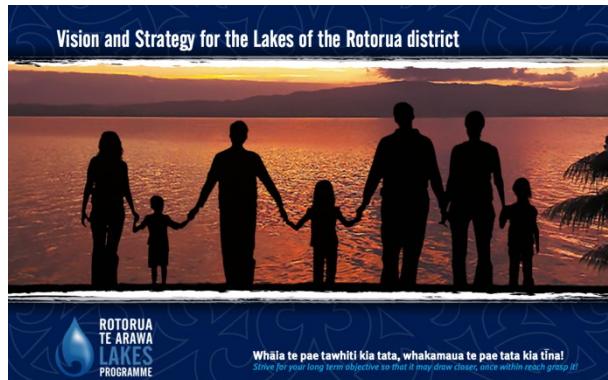
Our journey to date is deeply rooted in the collective commitment of all who have worked to protect these taonga (treasures).

THE BEGINNING OF COLLECTIVE EFFORTS

The Lakes Strategy Working Group was formed in 1998, leading to the development of the first Vision and Strategy for the Lakes of the Rotorua District in 2000. This marked a pivotal step in coordinated lakes management, emphasising a new form of collaborative management between Te Arawa, the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, and the Rotorua Lakes Council.



The Te Arawa Lakes Settlement Act 2006 formalised Te Arawa ownership of the lakebeds and formalised collaborative management through the Strategy Group. This milestone reinforced the commitment to restore and protect the lakes in alignment with Te Arawa tikanga and kaitiakitanga.



ACHIEVEMENTS ON OUR JOURNEY

Our collective efforts have led to significant accomplishments in lake protection and restoration, reflecting the dedication of partner organisations, hapū, community groups, and stakeholders:

Improving Water Quality: Major nutrient reduction projects, including wastewater reticulation, constructed wetlands, alum dosing, and land-use changes, have significantly improved water quality. Sewerage reticulation has been completed for nearly 3,000 lakeside properties in Ōkāreka, Rotomā, Rotoiti, Rotorua, and Tarawera catchments.

Cultural Revitalisation: Strengthened Te Arawa connections to the lakes through initiatives that revive traditional practices, restore place names, and integrate mātauranga Māori in restoration projects. The Te Arawa Lakes Trust has built a robust taiao (environmental) team actively working in catchment management, biosecurity, and other lake-based initiatives.

Community Engagement: Thousands of volunteers have participated in planting days, clean-up campaigns, and citizen science initiatives. Educational programs for schools and community groups have fostered a deeper understanding of the lakes' significance.

Science and Innovation: A world-class research programme has been established, including a lake monitoring buoy network, ongoing studies by the University of Waikato's Toihuarewa Waimāori (Chair of Lake and Freshwater Science), and partnerships with external funding bodies. Research includes long-term monitoring of species such as kōura (crayfish) and kākahi (freshwater mussels) to understand environmental stressors like catfish incursions and climate change. Uwhi mats have been a successful example of mātauranga-led innovation for lakeweed control.

Catchment Management Successes: In the Lake Rotorua catchment, over 4,500 hectares of land have been retired (20% of the farmed area), nitrogen loss has been reduced, and extensive wetland restoration and revegetation projects have been implemented. The pastoral areas of Lake Rotoehu area has decreased significantly, with native bush increasing from 31% to 38% of the catchment. The Tarawera Catchments Restoration Plan has been adopted and implemented, supporting long-term goals. Phosphorus locking on Lake Rotorua has successfully maintained the target TLI, ensuring recreational use while generational changes in land use are achieved.

5 | Where we are now

Despite our progress, the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes face continuing and emerging challenges that demand our focused attention and strategic action:

1. **Nutrient Runoff and Water Quality:** Land use practices and urban development continue to contribute to nutrient inflows, impacting the ecological balance of our lakes. The need for effective, catchment-wide nutrient management remains a pressing priority.
2. **Biodiversity Loss:** Invasive species, habitat degradation, and climate change threaten the biodiversity of lake ecosystems. Restoring habitat and protecting native flora and fauna require coordinated biosecurity measures and ongoing monitoring.
3. **Climate Change:** The impacts of climate change, including changing rainfall patterns and rising temperatures, pose risks to water quality, ecosystem health, and the cultural and recreational use of the lakes. Adapting to these changes will require flexible, forward-thinking management.
4. **Balancing Economic and Environmental Needs:** The lakes are central to the economy of Rotorua, attracting tourism and supporting local livelihoods. Balancing economic activity with the need for sustainable lake use remains a complex challenge, requiring innovative, community-driven solutions.
5. **Funding Uncertainty:** Sustained efforts to protect and restore the lakes depend on reliable funding. However, uncertainty surrounding the continued availability of central government funding for lake restoration initiatives poses a risk to the long-term success of these programmes.



PART C:

Te Arataki o te Whāriki | Our blueprint for the lakes



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Te Arawa Lakes
Programme

6 | Our collective vision for the future

Our collective vision for the future remains unchanged from the original 2000 Strategy. It is our enduring statement of purpose, reflecting our intergenerational commitment for the lakes.

The lakes of the Rotorua district and their catchments are preserved and protected for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations, while recognising and providing for the traditional relationship of Te Arawa with their ancestral lakes.

Matakite:

E tiakina ana, e manaakitia ana hoki ngā roto o te rohe o Te Arawa hei painga mō tātau me ngā whakatipuranga e ara mai nei, ā, me te aro anō ki te hononga tuku iho o Te Arawa ki ū rātau roto.

This vision continues to guide our decisions as the Strategy Group, ensuring a focused and coordinated approach to action that:

- achieves long-term ecological health and wellbeing for the lakes;
- upholds and strengthens the connection and customary practices of Te Arawa hapū and iwi in relation to the lakes;
- creates meaningful opportunities for community use, enjoyment, and involvement with, the lakes.

To achieve this vision, the Strategy Group will provide unified leadership and drive collaborative action to enhance the health and mauri of the lakes. We will champion sustainable practices that balance ecological, cultural, and social well-being; integrate mātauranga Māori and scientific knowledge; uphold the cultural and spiritual significance of the lakes; and inspire greater community involvement in the long-term care of these special lakes.

7 | Our guiding principles

The following principles guide our approach to ensuring our actions are meaningful, effective, and respectful of both the natural environment and the people who call it home. These principles are adapted and refined from previous strategies to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

To achieve our vision, we will be:

1. Outcomes-Focused:

We act with intention and clarity, ensuring that every initiative aligns with our long-term vision for the lakes.

2. Intergenerational:

We make decisions that benefit future generations, taking a long-term perspective that ensures the lakes' ecological and cultural wellbeing.

3. Adaptive and Knowledge-based:

We incorporate the best available knowledge - scientific data and insights as well as mātauranga Māori (including intergenerational knowledge) - and remain flexible to adapt to new information and changing conditions.

4. Grounded in Respect and Humility:

We approach our work with reverence for the lakes and their ecosystems, acknowledging the wisdom of past generations and learning continuously to improve our stewardship.

5. Collaborative:

We strengthen relationships across iwi, hapū, communities, landowners, and other stakeholders to foster collective impact and sustainable outcomes.

8 | Our measures of success

Te mā o te wai e rite ana ngā tapuwae a te kōura
The footsteps of the koura can be seen because the water is so clean

By 2050, we envisage that the successful implementation of this refreshed Lakes Strategy will have transformed many of our lakes into vibrant and flourishing environments, deeply reflective of ecological, cultural, and community well-being. This will be seen and felt in many ways:

ECOLOGICAL WELLBEING

The lakes will be clear, weed-and-rubbish-free and healthy ecosystems supporting a rich diversity of wildlife. Native plants will flourish along the shores, and kōura and other kai species will thrive. Our communities are safe from flooding. More people will be swimming or paddling in the lakes. The sound of native birds calling across the water will harmonise with the splashes and laughter of children, a testament to successful enhancement of ecological wellbeing and mauri.

CULTURAL LEGACY

Te Arawa hapū and Iwi will feel a profound sense of cultural pride and reconnection. Taonga kai species are abundant and can be safely harvested. Papakāinga will dot the landscape and the spiritual essence of the lakes will be honoured through visible expressions of cultural practices, artwork or signage. Te Arawa hapū and iwi will be recognised as hunga tiaki and cultural values will be evident in the way people interact with and care for the lakes.

COMMUNITY CONNECTOR

The lakes will continue to be hubs for communities, where primary production; ecotourism and sustainable recreational activities thrive alongside a deep respect for the environment. People of all ages will feel safe and secure, enjoying the lakes in harmony with nature. The lakes will be celebrated not just as natural resources, but beloved treasures. Our communities will feel connected and empowered to take on a more active role in the care of the lakes.

PART D:

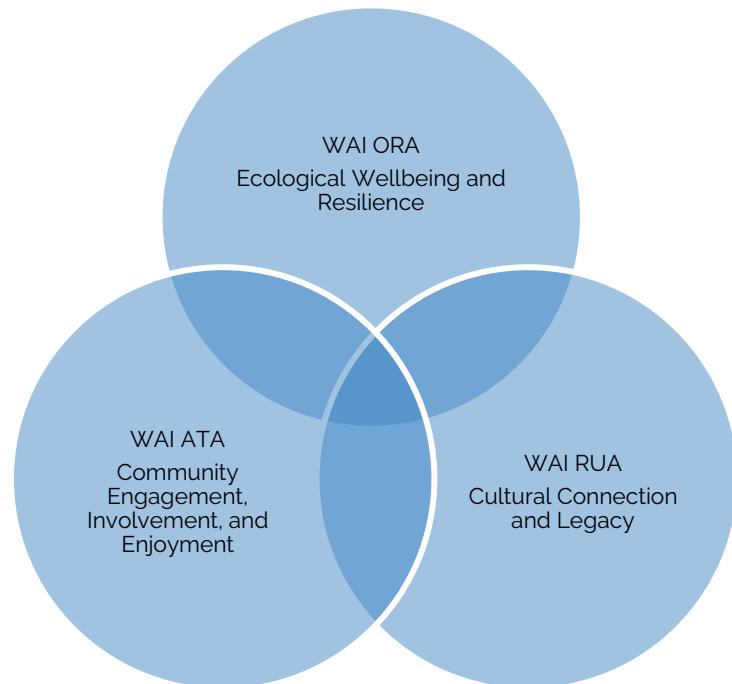
Ngā Muka Here | Our pathway forward



"Ngā Muka Here" refers to the binding strands or pathways that connect everything together. It emphasises how individual threads are brought together and woven tightly to form a unified, resilient whāriki.

9 | Our strategic priorities

Our vision is embodied within three interconnected strategic priorities or areas for focused action.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: WAI ORA | ECOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE

WAI ORA reflects efforts to improve the health and resilience of the lakes and their catchments. It focuses on improving lake water quality, restoring habitats and ecosystems, addressing

biosecurity threats and safeguarding biodiversity to ensure the lakes remain sources of life and sustenance for future generations.

Outcome 1: The lakes and their ecosystems are thriving, resilient, and safeguarded for future generations.

Priority actions include:

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: WAI RUA | CULTURAL CONNECTION AND LEGACY

WAI RUA acknowledges the lakes as spiritual and cultural touchstones for Te Arawa hapū and iwi. This priority includes revitalisation of cultural practices and preservation of intergenerational knowledge systems along with the active involvement of Te Arawa in research, monitoring and restoration activities around the lakes.

Outcome 2: The enduring relationship and cultural practices of Te Arawa hapū and iwi with their lakes are honoured, revitalised, and actively upheld.

Priority actions include:

- Embed Te Arawa values in research, monitoring and restoration initiatives for the lakes.
- Iwi/hapū-led projects involving the lakes.

- Nutrient management and water quality improvement initiatives.
- Restore wetlands and enhance riparian zones.
- Biosecurity surveillance and monitoring while carrying out pest control on land and in water.
- Develop and apply innovative solutions that combine mātauranga Māori and scientific methods.
- Incorporate climate change in research and monitoring to ensure adaptive management.
- Facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer to empower younger generations.
- Enhance access to culturally significant locations.
- Structures, elements or events celebrating cultural identity (mahi toi, place names, storytelling).

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: WAI ATA | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, INVOLVEMENT, AND ENJOYMENT

WAI ATA relates to the active participation and collective expression of communities in caring for the lakes. The lakes serve as spaces of learning, connection, and shared enjoyment for both communities and visitors alike. By fostering opportunities for education, collaboration, and meaningful

interaction, the lakes' significance is not only preserved but celebrated. This engagement builds a sense of ownership and responsibility, inspiring communities to take the lead in collective care and long-term stewardship of these treasured taonga.

Outcome 3: The Rotorua Te Arawa lakes are celebrated and accessible, providing meaningful opportunities for community engagement, education, and sustainable enjoyment.

Priority actions to achieve the above include:

- Educational resources, events and workshops.
- Lakeside events and initiatives.
- Community-driven lake care initiatives, such as clean-up days, citizen science projects, and planting events.
- Partnerships with local groups, businesses, and tourism operators.
- Cultural trails and interpretive signage.
- Accessible recreational areas.

10 | Our enablers

To ensure that the actions in this Strategy are possible and effectively carried out, several enablers are critical. These enablers provide the foundational support needed for achieving the shared vision of healthy, resilient lakes while honouring cultural, ecological, and social outcomes.

These include the following:

1. **Strong leadership and coordination** – ensuring efficient decision-making and coordination across partners.
2. **Strong backbone** – ensure there is a core group that will drive delivery and ensure connection between the Strategy Group and community. This requires dedicated resourcing to ensure effective implementation.
3. **Outcomes monitoring and reporting** – to know that the resulting actions are making a tangible difference. It also enables adaptive management and transparent reporting.
4. **Funding and Resources** – Having diversified funding sources reduces reliance on a single funder and helps to ensure the financial sustainability of lake restoration projects.
5. **Knowledge Sharing and Connection** – find ways to share knowledge and learnings and fostering collaboration among experts, iwi, hapū, and broader community.
6. **Open and continuous communication** – so people know what is happening and how to get involved. An informed community is an engaged and involved community.

11 | Implementation and review

The Strategy Group will be responsible for owning and delivering this Strategy.

An implementation plan will be prepared every five years to identify outline a clear plan of action, in terms of how the strategy will be delivered, by whom and when, ensuring accountability and progress.

The following criteria was used to help filter the 'wish list' of ideas into a suite of realistic actions and projects:

- Aligns with the purpose of the Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes Strategy Group.
- Aligns with the Vision and one or more outcomes of the Refreshed Lakes Strategy.
- Enables collaborative action and collective impact.
- Progresses / complements existing projects.
- Involves innovative approaches.
- Involves opportunities for Iwi / hapū / community-led projects and/or environmental education.

This 25-year Strategy is intended to be reviewed in 2049. However, interim updates may occur every 10 years to ensure the content remains relevant and up to date.

12 | Monitoring and reporting

To be effective, this Strategy plan relies on active implementation of projects and providing meaningful updates on progress to Strategy Group members and wider community.

Outcomes-based reporting will be used to describe not only what activities were carried out but also what difference it made in terms of the vision and outcomes within this Strategy.

An annual report will be produced which will be focused on three key questions:

**How much did we do? How well did we do it?
Are we better off?**

The report will also outline:

- Any barriers to implementation of tasks (e.g. resourcing, funding).
- What resourcing (funding, people) has been secured to implement projects.
- Priority action for the coming 12 months.

This report will be made publicly available on the Rotorua Te Arawa lakes website (www.rotorualakes.co.nz).