



Ko te Whakahaumanu o te Rakitata Awa

Rangitata River Revival

Strategy consultation report October 2023



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BACKGROUND

Ko te Whakahaumanu o te Rakitata Awa – the Rakitata (Rangitata) River revival programme began in 2019 as a partnership between mana whenua (Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua) and the Department of Conservation (DOC) as part of DOC's [Ngā Awa](#) River Restoration Programme.

The programme now includes Canterbury Regional Council (Environment Canterbury), Toitū te Whenua Land Information New Zealand, Timaru and Ashburton District Councils, and Central South Island Fish & Game.

Each partner has a role in aspects of managing biodiversity, land-use, landscape, water, weed and pest control, and these responsibilities often overlap. By working together to restore and protect the river, the Rakitata River revival programme aims to enhance the health and wellbeing of the community now and for generations to come.

The programme's working group, with representatives from each of the partners, was tasked by the steering group (the decision-making body for this programme) to develop a river restoration plan and annual workplan to:

- Maximise the impact of individual work programmes.
- Develop joint solutions.
- Coordinate activities on the Rakitata River.
- Work with the community on a shared vision and values to restore the mauri (life force) of the awa (river).

Over the last two years, a revival strategy has been drafted by the programme partners to guide future restoration activities through proposed actions that can contribute to reviving the mauri of the river. It is intended to be a partnership with the community to prioritise actions to revive the river.

This work is non-statutory (not legally binding) but given the statutory responsibilities of the partners, feedback will be shared throughout the organisations to provide information about community views for this awa.

The draft strategy was made available to the community for the first time from Monday 4 September to Monday 2 October 2023, seeking feedback through an online survey or via email.

The feedback provided will inform changes to the strategy and create new actions where appropriate. Information about the consultation can be found here: www.doc.govt.nz/rakitata-strategy

CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

A summary of the draft strategy was provided on DOC's website and survey responses were collected using Microsoft Forms.

Methods

Promotion was undertaken through online and traditional media:

- Newspaper advertising
- Facebook
- Website content
- Media release
- Email newsletter
- Targeted emails to stakeholders.

Approach

A phased approach to planning this campaign was taken, with the communications and engagement lead checking in with communications and engagement representatives at the end of each phase to seek peer review and approval of plans and content. The DOC website was chosen to host the consultation information as this has been the hub for previous communications regarding the programme. Partners shared content across their own channels throughout the consultation period.

Limitations

- Because no demographics were collected from survey respondents, we were unable to analyse results in this format, nor understand what groups might be missing from the responses.
- Because we did not collect personal information (name, contact information), we were unable to make direct contact with respondents through the online survey.
- Some respondents noted that the consultation timeframe (one month) was not long enough. However, we note that feedback is welcome on an ongoing basis if groups or individuals wish to do so, even after the consultation has closed.
- It was decided not to hold any face-to-face engagement events, due to resourcing and timing with other community engagements being undertaken at the same time by partner agencies. The working group intends to provide additional engagement opportunities focused on the strategy at a later date.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RESULTS

A total of 64 responses were received (45 online surveys and 19 direct emails).

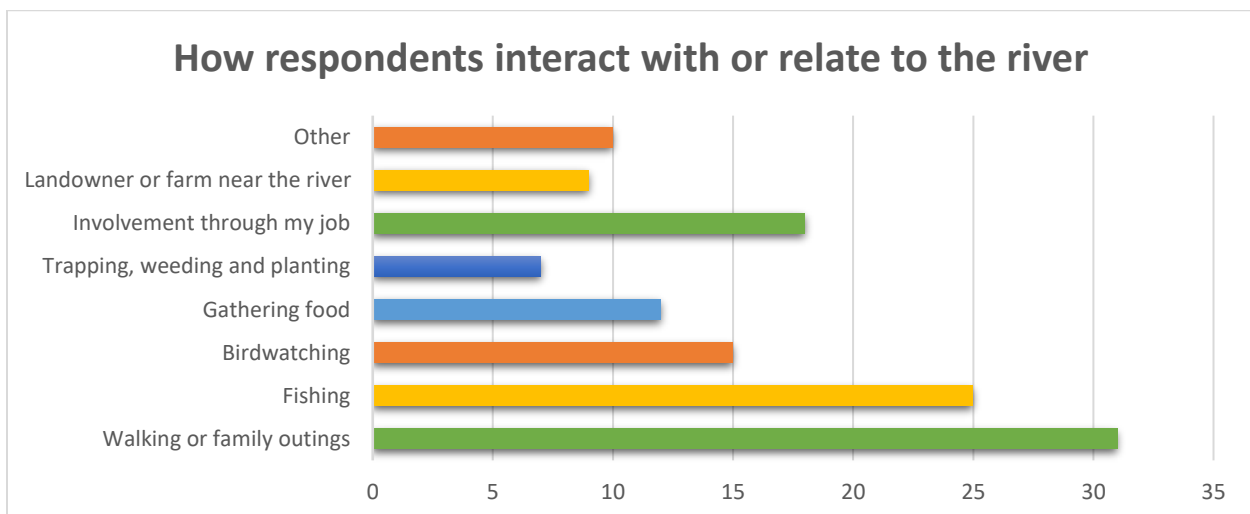
All direct emails were counted separately as it was not possible to track who filled in online surveys unless they specifically noted it in their email.

This report provides an overview of the issues, suggested changes and feedback on actions for each of the six reaches within the draft Rakitata River revival strategy. It focuses on feedback provided through the online survey with a specific section summarising email responses.

There are a range of interests and values associated with the Rakitata River, and this often means competing priorities. This is evidenced through the high quantitative support for actions, but lengthy written feedback offering suggested improvements or opportunities that were not captured in the draft strategy.

How do people interact with the river?

Walking or family outings, fishing and involvement through a job are the three main ways respondents interacted with or related to the river:



Those who selected 'other' added:

- Hunting (3)
- Agate hunting / collecting stones (2)
- Water source for the community
- RDR irrigation user
- Hut holder
- 4WD in the upper reaches
- Kayaking
- Packrafting
- Jet boating.

Support for the vision and mission

All 45 online survey respondents answered when asked if they support the vision and mission.

Most respondents fully or partially support the vision and mission.

Feedback on the vision and mission centred around concern over water allocation from the river and the need for water to be used wisely and fairly (six comments), as well as the need to recognise the important role that sports fish play in the Rakitata environment (six comments).

"I think that it is well overdue to have a strategy for the river as without one the river environment will continue to decline."

Secondary themes included:

- Concern over the decline of the naturalness and dynamic nature of the river (three mentions).
- The need for restoration for future enjoyment of the river (two mentions).
- The need for equality throughout the strategy (equal access and enjoyment of the river) (two mentions).
- The aspirational nature of the goals and the challenges associated with such aspiration (two mentions).
- The lack of community engagement to develop the vision and mission (two mentions).
- The need to recognise and acknowledge sustainable recreational uses such as fishing, rafting and tramping (two mentions).

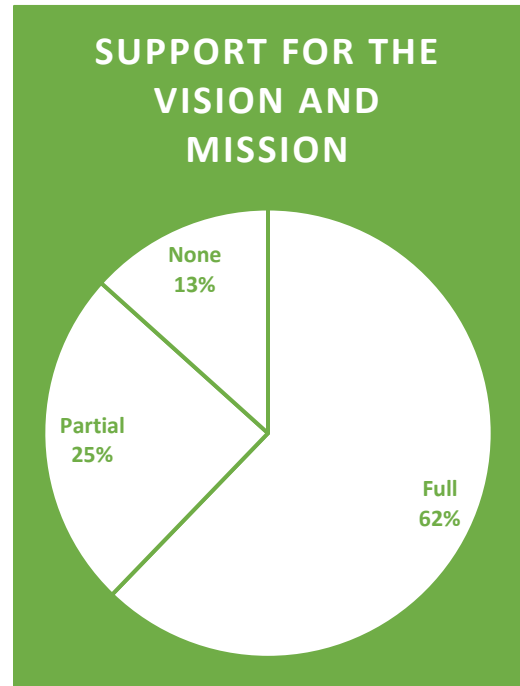
"You have created the vision and mission without the input from community but I broadly support it."

Those who did not support the vision and mission expressed concern over the amount of water abstracted from the river and did not see their recreational or agricultural values expressed in the strategy:

Enhancing the native taoka ika needs to be done in combination with also enhancing the exotic fishery (trout and salmon) i.e., not to the detriment of.

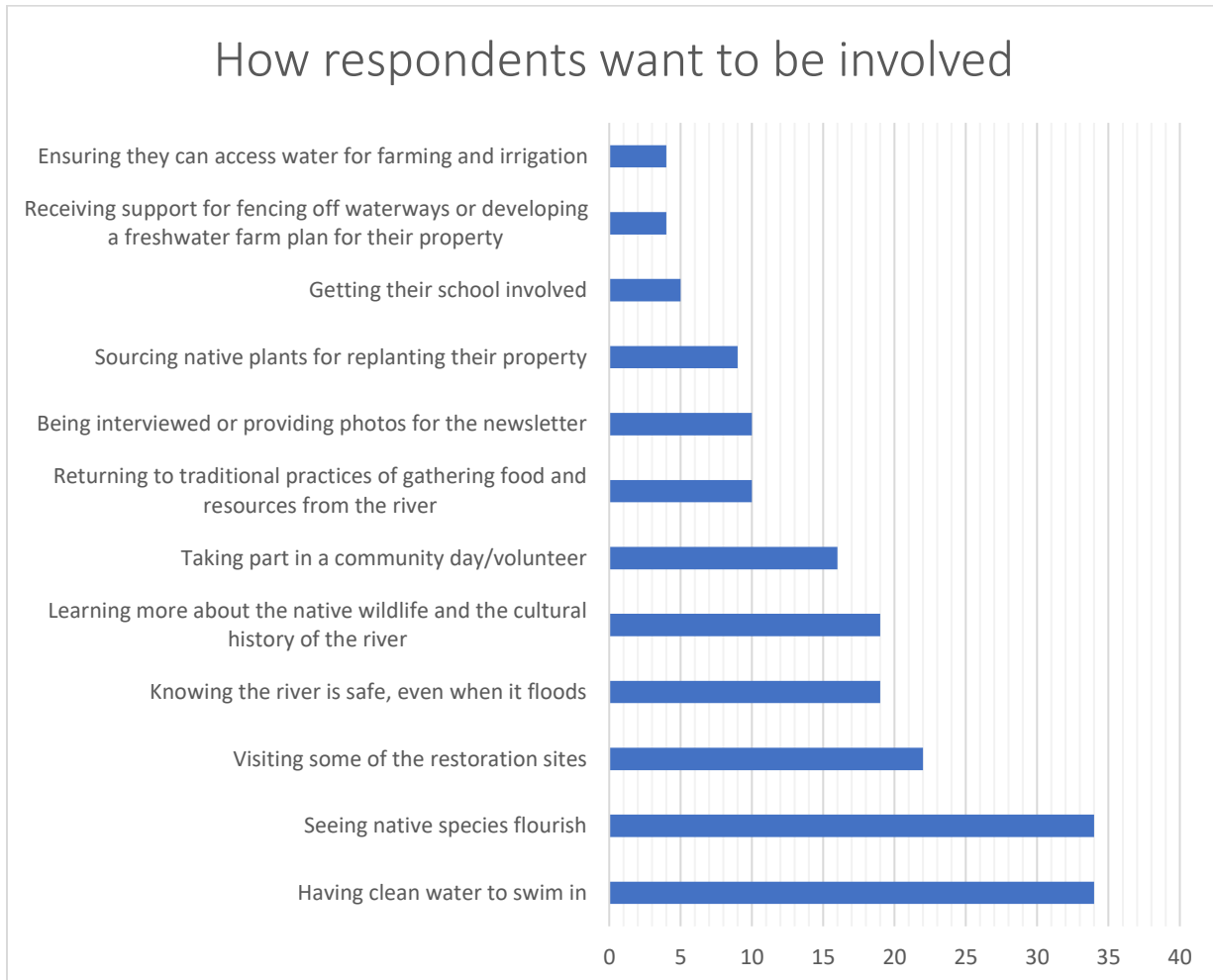
"It does not recognise that salmon do not feed within the river system and that introduced game fish play an important role in mahinga kai."

"I believe the current vision and mission will be unsustainable to farming business. Need to work with them to improve the river and surrounding habitats - not against."



Future opportunities

41 out of 45 respondents expressed interest in other opportunities to be involved.



Final comments from respondents varied in theme and sentiment. A few condensed examples are below:

- Lack of representation from all communities who have contributed and continue to contribute, to what makes the Rakitata River unique and special.
- Strong desire for restored flows.
- Desire for the development of educational opportunities.
- Lack of engagement on the programme.

“Don’t think the river can be made safe when flooding. Don’t natural disaster, don’t try to fight/control nature.”

“I would like to be involved in working groups in all forms, from weeding and planting to pest control and studies on fish and bird species.”

“Developing a plan for schools, developing a plan for farmers. Spreading the word.”

Overall, the survey responses reflected the wide range of views and challenges facing the Rakitata River. Responses also provide guidance for the partnership to take the next steps on communicating and engaging with the community on the draft strategy.

The following pages are high-level summaries of feedback provided for each of the reaches.

Note that the graphs and tables represent only the survey responses. Many of the email submissions were not in a format that could be incorporated into representative graphs for individual reaches. The themes mentioned here are not a comprehensive list of all responses but a collation of the most common themes for each reach.

Hāpua

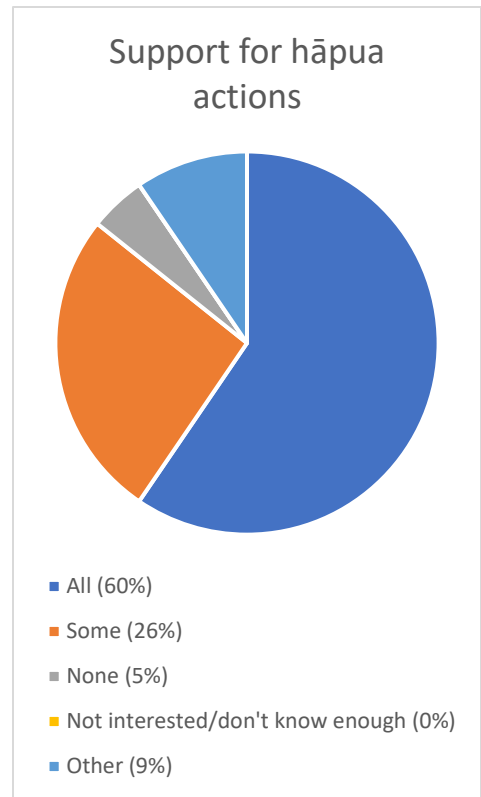
A total of 42 out of 45 people responded to the questions about this reach through the online survey.

Common themes for feedback included recreation (including recognising the important role sports fish play) and access (seven mentions), concern over water abstraction or low levels of water in the river (four mentions) and protection of the river from agriculture or stock (three mentions).

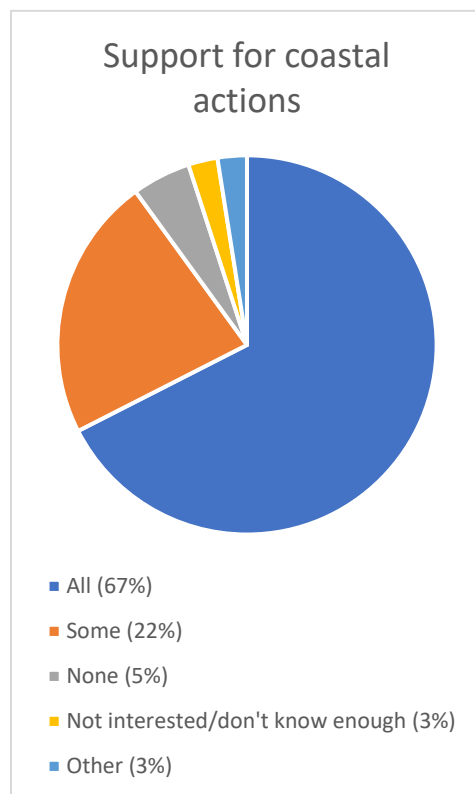
The prevailing theme for the hāpua was the need to manage access while balancing the protection of the environment.

"I don't have an answer for this, but I wonder what the climate change resilience actions might be, and what to do if those actions cut across other values or other actions. Am super impressed with all the inaka spawning habitat restoration work that has happened so far."

"Management of realising vehicle access. Management of upstream water abstraction and nutrient inputs. Monitoring of invertebrates."



Coastal



A total of 40 out of 45 people responded to the questions for this reach through the online survey.

Five respondents acknowledged that their feedback for this reach was similar to the feedback provided in the hāpua reach, largely around the need to recognise recreational uses (primarily fishing) and the important role sports fish play in the river.

Other feedback was varied – some regarding concern over low flows, lack of engagement with landowners and water quality declines and the need to monitor invertebrates.

"I think there may well need to be some recognition given to statutory actions that will be required to improve water quality, whilst realising this isn't a statutory plan, the plans intent, values, vision and mission will surely be helpful in influencing the statutory processes."

"Is there a need for any other actions to provide more room for the river to move in this reach?"

"Working with landowners should have been one of the first things you did. Setting up a catchment group for this area so all parties are involved should be a priority."

Lower river

A total of 40 out of 45 people responded to the questions for this reach through the online survey.

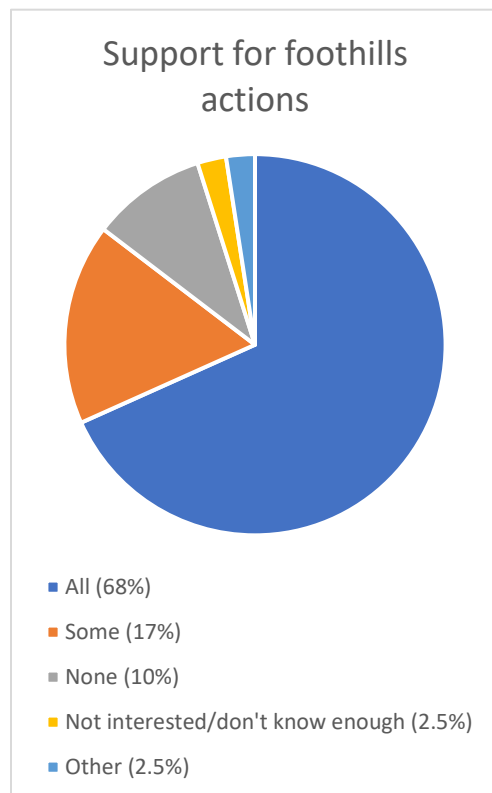
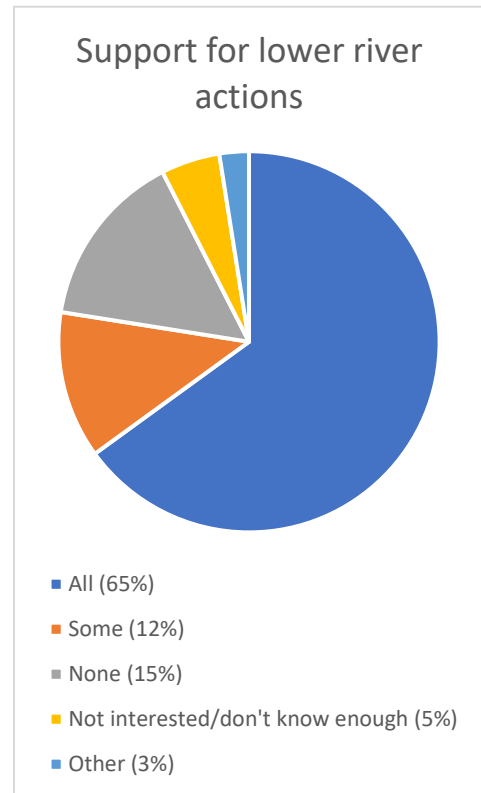
The south branch was the most common theme across responses for this reach. Some people thought the south branch floodway should be revived; others were keen to think about how impacts to the river from agricultural activity in this reach could be mitigated through changing farming methods. Protecting the river from encroachment (including from agriculture) and concern over water takes closely followed the south branch theme.

Lack of engagement, concern over flood risk and water quality decline, as well as sports fish were mentioned.

“Could there be some action to start looking at ways of reducing the amount of water required – maybe there are different types of crops or land uses that might be able to use less water?”

“Work in with landowners on a case-by-case basis and work out best places for habitats. These rules will have big effects on landowners.

Allowing the south stream to go back to natural way could be disastrous for the Rangitata island area. What effect will this have on the business, the people and money going into local economy?”



Foothills

A total of 41 out of 45 people responded to the questions for this reach through the online survey.

Common themes included concern over loss of access to the river, the need for weed control to provide flood resilience and protection for birds.

Secondary feedback was a lack of support for a cultural trail, concern over the cost to reintroduce native taoka (taonga) species and the lack of representation for the role that sports fish play in the river.

“If you're going to fence it, why not predator-fence it? Or at least sections of it that have the highest value to bird breeding. I realise the ends have to be open, but trap lines could sort that out.”

“Very important section for nesting. Help by making more shingle islands with flow all sides, as refuges - as tested in the Waitaki River. Weed control also very important on these island sites to remove cover for predators.”

High country

A total of 41 out of 45 people responded to the questions for this reach through the online survey.

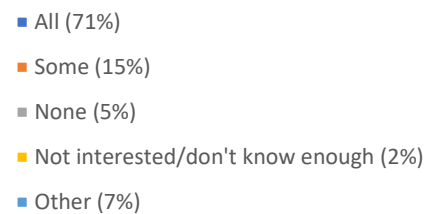
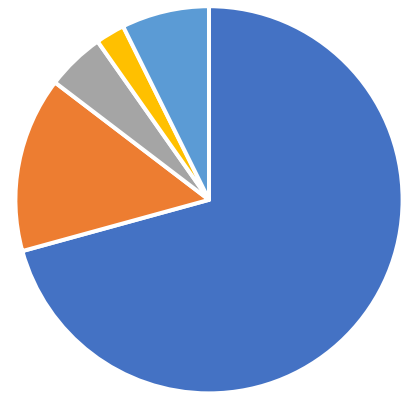
The standout theme for this reach (five mentions) was concern about lack of access to this area of the river, mostly for recreational (including fishing) purposes. One respondent suggested removing all vehicle access.

Recognition and support for the work of the Upper Rangitata Gorge Landcare Group was a secondary theme, alongside the need to manage irrigation and the impacts of intensive farming.

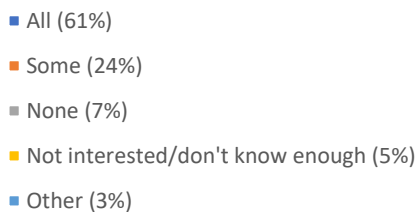
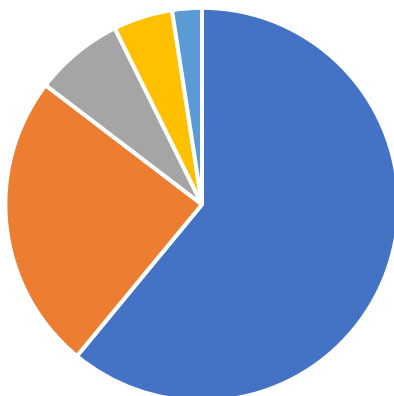
“Advocacy for tourists in the area! It is a popular place for tourists so it would be great to educate them on issues (e.g. they love Russell lupin but explaining why they are bad etc). I also think a focus on vehicle use/biosecurity vectors.”

“I’m unclear what fencing tussock wetlands will mean. Or rather, which ones. Some livestock grazing may be beneficial here to help control exotics.”

Support for high country actions



Support for headwaters actions



Headwaters

A total of 41 out of 45 people responded to the questions for this reach through the online survey.

The most common theme was concern over the loss of access to the river, with vehicle access specifically mentioned a number of times. Six respondents mentioned a concern about loss of access and two noted a desire to reduce vehicle access, specifically to the riverbed.

There was support for walking trails and camping areas and the need to maintain these. The risk from pine trees to the tussock lands was mentioned, as was the need to manage farm impacts and the lack of pest control actions.

“Maintaining (running a bulldozer once or twice a year) a track up the riverbed to the huts to try to reduce the number of people driving everywhere potentially disturbing nesting wildlife.”

“I think less is more in this area. Do we need more 4WD usage and trails up here? I'd argue it should be left to nature as much as possible with conservation work, weed control helping to enhance the natural areas.”

Email responses

A total of 19 direct emails relating to the draft strategy consultation were received. One stated that they had also completed an online survey.

Feedback received via email did not tend to answer the survey questions or relate to specific reaches. Instead, it focused on specific issues.

- Ten of the 19 submissions were not from individuals, but represented a larger agency, group, or resource user.
- Three submissions did not support the vision and mission.
- Feedback was heavily weighted towards issues related to the south branch, a perceived lack of engagement, the role of regulatory or statutory environment in relation to the strategy, and the recognition of sports fish in the Rakitata River environment.

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report will be presented to the programme's steering group along with a high-level summary of proposed changes to the strategy following further analysis of the feedback.

Face-to-face engagement options will be explored to gather further feedback from the community. Once these have been undertaken and feedback gathered and incorporated into the strategy, the steering group will receive an updated version with prioritised actions.

A final strategy will be shared with the public via DOC's [Rakitata River Revival webpage](#). As the strategy is intended to be intergenerational, there will be ongoing conversations about the content and further updates and changes over time.

Note that this work depends on funding and resources being available from the partnership and the community.

CAMPAIGN ANALYTICS

Overall, the campaign performed well/as expected. A total of \$868.20 was spent on promotion of the consultation (\$768.20 for two newspaper adverts and \$100 for Facebook). All promotional funding was provided by DOC.

Promotion results - stats

	Views	Reach	Impressions*	Likes	Comments	Shares	Link Clicks
DOC Blog post	271	-	-	1	2	-	-
DOC National Facebook (\$100)	-	31,169	49,085	485	76	20	84
DOC Instagram	-	16,969	24,279	910	5	18	-
DOC Canterbury Facebook	-	453	490	13	0	1	3
DOC consultation web	121	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rakitata EDM 1 (sent to 105)	67.7% opened	-	-	-	-	-	43 (to consultation page)
Rakitata EDM 2 (sent to 139)**	63% opened	-	-	-	-	-	13 (to consultation page)
Environment Canterbury Facebook	-	-	4,001	38 (reactions)	5	5	9
Environment Canterbury web	231	-	10 th most viewed news page on the website for the period 6 Sept – 2 Oct				
Environment Canterbury YouTube	514	-	4,100	Average view duration 3:47 (52.4% of the video). More than 34% of total traffic came from LinkedIn (shared through private pages, rather than partner agencies). Secondary was intranet (partner internal channels)			

*Impressions = people who saw the content/post in their feed

** Indicates 34 new sign-ups between sending the initial consultation content out, to sending the reminder

Other:

- The first stakeholder email was sent to over 60 individuals, groups, and agencies. We received five responses.
- The second stakeholder email was sent to over 60 individuals, groups, and agencies. We received no responses.
- Two newspaper adverts covering two districts (up to 43,150 copies printed/circulated).
- Central South Island Fish & Game Reel promoted the strategy through their Reel Life Newsletter and Weekly Fishing Report.
- Ashburton District Council & Timaru District Council shared content through Facebook.