

Evaluation of the Extension Services Programme

WaiP2K Catchment Community Groups Highlights



About this document

A comprehensive final report for the Extension Services programme is provided separately, including overall evaluation insights, successes, challenges and lessons learnt, along with more detail about the evaluation approach.¹

In comparison, this document provides a **snapshot of evaluation insights for the Wairarapa Pūkaha to Kawakawa Alliance (WaiP2K) Catchment Community Groups project**, one of 14 projects across New Zealand within the Extension Services programme that Scarlatti worked with in the last three years.

The evaluation work focuses only on the Extension Services-funded activities delivered by this project in the last two years.

This document is presented in five short parts:

1. **Evaluation overview** (refer to page 3): Briefly explains the evaluation purpose and framework.
2. **Project overview** (refer to page 4): Short overview of the project objectives and characteristics.
3. **Top impacts of the project** (refer to page 5): The most significant project successes. The ‘story’ that has emerged from this project.
4. **Highlights from the evaluation data and findings** (refer to page 7): How the project has influenced the evaluation outcomes, based on the data and information collected.
5. **Notable project characteristics** (refer to page 13). A slightly deeper dive into other factors that contributed to the project’s success and / or helped them overcome challenges.

Acknowledgements

The Scarlatti evaluation team would like to acknowledge the significant contributions to this project evaluation by the Catchment Community Groups project team, their Steering Group, WaiP2K, and the local coordinators and all their catchment group participants.

¹ Refer ‘Evaluation of the Extension Services programme: Final report, June 2023’.

Evaluation overview

The Extension Services programme is one of the workstreams within the Productive and Sustainable Land Use (PSLU) package funded by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). The programme funds farmer-led projects that aim to achieve environmental, economic and wellbeing outcomes for those involved. In keeping with this farmer-led approach, each project is tackling this goal differently.

MPI contracted Scarlatti to conduct the monitoring and evaluation of the programme. A national-level framework (a logic model) was developed to underpin this work. This provided a structure for data collection, and enabled the national-level outcomes to be assessed. Figure 1 presents an overview of the key outcome areas that are captured within the evaluation framework.

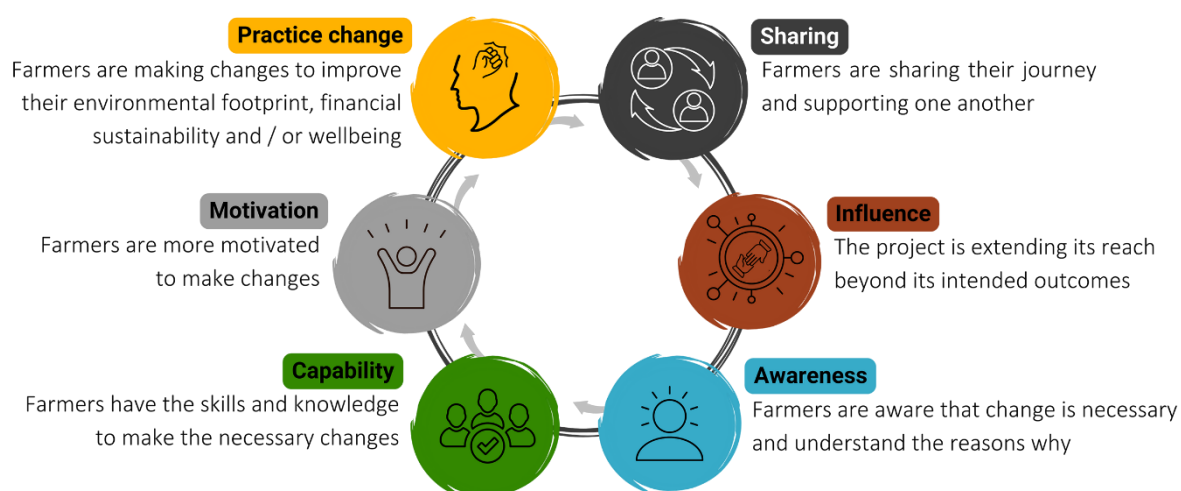


Figure 1: Overview of the Extension Services evaluation framework

The evaluation methodology was designed to accommodate – and celebrate – the differences between the projects. As such, each project used a different combination of data collection tools from the ‘Extension Services evaluation toolkit’. The methods that the WaiP2K Catchment Community Groups project used are outlined on page 7.

Project overview

Objectives

The Wairarapa Pūkaha to Kawakawa Alliance (WaiP2K) is a collaborative network of Wairarapa organisations and communities, working together to support, sustain and grow community-led environmental restoration and nature conservation. WaiP2K has the following vision for the Wairarapa:

Ko Wairarapa Tatou, Wai Ora, Tangata Ora, Whenua Ora, Mauri Ora

Thriving biodiversity and connected communities, where land, water and people flourish

WaiP2K identified that high functioning farmer-led Catchment Community Groups (CCG) – that can plan and take action at a farm, catchment and Wairarapa scale – were key to achieving this vision.

Extension Services funding provided the opportunity **to develop and implement a sustainable region-wide plan for CCG establishment, development and ongoing support**. This involved establishing a Steering Group, regional and local coordinator roles, and increasing the number of CCG.

The intended project outcomes were:

- Clearer plans and decisions made by the farmers involved, that in turn lead to improved adaptability to change (“All catchment groups have a catchment plan”)
- Sustained / improved profit and wellbeing, and reduced environmental impact for the farmers involved
- Improved environmental sustainability within target catchments
- Sustainable catchment groups going forward, e.g., catchments have a funding plan to go forward after the MPI Extension services funding ends.

More information about the project outputs and farmer participation is included on page 7.

Project at a glance

Project purpose: Implement a sustainable region-wide plan for catchment group establishment, development and ongoing support. Particular focus on water quality and pest control.

Project scale: District (Wairarapa)

Target audience: Local catchment coordinators (supporting 17 groups), rural community

Main delivery approach: Group-based workshops and meetings, water testing

Funding period: 2021 to 2023 (\$1,110,000)



Top impacts of the project

The project had a range of successes over the course of its delivery. This section identifies the key ones.

Awareness and capability within the catchment groups is growing

Catchment group capability is the area that this project appears to have impacted the most. The project has delivered a range of training workshops and field days focused on increasing practical skills in water quality monitoring and pest control, and devoted significant time to helping existing and new CCG coordinators and participants develop a vision and action plans.

Participants also appear to have a better understanding of the problems and issues that need to be solved as a catchment rather than as individuals. More detail about the evidence for increased awareness and capability is detailed on page 8 of this report. (These results are particularly pleasing considering the challenge that the project had getting people to understand that the Extension Services funding was for capacity and capability building, and not for capital to buy plants and traps.)

The number of catchment groups has more than doubled, with a strong focus on freshwater quality monitoring and pest control

At the beginning of the project there were seven CCG. Over the last 18 months that has increased to 17 groups. Because the project only works with the willing and does not approach farmers to form new groups, this significant increase is a positive sign that people like what they have been seeing and hearing from other catchment group participants.

A core project output was to understand the catchment landscapes. The project is well on track to achieve this through the gathering of baseline water quality data, and the work of the regional coordinators to help CCG develop water quality monitoring plans and animal pest control plans (refer to Figure 2 on the next page for a snapshot of progress). The project is currently in the process of detailing the exact catchment area locations and their environmental data using GIS data mapping.

Testing our water quality has been challenging. We tried different methods but were not confident about the quality of the data we were collecting. Through the [project] we now have access to expert knowledge and guidance to develop a robust water testing programme with people on the ground to help us. It feels much more achievable, and we are confident our data is valid and can be compared over time to measure change. (Catchment group coordinator)

Catchment group participants are experiencing wellbeing benefits

The project collected positive participant feedback relating to wellbeing from a range of sources (annual survey, event feedback forms, case studies). Notably, the majority of respondents reported that attending events made them feel more connected, hopeful, and less confused about what to do next. These results are detailed on page 11 of this report.

The project activities and the new catchment groups are bringing people together for the first time and giving them a reason to meet; enabling socialising and the sharing of ideas.

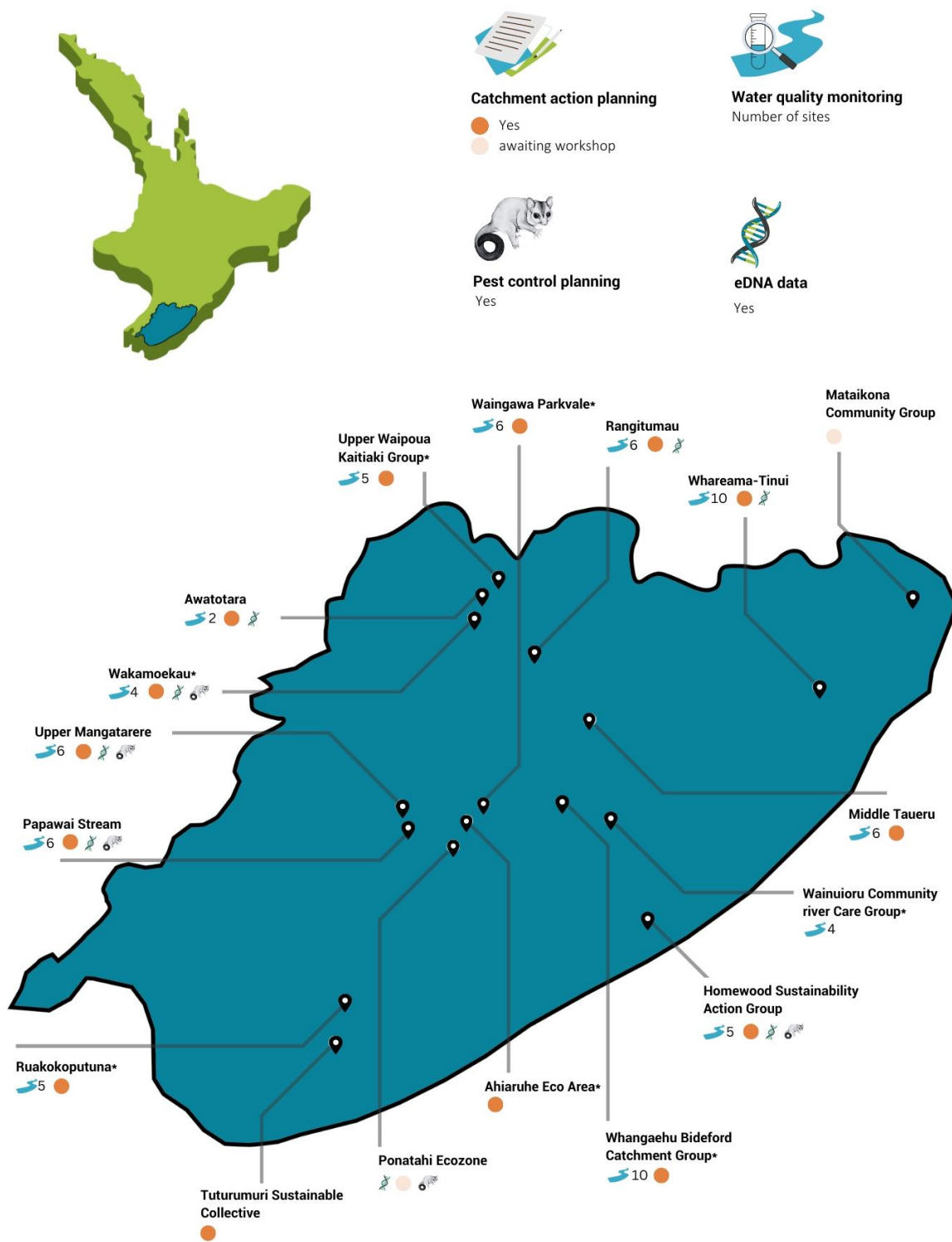


Figure 2: Map showing approximate location of the Catchment Community Groups, and the current focus of their work (* denotes groups that existed before Extension Services funding)

Highlights from the evaluation data and findings

Summary of evidence

Figure 3 below illustrates the types of evaluative data and information captured by the Catchment Community Groups project and provided to Scarlatti since we began providing evaluation support 18 months ago. The size of the circles denotes the relative quality and quantity of the data and information that informed our findings and aligned with the overall evaluation framework (refer to earlier Figure 1).

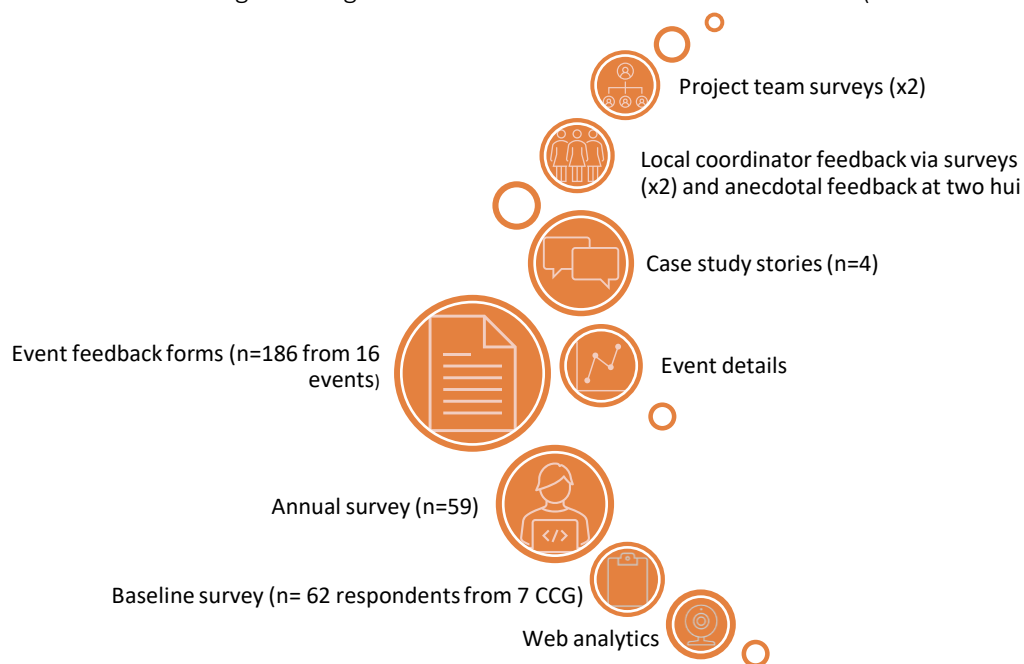


Figure 3: Evaluation data and information provided by the Catchment Community Groups project

Project activities and participation

The project had a milestone goal to deliver 16 activities in each of the two years, which was quickly exceeded. In total, the project delivered 128 activities, over a third of which were workshops and meetings to help local coordinators and their groups **develop catchment action plans**, closely followed by **waterway monitoring** (often by a water technician training a local coordinator) and **group stream walks**. Other notable activities included catchment capability building and animal pest control workshops. These are depicted below in

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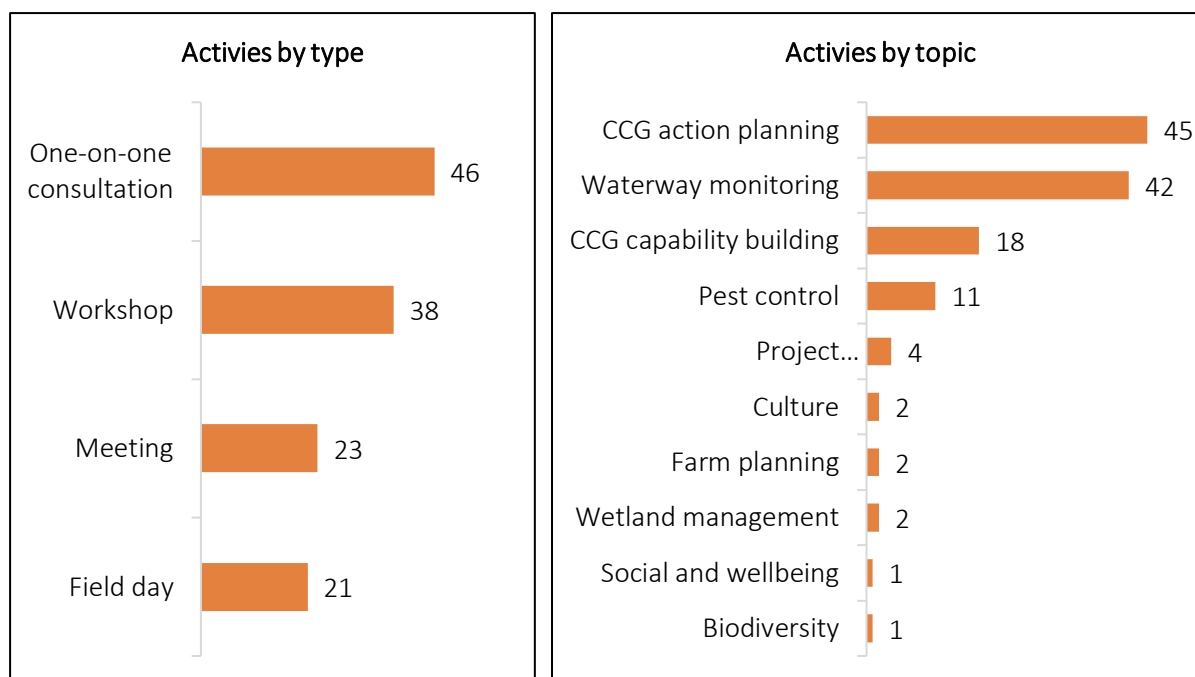


Figure 4: Number of project activities by type and by topic (n=128, between Jun 2021 to May 2023)

Key evaluation insights

Below is a summary of the outcome areas that the project influenced the most.

Capability, awareness and motivational change

The data and information gathered by the project shows a **growing level of capability and motivation amongst catchment groups and their participants.**



An annual survey was issued recently to understand whether the CCG approach was resonating with participants, and to help local coordinators understand the extent of participants' on-the-ground work. Feedback forms were frequently handed out at events to monitor changes in attendees' awareness, motivation and feelings as a result of participating. The project has also been proactive at capturing stories about catchment groups' experiences, that they publish on the WaiP2K website.

Of the 59 annual survey respondents²³:

- Almost all (89% of 57 respondents) **agreed to some extent that they are aware of what has to be done on their property to manage environmental impact**
- Almost all (84% of 57 respondents) **agreed to some extent that they know what has to be done on their property to manage environmental impact**

² The 59 annual survey respondents relate to ten of the 17 catchment groups. They include farmers (42%), small block holders with farms under 20ha (33%), urban community members (11%), 'other' (9%), Māori landowner (2%), rural professionals (2%).

³ Respondents who did not provide an answer or chose N/A were excluded from the analysis, therefore the respondent numbers vary.

- Almost all (96% of 53 respondents) are **likely to make changes on their property in the next 12 months**, with 25 people saying they are ‘highly’ likely to.
- Many (71% of 57 respondents) **agreed to some extent that they could help someone else manage their environmental impact on their property** if all other barriers were removed.

The induction baseline survey results reinforce the above data:

- Most (83% of 41 respondents) **said that they would be able to confidently describe to others what changes may be needed** in the Wairarapa to continue and improve the protection of the natural environment, with 16 people saying they felt ‘pretty confident’ and one person saying they were ‘extremely confident’.
- The majority (77% of 39 respondents) **felt ‘more’ confident about implementing necessary changes** as a result of joining a catchment group.

While we do not have firm participant numbers from each catchment group, which means it is difficult to confirm whether the above results are widespread, our findings are reinforced by the additional **186 event feedback forms** completed throughout the project, providing further insights into the project’s impact:

- Almost all respondents (96% of 90 respondents) reported that they **learned something useful** from the event they attended.
- Around two thirds (68% of 94 respondents) reported that they **‘know a lot more’**, and a further third (31%) ‘know a little more’, about the topic after attending an event.
- Almost all (98% of 94 respondents) felt either ‘somewhat confident’ (57%) or ‘very confident’ (41%) about putting what they learned into practice.

These results reveal that awareness is high, and that **increasing levels of knowledge, and especially confidence, should be prioritised in the future** to ensure CCG participants continue on their practice change journeys.

Four case studies supplied by the project, and published on their website, provide further evidence of catchment group coordinators and participants feeling more motivated and capable as a result of the project activities and support.⁴

People don’t always see the benefits of acting as a group. There are so many opportunities to tap in to funding and support, and it’s all about stuff that we can take back to our own farms and use individually, as well as have an impact as a group. (Catchment group participant)

It [project-funded allowance] has helped keep me motivated and accountable for progressing our work. (Catchment group coordinator)

Environmental, financial and wellbeing practice change

Practice change



Environmental

For the 55 CCG participants that completed the recent annual survey⁵:

⁴ Refer to the previous Extension Services evaluation reports (Q3 2022, Q4 2022, Q1 2023) and annual report (2023).

⁵ NB: Respondents that reported N/A were excluded from the analysis, hence the respondent count varies for each practice.

- The **practice most ‘completed’** on their properties in the last year **was fencing off waterways** (56% of the 45 respondents for whom this practice was applicable), with an additional 14 people reporting that this practice is ‘in progress’. This was closely followed by **on-farm soil testing** (52% completed of 44 respondents).
- The practices **most commonly ‘in progress’** are:
 - **Animal pest control** (64% of 50 respondents, with a further 24% reporting having already completed it)
 - **Plant pest control** (61% of 49 respondents, with a further 18% reporting having already completed it)
 - **Riparian planting** (41% of 49 respondents, with an additional 39% reporting having already completed it).
- The **least completed practice** from the list provided **was putting sediment traps in place**, with only three participants having completed (n=2) or being in the process of completing it (n=1). Fourteen people (13 of whom identified as farmers or small block holders) responded that they do not intend to put sediment traps in place.
- ‘Other’ practices completed by participants included: Growing native plants, welcoming seed collectors, retiring stock land for native tree revegetation, undertaking water testing, covenanting land and incorporating solar power.

The above results are consistent with WaiP2K’s strong focus on planting and water quality / monitoring, and **indicate that WaiP2K is fulfilling its priority focus areas.**

The majority of the respondents above (89% of 53 respondents) reported that **the changes they made on their property were influenced to some degree by their involvement in a catchment group.** When asked who else influenced the changes they made, the most common response was the regional council (47%), closely followed by other catchment group participants (40%).

It is worth noting that almost half of respondents to the various evaluation surveys often identified as lifestyle block holders / small-block holders (farms under 20ha), with around another half identifying as ‘farmers’. The data reveals some benefits of this demographic split. For example, when asked what changes had been made in the last 12 months, one CCG participant responded in their baseline induction survey:

Reduced hours of work so I can plant more trees. (Lifestyle block owner)

Being involved provides further benefits for lifestyle block owners:

That’s another advantage, especially for life-stylers, in being part of a catchment group. It’s an opportunity to have a voice, but also to tap into various funding pools which are not accessible to landowners as individuals. (Local co-ordinator)

Financial

Although being involved in a catchment group has not had a significant impact on participants’ financial sustainability, 45% of the 52 annual survey respondents reported either having had some degree of improvement in the last 12 months as a result of their involvement (10%), or expect that it will improve (35%). (Only 4% reported a decline.)

This would be an interesting metric for WaiP2K to continue tracking, alongside a question from the induction baseline survey that was issued to some catchment groups earlier in the project: ‘How capable do you feel about developing and implementing a plan to improve your financial sustainability and security?’. (The average score from 39 respondents was 4, on a 1-5 rating where 1= Not capable at all, 5= Very capable.)

Wellbeing

Being involved in a catchment group appears to have **had a significant impact on participants’ wellbeing**. The majority of respondents to both the induction baseline survey and the annual survey reported that as a result of joining a catchment group they felt:

- More connected to their community (78% of 41 respondents; and 81% of 54 respondents respectively)
- More hopeful about possibilities (79% of 38 respondents; and 77% of 56 respondents respectively)
- Less confused about what to do next (62% of 37 respondents; and 76% of 55 respondents respectively)
- Less frustrated about the changes that need to be made (44% of 39 respondents; and 57% of 56 respondents, respectively).

The majority of participants that completed event feedback forms also reported feeling more connected to their catchment’s community after the event they attended (82% of 82 respondents).

Our group came together because we wanted to take action for ecological aspects of our area, but also for those social aspects of bringing a community together. Within our catchment area there are four big farms and a few smaller lifestyle blocks. We saw this invitation to set up a Community Catchment Group as a way of having a “reason” to get together. (Local co-ordinator)

Farmer / catchment group sharing and support

Although we do not have strong evidence of sharing amongst CCG participants, with just under half of the annual survey respondents (47% of 47 respondents) and two thirds of induction baseline survey respondents (67% of 39 respondents) reporting that they shared the changes they had made on their property with someone else, the project has done an excellent job of sharing farmer and CCG stories through its website and in the local newspaper. Facebook, website and newsletter subscribers have also increased since the project began.

Of the respondents that reported sharing their stories with others in the annual survey, most did so at an informal discussion (45% of 22 respondents), followed by social media (18%). Similarly, in the induction baseline survey most respondents reported sharing their story through a chat (19 of 22 respondents), followed by at an event (seven respondents).

Overall assessment of the project impact

Based on the evidence above, Scarlatti’s final evaluative assessment is that the WaiP2K Catchment Community Groups project has been particularly successful at:



- **Increasing catchment group capability and motivation**, as evidenced by the feedback from CCG participants, the growing body of water quality data that the project has collected, and the rigorous efforts to upskill local coordinators in water quality monitoring and catchment group planning.
- **Building awareness** of freshwater monitoring and pest control (in particular), and the benefits of working together as a catchment group.
- **Contributing to improved wellbeing outcomes** for catchment group participants.

Notable project characteristics

This section digs a bit deeper into other factors that contributed to the project's success, and / or helped them overcome challenges.

The target audience was broader than farmers

This project is not just about farmers. This has been a source of both tension and learning for WaiP2K. Initially, not everybody thought 'non-farmers' (including lifestyle block holders) should be involved. However, as evidenced in the environmental outcomes on the previous pages, the advantage of allowing lifestyle block holders – who, arguably, face many of the same environmental challenges and regulations – to participate in, and lead, catchment groups, is that these landowners typically have more available time for planting, water quality monitoring and checking pest trap lines.

Project activities were fully customisable

One of the areas the project has worked through is what is the role of WaiP2K and what should the project look like. While this is something that is still being worked through, the project has responded positively by tailoring their activities to what is most needed by their participants. For example, when it became clear that confusion amongst local coordinators about their role was impacting the work to develop catchment plans, the project facilitated a hui for local coordinators to develop a task list for their role (a 'job description'), which they can use as a guide going forward.

Additional funding has been secured to progress iwi engagement

At the beginning of the evaluation period, the project team developed a suite of iwi engagement outcomes and measures. This cultural lens was a unique aspect of the project. Although we do not have data to be able to evaluate progress in this area – partly due to the length of time it takes to establish relationships before being able to deliver outputs such as an iwi engagement plan – we understand anecdotally that work is underway to:

- Hold hui with Ahu Whenua groups to explore whānau, hapū, iwi aspirations for improving the environment for future generations; and identify how WaiP2K can support them
- Organise a series of hīkoi for catchment groups, to share stories of the Māori and Pakeha history of their catchment
- Share resources and learnings through planting days and field days.

Additionally, Wai2K has secured project funding from MPI's Integrated Farm Planning Accelerator Fund to continue engagement with trustees of the Māori land blocks in the Wairarapa to develop farm plans.