

# Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui

**July 2025**



# Mouri Tūroa (Ngā Tangata Tiaki o Whanganui)

Direct allocation to entity



Jobs for nature funding  
**\$7.8million**  
(2022 - 2025)



Location  
**Manawatū-Whanganui**



Employees  
**158**



Partners

**Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui, Te Papa Atawhai (DOC)**

## Project description

Four-year landscape-scale restoration project designed to mitigate soil erosion, improve freshwater quality and enhance biodiversity of Te Awa Tupua.

## Project objectives

- Building knowledge and skills amongst uri.
- Providing exposure to traditional practices in relation to land management, river health and well-being.
- Increasing insight and experience in biodiversity within hapu and across Te Awa Tupua
- Providing whānau and hapū led solutions.
- Job creation and community engagement.

## Case study purpose

The purpose of this case study is to highlight the broad social and cultural outcomes delivered by the Mouri Tūroa Kaupapa, funded through the Jobs for Nature programme. It brings together the kōrero of Mouri Tūroa to demonstrate the collective reach of the project across people, place, and practice.

**The Department of Conservation (DOC) and Verian extend their heartfelt gratitude to all kaitiaki, kaimahi, and rangatira of Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui who collaborated with us to gather kōrero and prepare this project case study. Your unique insights, thoughts, and experiences are deeply valued and considered a precious taonga.**





# Case study methodology

## Verian conducted qualitative research with Mouri Tūroa to create this case study document.

1. Verian and Mouri Tūroa's engagement began with an online hui to build whanaungatanga with staff, and consolidate a shared understanding of the research purpose, approach, and outputs.
2. Verian conducted fieldwork in June 2025

**Mouri Tūroa hosted Verian** for a site visit to Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui office and a partner nursery located at Pīwaiwaka Farm.

**Verian facilitated** kōrero with Mouri Tūroa kaimahi to understand their experiences of working for the kaupapa, with a particular emphasis on the positive outcomes of the project.

**The final case study** was drafted by Verian with support and final approval from Mouri Tūroa staff before being shared with DOC.



Kōrero within this case study is context-bound to this document and cannot be summarised independently. This case study is reflective of research participants' views only and does not encapsulate the perspectives of all Mouri Tūroa kaimahi. Throughout the case study we refer to Mouri Tūroa kaimahi as a collective for anonymity reasons, however we acknowledge that individual experiences differ across employees.

# Mouri Tūroa kaupapa origins

**The Mouri Tūroa kaupapa was established in 2021 under the guidance of Ngā Tāngata Tiaki O Whanganui (NTT) and funded via Jobs for Nature investment. Anchored in a Te Awa Tupua approach, Mouri Tūroa focus on connecting uri back to Te Awa and whenua by providing employment, education and upskilling opportunities.**

The Whanganui river catchment is Aotearoa's largest catchment in the country, covering 7,611km. Along the catchment Mouri Tūroa kaimahi operate across a vast and diverse landscape. Mouri Tūroa also support established kaimahi at place to deliver the outcomes that benefit Te Awa Tupua and uri. To do this, Mouri Tūroa engage and prioritise enhancing over 150 relationships with any and all people that have a relationship with the awa, including:

- Private land owners, Māori land owners, contractors, farmers, other conversation agencies.

**Despite the expansive whenua and it's surrounding ecosystems that Mouri Tūroa oversee, their work remains firmly grounded in a Te Awa Tupua philosophy where the oranga of the awa and its people are central to the kaupapa. Guided by this approach, Mouri Tūroa has undertaken several key mahi to date:**

- Covered over 500Ha of pest and weed control in and alongside the catchment.
- Eco-source seeds within the catchment.
- Native replanting within the wetlands, including of mānuka/kānuka, harakeke and kahikatea.
- Riparian planting of over 600,000 native plants.
- Fencing 290 km of the catchment waterways.
- Annual webinar series for Mouri Tūroa kaimahi to share findings from work undergone by Mouri Tūroa.
- Iwi-led community symposium with various stakeholders and community members.

“The Kaupapa that Mouri Tūroa sits on is very reciprocal. It's a Te Awa Tupua way of being, its all based on reciprocity and how much we can collectively give back to the awa and in turn, each other.”

# Te Whakarauora o te Taiao: A relationship based approach to restoration

**Te whakarauora o te taiao is not a short-term goal for Mouri Tūroa, it is a long-term, intergenerational commitment. Their kaupapa ensures that the restoration efforts of today are not only seen and felt now but resonate through the generations to come. By creating an ecosystem of care grounded in a Te Awa Tupua worldview, Mouri Tūroa safeguards the mana and mauri of both the awa and its people. This bespoke, whakapapa-led approach to environmental revitalization has enabled widespread and meaningful impact across whānau, hapū, Iwi, and hāpori, restoring not just the whenua, but the relationships that sustain it.**

From the outset, Mouri Tūroa has intentionally invested in kaimahi who are of and from the places they serve. By supporting and upskilling uri at-place, they have cultivated a high-trust, relationship-based model that honours the mana of each kaimahi. This approach not only strengthens local capability but also reinforces the kaupapa's long-term sustainability through the establishment of enduring infrastructure and partnerships embedded in place.

Ngā Tangata Tiaki o Whanganui (NTT) as well as Mouri Tūroa internal staff speak highly of their contractors and the relationships they hold with each kaimahi. NTT notes that shifting from an outputs-based model to one grounded in high trust, has only strengthened their collective efforts to uphold the health and wellbeing of Te Awa Tupua.

Kaimahi and contractors alike reflect on their experiences of reconnecting with their Iwi and hapū through working with Mouri Tūroa. They describe a deepened sense of respect and responsibility for their obligations to Te Awa tupua, rooted in a shared experience of living and breathing the same whenua.

“We have always operated in a Te Awa Tupua way, where the mauri of the people is the mauri of the awa and vice versa. We make decisions based on the impact it will have on the Awa in a real intentional way. We are intrinsically tied to Te Awa Tupua.”



# In the words of kaimahi...

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“Through this mahi, some of our own kaimahi and their hapū have been able to take back some of their traditional customary responsibilities to their whenua up the river. I think it shows the leadership and connection that our kaimahi have with their communities.”

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“Working with the team (Mouri Tūroa), it's given me a sense of belonging and to know that I'm working for the right people. They've got the right intentions for us and the taiao.”

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“Those who have a relationship – come and be part of the mahi that's all you need.”

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“Working with Mouri Tūroa was an opportunity for me to reconnect back to my Tūrangawaewae and my whenua.”

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“It's been awesome working with the team for the past two years, I take real pride in my mahi, I've got skin in the game you know, I live here. Especially being an uri of the awa, it's important I give back.”



# From additionalities to opportunity, and embracing their new landscape

In establishing Mouri Tūroa from the ground up, both Mouri Tūroa and Ngā Tāngata tiaki kaimahi have proven their ability to manage unexpected challenges, or ‘additionalities’, with mana.

Their grounded, people-first approach has supported them in meeting their contractual expectations outlined in the JFN investment, while also contributing to an impact that has extended beyond its original scope.

These impacts have extended across **relational, geographical, sectorial, and cultural dimensions**. One powerful example is the creation of **a shared GIS-based map of the catchment**. Recognising the scale of the catchment and the diversity of stakeholders involved, Mouri Tūroa facilitated a forum that brought these groups together. Through their deep local knowledge and trusted relationships, they were able to facilitate a process that identified gaps and opportunities across the catchment, enabling more coordinated and collective restoration efforts.

Mouri Tūroa has embraced other challenges they have encountered along their journey. With a deep commitment to Te Awa Tupua, these were met as opportunities, to further strengthen their collective impact:

- **Liaising with Māori land courts** to bring landowners together, navigating complex ownership dynamics with sensitivity and care.
- **Facilitating conversations between landowners and contractors**, unlocking co-funding opportunities while reducing administrative burdens on landowners.
- **Identifying the need for stock watering systems** and working closely with landowners to co-design plans that protect and enhance waterways.
- **Bridging capability and capacity gaps** by supporting training and small business development for local contractors, ensuring those working for Te Awa Tupua are equipped to thrive.

“All these additional things that have occurred as a result of us beginning this mahi. One of them was that we see all these people coming into the catchment investing but not talking together, so we saw that as an opportunity to come together to understand what is everybody doing and that included creating a shared map on GIS. Which was a first. because extracting data from others isn’t always easy – they see that patch protection over data is important, but we were able to do it and find the gaps. That was initially through this process but it’s from us [Ngā Tāngata Tiaki/Mouri Tūroa kaimahi, understanding and knowing what else needs to occur on our whenua.”

*\*Mouri Tūroa kaimahi use the term 'additionalities' to describe the unanticipated tasks and situations that emerged organically through the course of this mahi.*



## In the words of kaimahi...



“One of the benefits is you become visible on the landscape and that visibility means we can contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of our whenua, so that by association we can improve the health and wellbeing of our awa. Being an active player in that is a restoration of mana and mana Motuhake.”



“More importantly, for Te Awa Tupua, it’s a process of inclusion, so we’re working as a collective with people who live on the land and alongside the awa to improve the health and wellbeing, and that’s really the essence of what Te Awa Tupua is all about. It’s a collective way of being and recognising everybody who lives alongside the river has a role and a responsibility, and these funds helped us to work with them to do that.”



“There’s a real gap in managing whenua Māori for us here, because you’ll have whenua on one side that has an administration and a trust on it, but right next door you have whenua Māori that doesn’t have a trust or support on it. But in order to protect that piece of the Awa, you need to do that whole stretch. So that’s meant that we’ve had to go to the Māori land courts and various other entities so that the mahi could continue. That’s just another example of how our kaimahi just get on with it, because they know it benefits the Awa.”

# Weaving ecosystems of care around Te Awa Tupua and her people

Mouri Tūroa has taken a deliberate and long-term approach to cultivating ecosystems of care that uphold the mana and mauri of Te Awa Tupua. Rather than working in isolation or within rigid sector boundaries, they have woven together a diverse network of relationships across the catchment, grounded in shared purpose, reciprocity, and place-based action.

A few key examples of this are their partnerships with **The Learning Environment** at Pīwaiwaka Farm Nursery, **Maungaroa, Ngā Hau e Whā** and **Waiatara Nurseries**. Over time Mouri Tūroa have provided iterations of funding to support an initiative centered on personal, community, and environmental wellbeing, with a particular focus on rangatahi. This collaboration supports native plant propagation and planting, pest and weed control, and a thriving community māra that hosts regular harvest festivals where people gather to harvest fresh produce grown and nurtured by local kaimahi.

These are just a few threads in a much wider ecosystem. Mouri Tūroa also maintains active relationships with a range of community-led initiatives throughout the catchment.

These partnerships are not transactional, they are enduring, people-first relationships that allow Mouri Tūroa to respond flexibly and effectively to the needs of the awa and its communities. Whether the task is ecological restoration, kai sovereignty, or knowledge sharing, Mouri Tūroa can draw on trusted, place-based relationships to get the mahi done in a sustainable and regenerative way.

At the heart of this approach is a commitment to **inclusivity and collective impact**. By working across sectors, beliefs, and communities, Mouri Tūroa is a key contributor in restoring not just the physical health of the awa, but the social and cultural systems that sustains it.





## In the words of kaimahi...

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“We created an annual conference to share some of the learnings back with the people and for them to share what they’re doing. We intentionally had a day just for the people. The first day was for us internally to share our learnings with our people and the second day was for government agencies and Ngo’s and that got Mouri Tūroa a lot of leverage, which was awesome.”

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“There was a lot of noise about Mouri Tūroa from the get-go, I think people were intrigued by it because of the sheer size of the catchment. And the team have set themselves up really well, it’s enabled them to have actual grass-roots action and supported their community in a tangible way. They really do go above and beyond for this mahi.”

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“Some of the lands that bordered the whenua we were responsible for, were DOC owned lands and they didn’t have adequate pest management on them, the pest encroachment was coming from DOC managed land to our land, so in this instance we were able to support the local DOC offices in securing additional funds to get better pest management, because their budget had been cut or reduced. So even there, we’re encouraging a collective approach.”





# He Ara ako: A journey of growth, learnings and reconnection.

Mouri Tūroa kaimahi are proud of how much they have learnt, grown, and adapted throughout their journey with the Jobs for Nature programme. For many, this kaupapa has been more than a restoration project, it has been a deeply personal reconnection to Te Awa Tupua, and a chance to grow in ways that whakamana their own kawa and tikanga as uri of the awa.

Over the course of the contract, kaimahi have not only built meaningful relationships but have also reclaimed their ability to exercise mana motuhake over their people, lands, and awa. This kaupapa has created space for them to lead with intention, grounded in their own values and lived experience.

Mouri Tūroa and Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui kaimahi continue to be guided by their rich connection to pūrākau, taonga tuku iho, and the traditional practices that once thrived along the river.

Their work is anchored in an intergenerational vision. One that seeks to restore not only the health of the environment, but also the cultural practices and relationships that sustain it.

As they look to the future, Mouri Tūroa remains firmly committed to restoring oranga to the awa and its people. Guided by **Tupua te Kawa**, they aspire to continue this journey of reconnection, bringing people home to their tūrangawaewae, so that the whenua, the awa, and the communities who live alongside them can thrive together.

“This Kaupapa doesn’t stop once the funding stops. This is just part of being Uri to the awa. We want to build our wealth and health, so that we can all thrive. Mauri ora, mauri awa, mauri tāngata.”

# Delivering on the kaupapa

| 01  | 02   | 03  | 04  | 05   |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Building knowledge and skills amongst uri.</b></p> <p>Mouri Tūroa has upskilled kaimahi through employment opportunities, access to learning forums, fostering a sense of pride and leadership over their mahi and a strong sense of identity. Kaimahi have grown in capability and confidence, supported by a high trust, place-based model.</p> | <p><b>Providing exposure to traditional practices in relation to land management, river health, and well-being.</b></p> <p>The kaupapa has reconnected kaimahi with customary responsibilities and traditional mātauranga. Kaimahi described their work as a return to their tūrangawaewae and a way to uphold Tupua te kawa. The project's grounding in Te Awa Tupua philosophy ensures that environmental decisions are made with intentionality and reciprocity, restoring the mauri of the awa and the people.</p> | <p><b>Increasing insight and experience in biodiversity within hapū and across Te Awa Tupua.</b></p> <p>Through large scale restoration efforts, such as riparian planting of over 600,000 native plants, pest control, and fencing, kaimahi gain hands-on biodiversity experience. Partnerships with nurseries and community organisations further enrich their knowledge around ecological practices.</p> | <p><b>Providing whānau and hapū led solutions.</b></p> <p>The projects success lies in it's people-first, whakapapa-led approach. Mouri Tūroa has supported hapū-led solutions by supporting local leadership, navigating Māori land court processes, and co-designed land management plans with stakeholders alongside the awa. Their relational approach ensure solutions are grounded in community need and tikanga.</p> | <p><b>Job creation and community engagement.</b></p> <p>With 158 jobs created, the project has delivered tangible economic and social benefits. Beyond job creation, the kaupapa has fostered deep community engagement through their collective restoration efforts. Kaimahi describe feeling visible and valued in their roles, actively contributing to the health of the whenua, awa and its people.</p> |

# Ngā mihi



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