

Meet the Ruamāhanga Whaitua committee

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee combined the knowledge and experience of the catchment community: farmers, iwi, householders, scientists, recreationalists, business owners, and environmentalists.

The Committee included representatives from the community, each of the territorial authorities in the Wairarapa, local iwi (Rangitāne o Wairarapa and Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa), and the Greater Wellington Regional Council. Peter Gawith and Esther Dijkstra were elected Chair and Deputy Chair in 2014.

Meet the Committee:

- Peter Gawith (CHAIR)
- Esther Dijkstra (DEPUTY CHAIR)
- Aidan Bichan
- Mike Ashby
- Mike Birch
- Colin Olds
- Rebecca Fox
- Russell Kawana
- David Holmes
- Chris Laidlaw
- Rawiri Smith
- Philip Palmer
- Vanessa Tipoki
- Andy Duncan



Peter Gawith (CHAIR) is the third generation to farm his property in Longbush and has been there with his family since 1972. Waikoukou has been the family farm for over one hundred years.

He has a keen interest in farming the hill country using trees to hold and stabilise the soils which are prone to erosion. His farming interests include:

- Three terms on Beef and Lamb Focus Farm Committees.
- A farmer leader on two Sustainable Farming Fund projects, researching the benefits of feeding poplar and willow cuttings to sheep and cattle during times of drought.

He has also served three terms as chairman of the Farming Reference Group (FRG), an advisory committee to Greater Wellington Regional Council. As the

Chairman of the FRG he has been an appointed member to the Environment Wellbeing Committee of Greater Wellington Regional Council.



Esther Dijkstra (DEPUTY CHAIR) lives in Carterton with her husband and two children. Volunteering on various restoration projects in the Ruamāhanga Catchment has been a big part of her family life. She is keen to ensure land and water management is sustainable in the broadest way – economically, environmentally, socially and culturally. She has a PhD and Masters in Physical Geography and a good understanding of the opportunities and limitations science provides. She is a Director and Consultant for EcoAgriLogic, a service provider for sustainable and ecological land-use that follows a holistic approach to integrate research, development, consultancy and education. She has managed national projects in the agricultural sector funded by the Sustainable Farming Fund and DairyNZ. She believes that natural and physical resources should be protected for future generations' needs, guaranteeing the continued development of thriving and resilient communities in the Ruamāhanga Whaitua.

She's connected to the wider Wairarapa community as a Wairarapa Enviroschools facilitator, the Mangaterere Restoration Society Project Coordinator and as a trustee on the Trinity Schools Trust Board.



Aidan Bichan has lived and farmed in the catchment for 15 years but has worked in it for 31 years and played in it for 45 years. It is important to him that future generations can continue to do these things.

His career involves working with dairy farmers in the catchment and he has seen land intensification, irrigation expansion, increasing fertiliser

application, farm amalgamation and conversions to dairying. These activities have increased the reliance on water.

He is a farming representative on the Wairarapa Moana Advisory Group, a member of the Farming Reference Group, and a Federated Farmers member. He was also a member of the Mangatarere Water Wheel Forum, a committee member of the NZ Deer Stalkers Association (Wairarapa branch) and a life member of QEII National Trust.



Mike Ashby is married to Maureen, and has four adult children and four grandchildren.

He is a sheep and bull beef farmer in the Ponatahi district, farming 1,111 ha in partnership with his brother Ric, which they have been doing for 42 years. He's a farm forester with over 60ha in production forests, QEII blocks, fenced off bush blocks and riparian planting.

He was runner up in the Wairarapa Farming Business of the Year and the Ballance Farm Environment awards 2010. He is a former Chairman of Wairarapa monitor farm programme and focus farm for the Wairarapa monitor farm programme.

Currently he's a Councillor of the Carterton District Council and his special concerns are Carterton waste water, roads and audit, and representing the Council on Rural Fire, the Waiohine Advisory Committee and Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee. He has a Bachelor of Commerce and Administration.



Mike Birch grew up in the Ruamāhanga Whaitua on a hill country sheep-and-beef farm and returned to live on the family farm in 2008.

He has 15 years of experience in adventure tourism. He is currently a web designer and developer as well as a keen whitewater kayaker and avid fly fisherman. He enjoys tramping in the Tararua ranges. He is a past president of Whitewater NZ and has a degree in Agricultural Engineering.



Colin Olds is a South Wairarapa District Council Councillor, Featherston Ward.

Prior to becoming a Councillor, he owned businesses in Featherston. Colin is also a Featherston Lion, an honorary Fisheries Officer, and a coastal ranger. As well he's a supporter of economic development and infrastructure in South Wairarapa, and an advocate for stronger community and preservation of Wairarapa Moana.



Rebecca Fox settled in Wairarapa 10 years ago and lives in Greytown. She is a water industry training consultant and has extensive experience as a Health Protection Officer across New Zealand (in Wairarapa since 2004). She is also a member of Water New Zealand, Irrigation NZ, the Water Industry Operators Group and Federated Famers.

She believes there are some significant issues in the Ruamāhanga catchment with degraded waterways. There is also a perception that consents are “water rights” and therefore it is there for the taking. While water may be a renewable resource, it won't be unless we value it, and use fair and equitable ways of managing and/or developing the resource.

She chooses to live in this area and has a real interest in paying it forward to the next generation. While she has an opinion, and technical skill in this area, the most important matter to her is the wish to contribute and facilitate an outcome that meets the wider community needs.



Russell Kawana (Rangitāne o Wairarapa) works at Rangitāne ō Wairarapa in the Environmental Services Department. He sits on the Wairarapa Moana Co-ordinating Committee and is a trustee of Te Ohu Tiaki O Rangitāne Te Ika a Maui. He has been a full committee member since October 2015 when Siobhan Garlick resigned.



David Holmes has lived at Pakaraka for 45 years. His property runs from the Ruamāhanga River, onto rolling country then to the hill country running sheep and cattle. A lot of time and effort has been spent planting poplar poles in the hill country for erosion control and also controlling bank erosion on the banks of the river. This has been very rewarding.

He has been a member of the Te Ore Ore/ Wardells bridge section since the river groups were formed and has chaired that Committee since its formation. Prior to that he was on the original management committee.

The Ruamāhanga Whaitua committee is a first for this region. He believes the committee should be well balanced with members from all walks of life and age. He's proud to be a part of a team that through both tough decisions and good open governance can be a part of looking after the vein of the valley the Ruamāhanga River.



Chris Laidlaw divides his time between serving as the Wellington Regional Council Chair, chairing resource hearings and public meetings on issues of public concern, writing columns and books, and serving in a governance capacity on several charitable organisations. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972, serving in Suva and Paris before joining the International Energy Agency at the OECD in 1977. He became Commonwealth Secretary – General Shridath Ramphal’s special assistant in London, before returning to New Zealand to work as a Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister. Then he became New Zealand's first ambassador on the African continent in 1986, returning to New Zealand in 1989 to become Race Relations Conciliator. After a year as MP for Wellington Central, he became CEO of WWF-NZ. He was elected to the Wellington Regional Council in 1998 and began a career as a radio host with National Radio’s Sunday morning programme in 2001. He's an accredited hearings commissioner chairman under the Resource Management Act. He's also the author of three bestselling books: *Mud in your eye* (1973); *Rights of passage* (1999); *Somebody stole my game* (2010).



Rawiri Smith's ancestor Kupe is credited by Wairarapa sources with discovering Aotearoa. His ancestors arrived on the waka Takitimu. This waka brought many tohunga (experts) to Aotearoa, including Rongokako. His pre-European ancestors included tohunga trained in the whare wananga. His ancestors who lived during European settlement, including Te Tiriti o Waitangi era, recorded whare wananga dealings, of which genealogy was an important part. He's descended from Whatahoro Jury, an ancestor six generations back who left him and Wairarapa a huge inheritance. He started his formal education at Martinborough Primary School. His informal education was with his whanau including Aunty Alberta Wirihana (nee Riwai). He attended Church College of New Zealand from 1975 to 1980.

He served in the Manila Philippines Mission from 1981 to 1983. He attended Canterbury University and Christchurch College of Education from 1984 to 1989. He taught English at Cashmere High School for 13 years. Rawiri represents Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa on the Ruamāhanga Whaitua Committee.



Philip Palmer is a fifth generation dairy farmer (with some sheep & beef) in Kopuaranga. For him, the big issue is the quality of water in the sustainable farming practices which protect our environment are of utmost importance to his family.

The Kopuaranga River, which flows through their property, is particularly important. It provides water for their stock and irrigation, and his family also values the recreational attributes it provides. He believes our community, both urban and rural, must set objectives to deliver environmental, cultural, economic and social values to deliver sustainability for future generations.

Currently he's Deputy Chair of the Fonterra Shareholders Council, a member of the Kopuaranga River Scheme Committee and a member of the community consultation group for the Masterton Sewage Scheme.



Vanessa Tipoki farms at the bottom of the Ruamāhanga catchment. Her community is on the doorstep of the coastal settlements of Lake Ferry and Whangaimoana – they are also 10 minutes from Cape Palliser – so experience first-hand the consequences of many years of land and management practices along their river.

She has an LLB from Victoria University, and has worked as a lawyer in the litigation department at Buddle Findlay in Wellington and also in property law at Logan Gold Walsh in Masterton. More recently, she was employed as

a Resource Management Planner at South Wairarapa District Council, then as Group Manager Planning and Environment for a six-month stint.

As well as caring for her young son Vincent and being involved with the farm, she works part-time from home for Geange Consulting and remains active within the South Wairarapa Biodiversity Group (which she helped establish in 2011).



Andy Duncan has lived in the Wairarapa, in Te Whiti, for twenty years. He is a father of two and a Chartered Professional.

A keen sportsman who enjoys all aspects of outdoor life, he is committed to facilitating change to keep the environment safe for future generations. He has a Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) and a Master of Engineering with twenty years of experience in environmental and energy engineering.

He runs a small engineering consultancy business and has also lectured at Massey University in climate change and renewable energy systems.