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### **Te Arawa hopes new freshwater proposals will increase Māori involvement**

Te Arawa Lakes Trust is welcoming moves to strengthen and reflect Māori values in freshwater management, including taking a more holistic approach to the mana and mauri of water.

The Government today released its Action Plan for Healthy Waterways discussion document and is seeking submissions on the proposal over the coming weeks.

TALT Chairman, Taa Toby Curtis says the Trust is yet to fully consider the finer details of the Action Plan, but hopes it will strengthen the Trust's efforts to protect waterways and improve water quality.

Taa Toby says it is pleasing to see the Action Plan has been developed with a view to upholding Te Mana o te Wai, which involves taking a more holistic approach to the mana and mauri of waters.

"The Trust supports strengthening the priority of Te Arawa values. We have done significant work to determine Te Arawa Te Tuapapa values framework and to identify what determines healthy waterways for Te Arawa.

"We've also looked at ways to measure the health of our lakes from a cultural perspective, giving local hapū a meaningful way to measure the state of their water considering cultural factors, such as whether people can swim in the lakes or if they can collect kai from them.

"We hope these new proposals will allow us greater involvement in determining the parameters of Te Mana o te Wai as decision makers, not just stakeholders."

Taa Toby says the Plan's proposal to elevate the status of mahinga kai (gathering of food) to a compulsory value would be an important move for the protection of Te Arawa customary fisheries.

Te Arawa Lakes Trust is responsible for the sustainable management of 14 lakes within the wider Rotorua region, including Lake Rotorua and Lake Rotoiti.

The lakebeds were returned to Te Arawa under the 2006 Te Arawa Lakes Settlement Act, with the Trust established in 2007 to manage its assets.

Today, it undertakes a range of its own projects to help protect and restore the lakes, while it also works in partnership with other agencies to achieve better water quality outcomes.

Trust chief executive, Karen Vercoe says the Trust will consider the discussion document and develop a submission in the coming weeks.

"The proposal includes plans to support the protection of wetlands for water quality and we support efforts to protect these taonga.

"Wetlands have many important roles for Te Arawa. They filter nutrients from our lakes, can be active carbon sinks if they are undisturbed, and they are places where our kuta (native plants) thrive.

“Wetlands and swamps also play an important role in protecting other waterways from the impact of heavy rainfall, while others are actually urupa, which cannot be disturbed,” says Ms Vercoe says.

“We are already working with Bay of Plenty Regional Council and landowners in the Rotorua catchment to protect these precious areas.”

Ms Vercoe says the Government’s proposal to support eco-system health and better protect threatened indigenous species also supports the Trust’s existing work in this space – including kaupapa focusing on restoring koura numbers and the successful Catfish Volunteer programme.

“In particular, the Action Plan highlights working with communities in freshwater catchments to best understand how to leverage and accelerate local actions.

“We have fostered this community-led approach for some time and it is already showing huge results around our Rotorua lakes. We would embrace any Government initiatives to help accelerate this work.”

Ms Vercoe says TALT will continue to work closely with its Strategy Group partners in order to ensure a collaborative effort towards achieving the country’s freshwater goals.

“Ultimately we all want the same thing – to restore our waters to a pristine condition that can be enjoyed for many generations to come.”

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