

Wetland action plan

2026–2035



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government

Wetland action plan 2026–2035

Cover photo: Kaimaumau-Motutangi wetland, Northland.

Photo: Department of Conservation (DOC)

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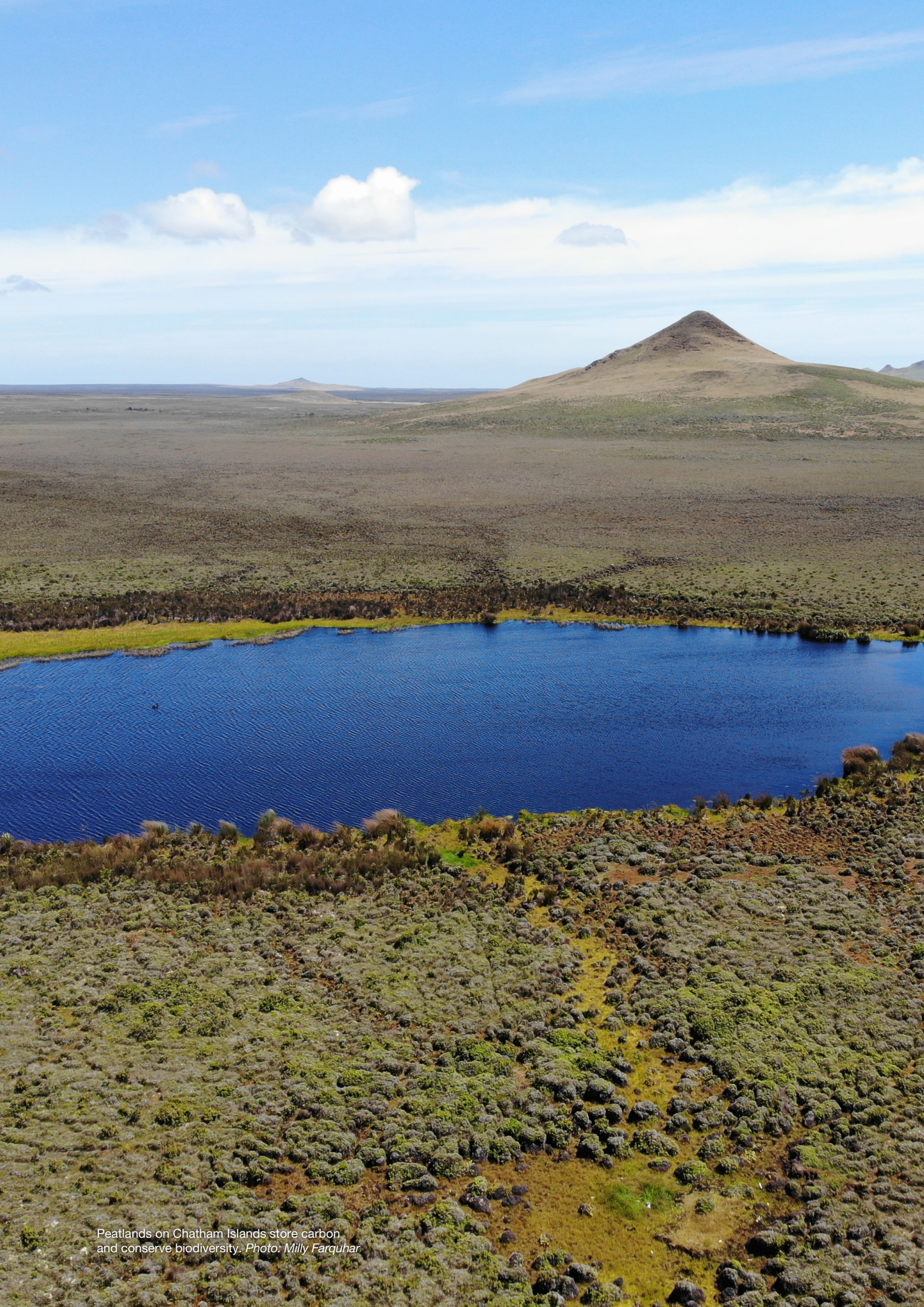


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Peatlands on Chatham Islands store carbon and conserve biodiversity. *Photo: Milly Farquhar*

1. Purpose & Scope

1.1. Purpose

The Wetland Action Plan 2026–2035 sets out the Department of Conservation (DOC) strategic direction for conserving and restoring New Zealand’s wetlands over the next decade. It provides an integrated framework to align DOC operational work, science, policy, advocacy, Treaty partnership obligations, and cross sector collaboration to halt continued wetland loss and enable large-scale, long-term recovery.

This Plan communicates priority actions required to:

- protect and restore peatlands and coastal wetland ecosystems as part of New Zealand’s climate mitigation and adaptation response
- improve the health of threatened, at-risk, iconic, and culturally significant wetlands
- mobilise partnerships, resources, and cross-agency action to influence system-wide change
- meet DOC’s responsibilities under the Conservation Act 1987, Treaty settlements, and international commitments such as the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention).

It describes opportunities for transformational change, including peatland rewetting and coastal wetland (blue carbon ecosystem) restoration, and outlines how DOC will work in partnership with iwi/hapū, and alongside government agencies, councils, industry, NGOs, and local communities to deliver outcomes.

The Wetland Action Plan is intended to guide DOC’s prioritisation, investment and operational planning, and communicate DOC’s wetland direction to partners. It provides a basis for building co-investment pathways, including nature-based solutions and will support national implementation of the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy¹, the Convention on Wetlands² and contribute towards the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

1.2. Scope of the Plan

Geographic focus

This Plan addresses the conservation of wetlands across New Zealand, with a focus on DOC's primary statutory responsibilities. It guides the management of wetlands located on public conservation land (PCL) and other key areas for threatened ecosystems and species as many important wetland ecosystems occur on mixed land tenure. The plan supports:

- collaborative conservation initiatives, especially in wetland hotspot regions
- partnership based restoration that integrates mātauranga Māori, tikanga, and iwi/hapū aspirations
- cross agency and cross sector coordination where wetlands extend beyond DOC-managed land.

Wetland types

The Wetland Action Plan encompasses both inland freshwater wetlands and coastal wetlands within intertidal zones³. Annex 1 provides a description of the wetland ecosystem types.

The plan does not cover lakes, rivers, ground-water systems or estuaries. These aquatic systems are addressed in other DOC work programmes and catchment initiatives. However, it is recognised that actions for wetlands must be connected within the wider hydrological and ecological landscape.

Inland freshwater wetlands	Coastal wetlands
• Bog • Fen • Gumland and Pakihi • Swamp • Marsh • Ephemeral wetlands, including tarns	• Saltmarsh • Mangroves • Seagrass • Herbfields and non-vegetated areas



Raised bogs are a rare type of peatland. Photo: DOC



Rewetting drained wetlands to restore biodiversity and support taonga species. Moawhitu. Photo: DOC

2. The case for action

2.1. Wetlands for biodiversity, climate and people

Wetlands are among the most threatened ecosystems in New Zealand, and the pressures they are facing are intensifying. Despite their critical role for biodiversity, climate regulation, human health, mahinga kai, and water quality regulation, wetlands continue to decline in extent and condition. Globally, wetlands provide ecosystem services up to \$39 trillion each year⁴. Incorporating wetlands into catchment management in New Zealand will improve the resilience of local communities to floods and droughts, reduce pollution of sensitive waterbodies and support nature-based tourism.

A clear national strategy is required to halt the loss, conserve and restore wetlands. This Wetland Action Plan responds by:

- providing a unified direction for wetland conservation across DOC
- prioritising wetland types and places where action will have the greatest impact
- enabling investment and partnership pathways to upscale restoration
- positioning wetlands at the heart of New Zealand's climate and biodiversity strategies
- ensuring DOC can meet international commitments, especially under the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention)
- coordinating action between DOC, Treaty partners, central and local government, industry, NGOs, and communities.



Lowland freshwater wetland, Northland. Photo: DOC

2.2. Status and trends

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of wetland loss in the world, with less than 10% remaining⁵, and progress towards restoring wetlands has been limited.

Many remaining coastal and freshwater wetlands are degraded but still provide critical habitat for threatened species and ecosystem services for people. The primary threats impacting on wetlands across New Zealand are:^{5,6}

- drainage and hydrological modification
- land clearance and development, including conversion to other land uses
- fire (human-induced)
- nutrient enrichment and sedimentation
- invasive weeds and pests
- climate-driven impacts such as sea-level rise, altered rainfall patterns, increased flooding, drought risk, and coastal squeeze.

Wetland degradation has economic consequences beyond biodiversity loss. Degrading wetlands removes critical ecosystem services, creating real economic costs through increased flood risk, higher water treatment and infrastructure costs, and lost agricultural, fisheries, and tourism value. Fire events also cause significant emissions and extensive damage to wetland ecosystems⁷.

Restoring wetlands after they have deteriorated is significantly more costly than protecting them in the first place⁴. The ongoing decline signals a pressing need for strategic prioritisation, investment, and coordinated national delivery.



Loss of peatland vegetation post fire. Photo: DOC

2.3. DOC's stewardship role

DOC has an important role in stemming wetland decline. Approximately 60% (by area) of remaining inland freshwater wetlands occur on public conservation land⁸, giving DOC direct operational responsibility for much of the country's wetland habitat. Many coastal wetlands are also located within conservation areas.

DOC's responsibilities span:

- **operations:** managing wetland ecosystems and species, delivering restoration, pest and weed control
- **advocacy and policy influence:** supporting sustainable land and water management and providing advice on national level policy and legislative settings that protect wetlands

- **science and monitoring:** providing information on ecosystem condition, pressures, carbon storage potential, and threat status
- **partnerships:** working in partnership with iwi, hapū and whanau, and in collaboration with councils, NGOs, community groups, and industry to deliver restoration at scale.

Several DOC-led programmes – including the Arawai Kākāriki wetland restoration programme, coastal wetland initiatives, research on carbon storage, and efforts to conserve threatened species including matuku/Australasian bittern – demonstrate the value of targeted, place-based restoration. The Wetland Action Plan builds on these initiatives.



Matuku/Australasian bittern is threatened with extinction, a Nationally Critical wetland species. *Photo: Colin O'Donnell*

2.4. Treaty context

Wetlands are significant to iwi and hapū, embedded deeply into whakapapa. Te repo/ wetlands are important for mahinga kai, wāhi tapu, and wāhi tūpuna, and underpin mātauranga Māori, identity, and wellbeing.

In many regions wetlands are acknowledged in Treaty settlements, and DOC has responsibilities to uphold these agreements through co-management, shared decision making, and active protection of the cultural and ecological values of wetlands. Examples include the Waikato Tainui co-management arrangements for wetlands and lakes within Crown administered reserves, and Ngāi Tahu settlement provisions that recognise wetlands at Awarua-Waituna, Ōtūwharekai, and Te Waihora.

Fulfilling these obligations requires genuine partnership, integration of mātauranga Māori, and ensuring the aspirations of mana whenua are embedded in wetland conservation. The *Assessment of ecological change of the Whangamarino Wetland Ramsar Site/He arotake i te whakaumu hauropi o te rohe kooreporepo o Whangamarino*, applied a cultural wetland health framework, illustrating how DOC can work together with iwi and hapū⁹. This Plan provides a framework to strengthen these relationships and DOC's statutory responsibility under Section 4 of the Conservation Act to uphold the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi in all aspects of its work.



Native sedges (e.g., *Machaerina* spp.) provide critical habitat. Photo: DOC

2.5. Wetlands and climate change

Wetlands are highly vulnerable to climate change. In New Zealand, projected changes in water availability, the frequency of severe rainfall events, temperature increase and sea-level rise will impact wetlands. Warmer temperatures will support spread of invasive species, proliferation of algae, and lead to an increase in fire frequency, and changes in water availability can lead to ecological collapse.

The conservation of wetlands is also critical for responding to climate change, given their role in carbon storage, mitigating the risk of flood events and droughts, and buffering local communities from coastal storm surges. Protecting and restoring wetlands is an effective nature-based solution to respond to climate change.

There is strong interest across environmental, agricultural and climate sectors in New Zealand to manage wetlands for climate change mitigation. For example, peatland rewetting may support regional economies through nature and carbon markets. The Government's Second Emissions Reduction Plan¹⁰ outlines opportunities to reduce carbon emissions from sources not currently recognised under the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), including wetlands.

Peatland rewetting: a major emissions reduction opportunity

Peatlands store significant carbon, but when drained they release large quantities of greenhouse gases. Emissions from drained peatlands account for 6.5% of New Zealand's total annual emissions, underscoring the scale of the opportunity¹¹. Rewetting peatlands on public conservation land would reduce emissions, rebuild biodiversity, and generate co-benefits for water quality and landscape resilience. Work is already underway to determine how emission reductions and sequestration from peatlands could be recognised in carbon markets and whether New Zealand's climate target accounting could be expanded to include peatlands. This Wetland Action Plan positions DOC to contribute to, and benefit from that policy development.

Coastal wetlands: blue carbon and climate resilience

Coastal saltmarsh, seagrass, and mangroves are blue carbon ecosystems, which capture and store carbon and provide natural buffers against storms, flooding, and sea-level rise. These ecosystems help protect communities and infrastructure, filter nutrients, and support fisheries.

Restoring and protecting coastal wetlands will strengthen resilience in the face of climate change, while also contributing to DOC's biodiversity and cultural outcomes.

2.6. Policy and legislative setting

New Zealand has a range of policy and legislative mechanisms that support the protection, management and restoration of wetlands as part of the sustainable management of land and water resources. These operate across international, national, regional and local levels and provide important direction for wetland outcomes that are given effect through regional policy statements and plans. Key national instruments have included the Resource Management Act 1991 and associated freshwater instruments, which set requirements to protect wetland values, and regulate activities that may affect wetlands. The Government is reforming national freshwater direction, and changes are expected.

Under the Conservation Act 1987, DOC has statutory functions to manage wetlands on public conservation land, advocate for the

conservation of wetlands and sustainable land and water management more broadly and protect freshwater species and habitats. DOC also administers other legislation relevant to wetland protection including the Wildlife Act 1953 and the Reserves Act 1977.

The Wetland Action Plan supports delivery of:

- the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020, including the Action for Nature¹²
- Treaty settlement commitments involving wetlands
- New Zealand's climate strategy and emissions reduction plans.

The Plan provides a unifying framework to support alignment and implementation across these policy settings, strengthening long-term outcomes for wetlands across New Zealand.



Harakeke/flax in flower. Photo: Nir Ketraaru

2.7. Convention on Wetlands

Outcomes delivered through this Plan will support New Zealand's implementation of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention). The Convention is an international treaty promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands, to which 172 Countries, including New Zealand, are signatories. DOC is New Zealand's lead agency for the Convention and has obligations to maintain the ecological character of listed Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) and to promote the wise use of all wetlands through national planning and policy frameworks. New Zealand is required to monitor and report on the condition of wetlands generally¹³, and the ecological character of Ramsar Sites. New Zealand also has commitments to strengthen public awareness, education, and stakeholder engagement in wetland conservation, and to

consider designating additional wetlands for inclusion on the Ramsar List. The Fifth Strategic Plan of the Convention, adopted in 2025, places clear expectations to strengthen national policy, governance and investment to reverse wetland loss and restore wetland ecosystem function.

New Zealand currently has seven Ramsar Sites, distributed from Waikato to Southland, covering over 68,000 ha. These sites are of outstanding ecological value but are under pressure from changes in catchment land use, water diversion, fire and invasive species.

The Wetland Action Plan provides a framework to coordinate the actions required to conserve and restore the Wetlands of International Importance, and to advocate for the sustainable management of wetlands across New Zealand.



Bird's eye view of wetland habitat diversity. Photo: DOC



High elevation wetlands are threatened by climate change. *Photo: DOC*



Kettle holes occur on glacial moraines, inland Canterbury. *Photo: DOC*

3. Objectives for wetland conservation

The Wetland Action Plan 2026–2035 sets three overarching objectives that reflect DOC’s responsibilities, the status of New Zealand’s wetlands, Treaty commitments, and the major opportunities for biodiversity and climate gains. Each objective is supported by two strategic goals that guide DOC’s work across operations, science, policy, partnerships and Treaty relationships. The objectives and goals provide the framework for the Plan’s 10-year outcomes and priority actions.

3.1. Objective 1: Wetlands are part of the climate solution

New Zealand’s wetlands – particularly peatlands and coastal wetland ecosystems – have an essential role in both climate mitigation and climate adaptation. Peatlands store significant amount of carbon, while coastal wetlands capture carbon (blue carbon) and protect communities from storms, erosion, flooding and sea-level rise. Degraded peatlands on and off conservation land are currently emitting greenhouse gases, and coastal wetlands are under increasing pressure from climate impacts and land-use change. Addressing these issues is one of the most powerful nature-based climate and economic opportunities available to New Zealand.

Goal 1.1: Protect and restore peatlands to reduce carbon emissions and enhance biodiversity

Rationale

Drained peatlands contribute an estimated 6.5% of New Zealand’s total annual greenhouse gas emissions¹⁰. At least 10,000 ha of degraded and drained peatlands occur on public conservation land and are likely emitting carbon. Rewetting these peatlands will contribute to New Zealand’s emission reductions and safeguard biodiversity. DOC also has a critical role in managing fire events in peatlands that release massive quantities of carbon and disrupt ecosystems.

10-year outcome

Peatlands on public conservation land are being actively rewet, restored, and protected, and DOC is enabling and supporting peatland restoration efforts outside public conservation land.

Strategic direction

DOC aims to:

- identify priority peatland sites for restoration
- implement rewetting pilots and work with others to scale them into a national programme
- integrate mātauranga Māori and tikanga through active partnership with mana whenua
- provide advice on emerging policy and market frameworks (ETS, voluntary carbon and nature markets, on farm removals) to recognise peatland emissions reductions and sequestration
- share evidence of climate and biodiversity benefits from peatland restoration.

Goal 1.2: Protect and restore coastal wetlands for carbon capture, climate resilience and biodiversity

Rationale

Coastal wetlands – including mangroves, saltmarsh and seagrass – store carbon, support biodiversity, protect coasts from extreme weather events, and buffer the effects of sea-level rise. These ecosystems are under increasing pressure from climate driven impacts, coastal squeeze, and land use activities.

10-year outcome

Coastal wetlands on public conservation land and waters are being actively restored or protected, and DOC is supporting restoration efforts outside public conservation land.

Strategic direction

DOC aims to:

- identify priority coastal wetlands for climate and biodiversity outcomes
- deliver conservation projects on PCL and in partnership with others
- provide advice on national policy and legislative settings that protect coastal wetlands
- advocate for regional and district planning provisions that protect coastal wetlands
- share evidence of coastal wetland contribution to carbon sequestration and resilience.



Coastal wetlands of Mahurangi harbour. Photo: Helen Kettles

3.2. Objective 2: Threatened and iconic wetlands are healthy

New Zealand's most threatened wetland ecosystems and species are at risk of further loss and decline and urgent action is necessary to conserve wetlands in modified landscapes. Many high value wetlands – including Ramsar Sites and wetlands of cultural significance – require improved protection, management, and monitoring. The loss of these systems would be irreversible and would compromise biodiversity, cultural values, and international obligations.

Goal 2.1: Enhance conservation of threatened and at-risk wetland ecosystems and species

Rationale

Threatened wetland ecosystems have declined due to land use change, drainage, invasive species and climate related pressures. Many wetland dependent species, such as the Nationally Critical matuku/ Australasian bittern, are threatened or at risk and require targeted management.

10-year outcome

Threatened wetland ecosystems and species at imminent risk of decline are actively conserved, with increased advocacy, monitoring, and management, including expanding protected areas and other areas managed for conservation.

Strategic direction

DOC aims to:

- identify the most threatened wetland ecosystem types applying the IUCN Red List Ecosystem assessment method
- prioritise wetlands on PCL for management based on threat status and Treaty commitments
- deliver on-ground actions for threatened ecosystem and species recovery
- support protection of wetlands on private land through tools such as Ngā Whenua Rāhui covenants (Kawenata)
- enhance use of technologies to monitor wetland extent and condition
- engage in national, regional and district planning, policy and permitting processes to prevent or reduce direct and indirect effects of land use and development on threatened wetland ecosystems and species.

Goal 2.2: Improve management of Wetlands of International Importance and culturally significant wetlands

Rationale

New Zealand currently has seven Wetlands of International Importance, known as Ramsar Sites. Many require improved monitoring, restoration, and reporting to meet obligations under the Convention on Wetlands. Culturally significant wetlands recognised in Treaty settlements and by mana whenua require active partnership and stewardship to restore and uphold their mauri.

10-year outcome

DOC has a renewed, coordinated approach for implementing the Convention on Wetlands, increasing the number of designated sites and improving the ecological health of existing Ramsar Sites. DOC partners with tāngata whenua to enhance the mauri of culturally significant wetlands.

Strategic direction

DOC aims to:

- develop and implement a national Ramsar Strategy
- identify new candidate sites for designation as Wetlands of International Importance
- co-develop and implement management strategies for Ramsar Sites and culturally significant wetlands with mana whenua, and in collaboration with councils, and stakeholders
- restore Ramsar Sites where ecological character has declined
- embed mātauranga Māori in monitoring and management
- lead national and international policy and science efforts to advance wetland conservation.



Intermontane wetlands of Ōtūwharekai/Ashburton Basin. Photo: DOC

3.3. Objective 3: We work in partnership to conserve and restore wetlands

Wetland conservation at scale cannot be achieved without the support of others. Sustainable, long-term outcomes require collaboration with Treaty partners, councils, central government, NGOs, industry sector such as agriculture, and community groups. Partnerships bring diverse knowledge, capability, and resources to support actions both on and beyond public conservation land.

Goal 3.1: Mobilise resources and strengthen conservation action with partners and across sectors

Rationale

Significant resources – public, private, philanthropic, and international markets – are becoming available for climate, biodiversity or tourism aligned conservation. Wetlands, particularly peatlands and coastal systems, present high impact opportunities for such investment. Collaborative initiatives (e.g., Moawhitu, Awarua, Kaipara Moana) show the effectiveness of shared delivery.

10-year outcome

Partnerships with Treaty partners, councils, government agencies, NGOs and industry help build and leverage investment pathways and upscale wetland conservation.

Strategic direction

DOC aims to:

- develop investor ready wetland restoration projects
- strengthen and embed existing partnerships at priority sites
- align monitoring and research efforts with government agencies and research institutes
- build streamlined DOC processes that enable joint delivery and co-funding
- support environmental NGOs and others to accelerate their own wetland programmes.

Goal 3.2: Support others to address the most significant threats to wetlands

Rationale

Major pressures on wetlands – drainage schemes, invasive species, nutrient loading, sedimentation, and climate impacts – often sit outside DOC’s direct control. Providing science, tools, policy advice, mapping, and enabling cross-sector partnerships, can help address key threats at catchment scales.

10-year outcome

Cross-sector relationships with agriculture, tourism, water use, health, climate and biodiversity, and strengthened research and policy collaboration, contribute to reducing the pressures on wetlands and improving ecosystem services, including flood and drought mitigation and climate resilience.

Strategic direction

DOC aims to:

- improve national reporting on wetland extent, condition, and pressures – working with local and central government, and research organisations
- strengthen policy input on environmental limits, wetland definitions and other reforms
- work with agricultural sector to reduce impacts on wetlands and develop joint initiatives
- share spatial tools and catchment pressure mapping to guide regional action
- support biosecurity programmes and research to address key threats
- provide education and best practice guidance to mobilise community level action.



Extensive peatland fire at Whangamarino Wetland. Photo: DOC



Te Whanga Lagoon part of a diverse wetland mosaic. Photo: Milly Farquhar



Restoring wetlands to connect freshwater and coastal environments. *Photo: DOC*

4. Priority actions

This Wetland Action Plan identifies where concerted effort is required to halt the decline of threatened ecosystems and species, to deliver nature-based solutions for climate, to mobilise resources and promote sustainable catchment management.

The priority actions to conserve wetlands for the next decade (2026-2035) are detailed in Annex 2.

The actions encompass science, on-ground operations, partnership, policy development, Treaty relationships, and cross-sector partnerships, and support broader government and non-government initiatives and strategies. The actions are aligned with DOCs Biodiversity Investment (BioInvest) approach that provides detailed outcome plans to conserve wetlands at key locations in New Zealand.

Delivering the actions with Treaty Partners to strengthen rangatiratanga, mātauranga Māori, connection and mahinga kai outcomes is critical.

These actions will also contribute to delivery of the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy, the Government's Climate Strategy, and implementation of the Convention on Wetlands, as well as other international agreements relating to wetland ecosystems, biodiversity and climate.



Ranger monitoring and releasing rare mudfish for wetland conservation. Photo: DOC



Native orchid *Thelymitra* spp.
Photo: DOC

5. Implementation

5.1. Coordinated delivery and prioritisation

Implementation of priority actions for the Plan's six strategic goals will rely on coordinated delivery across DOC's core functional areas.

- **Operations:** on-ground actions to conserve ecosystems and species, including rewetting, restoration, biosecurity, and fire prevention.
- **Science and technical:** ecological assessments, scientific research, ecosystem and species prioritisation, and development of monitoring frameworks.
- **Policy and advocacy:** supporting regional, national and international policy and legislative frameworks, development of planning tools, and ensuring climate and biodiversity policy settings consider wetlands.
- **Treaty relationships:** supporting shared governance and management arrangements, embedding mātauranga Māori and tikanga, and upholding Treaty settlement responsibilities.
- **Partnerships:** developing investment ready projects, coordinating co-funding, and supporting collaboration with councils, NGOs, industry, and community groups.

Prioritisation of effort to high-value conservation wetlands will ensure DOC invests effort where it can achieve the most significant ecological, climate, and cultural benefits. DOC will prioritise work using biodiversity investment and planning tools designed to allocate operational resources to where they have conservation impact, and to give effect and strengthen Treaty commitments with mana whenua.

These tools include:

- **BioInvest:** guiding investment decisions based on ecological value and imminence of biodiversity loss, particularly for threatened wetlands.
- **Threatened ecosystems:** using IUCN Red List of Ecosystems assessments.
- **Priority wetlands for climate response:** focusing on wetlands with high net emissions reduction potential (peatlands) and high climate resilience value (coastal wetlands).

5.2. Working with others

Successful wetland conservation requires collaboration with others, underpinned by partnership with Treaty Partners including co-design and co-governance where appropriate. Initiatives that build and maintain the support of local communities, local and national government and science institutions are likely to achieve greater outcomes. Joint catchment programmes are also necessary to address the threats on wetlands stemming outside public conservation land.

Implementation of the Wetland Action Plan will require DOC to:

- work with Treaty Partners to uphold and strengthen co-governance and co-management arrangements, embed mātauranga Māori and tikanga into wetland restoration, and develop joint management strategies for culturally significant wetlands, including Ramsar Sites
- collaborate with the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions, and Transport (MCERT) on freshwater and climate frameworks, environmental limits, wetland definitions, national reporting; and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), LINZ and other relevant agencies on intersections with agriculture, sustainable land use, and catchment-scale restoration
- enhance relationships with regional and local government to support freshwater planning, drainage scheme management, consenting and land use decisions, monitoring of wetland extent and condition
- support partnerships with environmental NGOs and other national groups, including Fish and Game, National Wetland Trust, Forest & Bird
- develop joint programmes with research institutions, including universities, public research organisations and mātauranga Māori researchers
- enable community and catchment group conservation efforts at priority wetlands.



Working in partnership with mana whenua to manage and restore wetlands. Photo: DOC

5.3. Resource mobilisation and cross-sector partnerships

Achieving large-scale wetland conservation will require cross-sector partnerships and an innovative approach to mobilising resources. The Plan positions DOC to work with Treaty partners and other organisations to develop investment ready wetland projects for co-funding and to enable nature-based market opportunities.

Over the next decade, nature finance is anticipated to support wetland restoration, including voluntary nature and carbon markets. These mechanisms may support action on PCL, private land, as well as iwi- and hapū-led initiatives for wetlands, including through co-management.

Implementation of this Plan will also rely on partnerships with other sectors, particularly agriculture. It calls for an open dialogue between the land use, water management, climate and conservation sectors – to understand the economic limitations facing different groups, and future options for improving the management of wetlands and water resources.



Mangroves are important blue carbon ecosystems.
Photo: Kirstie Knowles

5.4. Monitoring, reporting and adaptive management

Reporting on the status and trend of wetland ecosystems is necessary to evaluate progress towards the strategic objectives and goals in the Wetland Action Plan, and for adaptive management to adjust management actions and investment pathways over time.

Monitoring and observations of wetlands must also apply mātauranga Māori, to guide restoration and to shape future priorities for wetland management.

Measuring progress toward 10-year outcomes will be supported by a monitoring and reporting framework that draws on:

- national indicators for ecosystem extent, condition, and pressures applied under the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (ANZBS), Environmental Domain reporting and used by regional councils
- reporting obligations under the Convention on Wetlands, including monitoring of Ramsar Site

- mātauranga Māori frameworks and knowledge systems, where available, including in terms of whakapapa (genealogy), wairua (spiritual essence) and mauri (life force) of wetlands.
- carbon emissions reporting, including changes in carbon stocks and emissions from peatlands and coastal wetlands.

DOC will align monitoring and reporting approaches, where practical, with mana whenua, MCERT, MPI, councils and research organisations.



Measuring changes in wetland condition. *Photo: DOC*



Field team preparing to monitor Awarua-
Waituna Ramsar Site. Photo: DOC



Freshwater wetlands, Waikato
Photo: DOC

6. Annexes

Annex 1: Wetland ecosystem type definitions

Table A1 provides definitions of the freshwater and coastal wetland types included in the scope of this Action Plan, reflecting wetland ecosystem classifications applied by DOC and other partners.

Table A1. Definitions of freshwater and coastal wetland types. *From Johnson & Gerbeaux (2024).*

Wetland type		Defining features
Bog*	Bog**	A peatland characterised by organic (peat soils) which receives its water supply only from precipitation. The water table is generally close to or just above the ground and relatively constant. Bogs are nutrient-poor, poorly aerated, and poorly drained.
	Fen*	Predominantly peat substrate that receives inputs of groundwater and nutrients from adjacent mineral soils. The water table is usually close to or just below the peat surface, and relatively constant. Fens have slightly higher nutrient status than bogs.
	Gumlands and Pakihi*	Characterised by low pH/low nutrient status mineral or peat substrate. Rain-fed and frequently saturated but seasonally dry. The soils are mature/old and severely leached of most nutrients. Includes the West Coast pakihi and Northland gumlands but can extend also to sites having soils of extreme infertility because of their skeletal nature or lack of nutrients from inhospitable substrates such as ultramafic rock. Vegetation is usually heathland.
	Swamp*	Swamps usually have a combination of mineral and peat soil. They receive nutrients and sediment via surface runoff and groundwater from adjacent land. Standing water often present, and the water table is usually above the ground surface, or periodically above much of it. Swamps usually occur in basins, valley floors, deltas, and plains.
	Marsh	Marshes occur on mineral substrate/soils. They are fed by groundwater or surface water and characterised by water level fluctuations and periodic inundation. Marshes differ from swamps by having better drainage, a lower water table, and mineral substrate.
	Ephemeral wetlands	A distinctive wetland type frequently found in closed depressions lacking a surface outlet, in climates with seasonal variation in rainfall and complete drying in summer months or dry years. Substrates are usually mineral. Occur on moraines, bedrock, dunes, and tephra.
Coastal wetlands	Mangrove	Mangroves are woody, salt-tolerant trees that grow in the shallow, often muddy intertidal zones of sheltered estuaries and harbours.
	Seagrass	Seagrass beds or meadows are a productive coastal ecosystem typically formed by the marine flowering plant <i>Zostera muelleri</i> , or other seagrass taxa. The meadows found on sandy or muddy tidal flats in estuaries and sheltered harbours.
	Saltmarsh	A saltmarsh is an intertidal coastal wetland situated between land and sea, regularly flooded by tides of saltwater or brackish water. Typically found in sheltered estuaries, bays, lagoons, and river mouths, these habitats are dominated by dense, salt-tolerant plants.
	Herbfields and non-vegetated areas	Intertidal wetland types dominated by non-vegetated habitats such as mudflats or low stature herbfields.

* Fens, Gumlands, Pakihi and swamps occur on peaty-mineral or peat soils, associated with peatlands.

** Bogs occur on peat (organic) soils, often termed peatlands.

Annex 2: Wetland action plan – 10-year outcomes and priority actions

Objective 1: Wetlands are part of the climate solution

Goal 1.1: Protect and restore peatlands to reduce carbon emissions and enhance biodiversity

10-year outcome (by 2035)

Peatlands on public conservation land are being actively rewet, restored, and protected, and DOC is enabling and supporting peatland restoration efforts outside public conservation land.

Strategic direction

- ANZBS 2050 Objectives¹: 2, 3, 10, 13.
- BioInvest Programme: P29, P21, P04, P01, P20, P26.

Priority actions

Action	Description	DOC lead	Timeframe
A1.1	Address national information gaps limiting peatland inclusion in GHG targets and nature and carbon markets.	Biodiversity & Heritage (BHV), Policy	2026–2027
A1.2	Identify priority sites for peatland conservation and restoration on PCL and in national hotspot regions.	BHV	2026–2027
A1.3	Develop investor ready peatland restoration projects and outline critical science needs.	Public Affairs , BHV	2026–2027
A1.4	Work with mana whenua in peatland hotspots and embed mātauranga Māori and tikanga in conservation initiatives.	Treaty Relationships, Operations	2026–2029
A1.5	Implement peatland rewetting pilot projects on PCL to guide future policy and operational delivery.	Operations, BHV	2026–2027
A1.6	Deliver a national peatland rewetting and restoration programme, with partners including primary sector groups.	Operations, BHV	2027–2035
A1.7	Share national and international evidence on emissions reductions and biodiversity gains from peatland restoration.	BHV	2027–2035
A1.8	Develop policy and permissions for use of VNCM on PCL.	Policy	2026–2030
A1.9	Provide information on the scale of the opportunity for peatland conservation in New Zealand.	BHV	2026–2027

Goal 1.2: Protect and restore coastal wetlands for carbon capture, climate resilience and biodiversity

10-year outcome (by 2035)

Coastal wetlands on public conservation land and waters are being actively restored or protected, and DOC is supporting restoration efforts outside public conservation land.

Strategic direction

- ANZBS 2050 Objectives¹: 2, 3, 10, 13.
- BioInvest Programme: P29, P21, P04, P01, P20, P26.

Priority actions

Action	Description	DOC lead	Timeframe
A1.10	Identify priority coastal wetland sites for biodiversity, carbon capture, and climate adaptation.	BHV	2026–2027
A1.11	Support a Green Status of Ecosystems (GSE) assessment for saltmarsh.	BHV	2026–2028
A1.12	Develop investor ready coastal wetland restoration projects and identify critical science needs.	Public Affairs, BHV	2029–2031
A1.13	Work with mana whenua in coastal wetland hotspot regions and embed mātauranga Māori and tikanga in conservation initiatives.	Treaty Relationships, Operations	2026–2027
A1.14	Implement coastal wetland restoration and conservation projects on PCL and other high priority sites.	Operations	2026–2029
A1.15	Provide advice on coastal wetland protection through national policy, legislative and planning instruments.	Policy	2026–2035
A1.16	Advocate for regional and district planning provisions that protect coastal wetlands.	BHV, Operations	2027–2035
A1.17	Share evidence of blue carbon, resilience, and biodiversity gains from coastal wetland restoration.	BHV	2027–2035

Objective 2: Threatened and iconic wetlands are healthy

Goal 2.1: Enhance conservation of threatened and at-risk wetland ecosystems and species

10-year outcome (by 2035)

Threatened wetland ecosystems and species at imminent risk of decline are actively conserved, with increased advocacy, monitoring, and management, including expanding protected areas and other areas managed for conservation.

Strategic direction

- ANZBS 2050 Objectives¹: 2, 4, 5, 10, 11.
- BioInvest Programme: P04, P08, P11, P20, P22, P23, P24, P25.

Priority actions

Action	Description	DOC lead	Timeframe
A2.1	Identify the most threatened wetland ecosystem types by bioregion using IUCN Red List of Ecosystems criteria.	BHV	2026–2027
A2.2	Share spatial information on the extent and condition of threatened wetlands with councils, iwi, industry and stakeholders.	BHV	2027–2028
A2.3	Prioritise wetlands on PCL for management, aligned with national/regional initiatives (e.g., predator control, biosecurity, whitebait management).	BHV	2027–2028
A2.4	Deliver management actions to protect and restore threatened wetlands, focused on those under imminent risk of decline.	Operations	2026–2035
A2.5	Deliver management actions to secure populations of threatened wetland dependent species.	Operations	2026–2035
A2.6	Promote development of a wetland protected areas network, focusing on under represented wetland types.	BHV, Policy	2026–2035
A2.7	Support Ngā Whenua Rāhui and other private land protection tools.	Treaty Relationships, Operations	2026–2035
A2.8	Provide advice on national policy and legislative settings to protect threatened ecosystems and significant habitats.	Policy	2026–2030
A2.9	Engage in regional and district planning and permitting processes to prevent or reduce direct and indirect effects of land use and development on threatened wetland ecosystems and species	BHV, Operations	2026–2035

Goal 2.2: Improve management of Ramsar sites and Culturally Significant Wetlands

10-year outcome (by 2035)

DOC has a renewed, coordinated approach for implementing the Convention on Wetlands, increasing the number of designated sites and improving the ecological health of existing Ramsar Sites. DOC partners with tāngata whenua to enhance the mauri of culturally significant wetlands.

Strategic direction

- ANZBS 2050 Objectives¹: 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10.
- BioInvest Programme: P12, P01, P07, P11, P20, P24.

Priority actions

Action	Description	DOC lead	Timeframe
A2.10	Develop and share a National Ramsar Strategy, clarifying priorities for management, monitoring and reporting.	Policy, BHV	2026
A2.11	Identify target wetlands for future Ramsar Site designation.	BHV, Policy	2026–2028
A2.12	Co-develop management strategies for all Ramsar Sites with councils, mana whenua and stakeholders.	Operations	2026–2030
A2.13	Restore ecological character at Ramsar Sites showing evidence of decline.	Operations	2026–2029
A2.14	Streamline monitoring and reporting of Ramsar Site ecological character, integrating mātauranga Māori.	BHV, Operations	2026–2035
A2.15	Co-develop outcomes with Treaty Partners to strengthen rangatiratanga, mātauranga Māori, connection and mahinga kai actions across all wetlands	BHV, Operations	2026–2035
A2.16	Partner with mana whenua to safeguard and lift the mauri and wairua of culturally significant wetlands.	Treaty Relationships, Operations	2027–2035
A2.17	Advocate for policy and planning settings that protect culturally significant wetlands and Ramsar Sites.	BHV, Policy	2026–2035
A2.18	Provide national and international leadership on science and policy to promote wetland conservation and wise use.	Policy, BHV	2026–2035

Objective 3: We work in partnership to conserve and restore wetlands

Goal 3.1: Mobilise resources and strengthen conservation action across sectors

10-year outcome (by 2035)

Partnerships with Treaty partners, regional councils, government agencies, NGOs and industry help build and leverage investment pathways and upscale wetland conservation.

Strategic direction

- ANZBS 2050 Objectives¹: 2, 3, 8, 9, 12
- BioInvest Programme: P05, P07, P26, P33

Priority actions

Action	Description	DOC lead	Timeframe
A3.1	Develop investment ready wetland projects to attract co-funding for priority sites and hotspot regions (refer to Objective 1 and Objective 2).	Public Affairs	2026
A3.2	Strengthen and embed effective partnerships at priority wetlands with mana whenua, and enhance collaboration with industry, and councils.	Operations	2026–2028
A3.3	Explore international partnership opportunities to mobilise resources.	Policy, Public Affairs	2026–2028
A3.4	Align cross agency wetland monitoring and research initiatives, including mātauranga Māori.	BHV	2026–2035
A3.5	Support environment-NGOs and community groups to accelerate wetland conservation.	BHV	2026–2035
A3.6	Build new partnerships in wetland hotspot regions to explore conservation and funding opportunities.	Operations	2028–2030
A3.7	Provide advice on enabling voluntary carbon and nature market activities on PCL, which could be used to fund wetland restoration.	Policy	2026–2030

Goal 3.2: Support others to address the most significant threats to wetlands

10-year outcome (by 2035)

Cross-sector relationships with agriculture, tourism, water use, health, climate and biodiversity, and strengthened research and policy collaboration, contribute to reducing the pressures on wetlands and improving ecosystem services, including flood and drought mitigation and climate resilience.

Strategic direction

- ANZBS 2050 Objectives¹: 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12
- BioInvest Programme: P06, P14, P20, P26, P29, P32, P33

Priority actions

Action	Description	DOC lead	Timeframe
A3.8	Improve national reporting on coastal and inland freshwater wetland extent, condition and pressures, including use of new technology.	BHV	2026–2029
A3.9	Strengthen input to national legislative and policy frameworks and plans (limits, restoration guidance, coastal wetland definitions).	Policy	2026–2030
A3.10	Partner with the agricultural sector to monitor interactions and develop sustainable land use initiatives.	BHV, Public Relations	2027–2028
A3.11	Share spatial mapping tools and catchment pressure layers to enable regional action.	BHV	2028–2030
A3.12	Work with drainage schemes to reduce effects of drainage and land subsidence while supporting community needs.	Operations	2026–2035
A3.13	Support freshwater and coastal biosecurity control programmes.	Operations	2026–2035
A3.14	Undertake research on critical threats including hydrology, climate change and sedimentation.	BHV	2026–2035
A3.15	Strengthen science relationships with councils and agriculture to address drainage, grazing, invasive species and nutrient loading.	BHV	2027–2029
A3.16	Create education resources, signage and best practice guidance to mobilise community action.	Operations, Public Affairs	2026–2028



Waituna Lagoon, Southland. Photo: DOC

Annex 3: Supporting information

- ¹ DOC (2020). Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Department of Conservation.
- ² Convention on Wetlands (2025). Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands 2025–2034. Adopted by the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (COP15), Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.
- ³ Johnson J, Gerbeaux P (2004). Wetland types of New Zealand. Department of Conservation.
- ⁴ Convention on Wetlands (2025). Global Wetland Outlook 2025: Valuing, conserving, restoring and financing wetlands. Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands, Switzerland. DOI: 10.69556.
- ⁵ MfE (2026). Our Freshwater 2026. Ministry for the Environment.
- ⁶ MfE (2025). Our Marine Environment 2025. Ministry for the Environment.
- ⁷ Pronger J, Price R, Schindler J, Robertson H, West D (2024) Estimating carbon emissions from peatland fires at Kaimaumu–Motutangi and Awarua wetlands Manaaki Whenua Contract Report: LC4517. Prepared for Department of Conservation.
- ⁸ Robertson HA (2016). Wetland reserves in New Zealand: the status of protected areas between 1990 and 2013. *New Zealand Journal of Ecology*, 40: 1–11.
- ⁹ Robertson H, Moynihan Magsig R, Blyth J, Tupuhi G, Dixon L, Sandwell D (2026). Assessment of ecological change of the Whangamarino Wetland Ramsar Site, New Zealand: Applying an integrated cultural framework to assess ecological character (health) of a Wetland of International Importance. Prepared for the Department of Conservation, February 2026.
- ¹⁰ MfE (2024). New Zealand’s Second Emissions Reduction Plan 2026–30 (Amended January 2026). Ministry for the Environment.
- ¹¹ Goodrich JP, Pronger J, Campbell DI, Glover-Clark GL, Price R, Mudge P, Wyatt J, Robertson H, Wall AM, Wheatley-Wilson A, Schipper LA (2025). Large greenhouse gas emissions from drained peatlands in New Zealand, and the climate mitigation potential of rewetting. *Mires and Peat* 32.
- ¹² DOC (2026). Action for nature: Implementation plan for Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020
- ¹³ DOC (2025). New Zealand National Report to the Convention on Wetlands, Department of Conservation.



Unique wetlands of the Taiari scroll plain,
Central Otago. Photo: Mike Goldsmith

