If you love the coast, love fishing and love nature, you’ll already appreciate the importance of the Tairua Harbour and Catchment Management Plan. Have you thought about the opportunities that it holds for working with us to make our harbour healthier?

As your new harbour and catchment management co-ordinator, I will be working with the community and other members of the Waikato Regional Council team putting into action the work identified so far through this plan.

We’ve gathered a large amount of information on this special place and I want to hear your ideas on ways we can work together and continue to bring it to life. Many people have already registered as volunteers for the mangrove removal work in Tairua Harbour, but this plan is about more than just mangroves and you may have other initiatives in mind.

Estuaries are some of the most sensitive and diverse coastal areas within the Coromandel and greater Waikato. They’re a spawning and nursery area for many species of fish, support birds and other estuarine animals, and most people in Tairua and Pauanui have a strong connection to these, the harbour, and the streams and rivers that feed into it.

Read on to find out about some of the great work that’s happening, and how you can muck in with us or how we can contribute our knowledge and skills to your community group or patch of paradise. Please feel free to call me. I am here to work with you!

Kind regards

Alison Smith
Harbour and Catchment Management Co-ordinator

Bright green coastal weed that’s tough to kill

In May this year we’ll begin carrying out control of a nasty invader of the Tairua Harbour – saltwater paspalum.

Just like the paspalum that gets into your lawn, saltwater paspalum is an invasive type of grass. It spreads very quickly, smothering native plant species in the process. Wading birds have trouble accessing feeding and roosting sites through it, fish spawning and feeding grounds are affected, and its growth restricts the flow of water which can contribute to localised flooding. Brought to New Zealand as a hardy grass for golf courses, saltwater paspalum is salt tolerant with a waxy texture and bright green colour that merges into our reserves. In harbours it can also grow as a dense island, where it may be darker in colour.

Saltwater paspalum is a significant threat to our estuarine ecology and it’s growing at a rate of knots. Its roots are dense and so tough that it cannot be pulled out by hand. Mechanical removal would be virtually impossible and very expensive and any pieces of the plant that break off would then easily be taken away with the tide to re-establish elsewhere.

On the Coromandel we’re learning a lot about how to best control this weed using herbicide, and have been identifying where to concentrate our efforts.

Under a resource consent, we’ve been using a selective herbicide that kills only the saltwater paspalum and leaves behind the native plants which can then re-establish. However this weed has grown back up to four times using this particular herbicide, so we’re working with ecological experts to trial the use of a different herbicide that will eradicate this weed more quickly and thoroughly and give the native plants a chance to grow back from seed without competition from saltwater paspalum.

Saltwater paspalum is particularly bad in Tairua and we’ll concentrate eradication efforts at Oturu Stream (near Green Point) and around the Graham’s Creek area.

For more on saltwater paspalum and what we’re doing to eradicate it, please call or email Alison Smith on 07 866 0172 or at alison.smith@waikatoregion.govt.nz.

Funding available

Since 2004 we’ve helped Coromandel landowners plant 100,000 native trees, fence 140 kilometres of stream and forest fragments, and restore and retire 810 hectares of land.

We’re currently working with eight landowners in the Tairua catchment who have received funding from us to carry out this type of work. And we still have funding available to help others.

If you’d like to know how we can help you, please contact Andy Wills in the Whitianga office on 07 866 0172.
Sandy feet or muddy boots: Sediment in our harbour

There’s widespread concern over the silting up of our estuaries and the effect this is having on water quality, shellfish, mangrove growth, and recreational use of the harbour.

At Waikato Regional Council we’ve been investigating this sedimentation and taking an even closer look at sediments in Tairua Harbour for use as a case study and to help us identify priority work and hot spots.

It was the widespread forest clearance on the Coromandel from the mid-1800s that seriously exacerbated rates of sediment infilling into Coromandel estuaries – by at least 10 to 30 times – and adding an estimated 25-30cm of sediment to the Tairua estuary.

The average infilling means the estuary essentially aged by 3000-4000 years in less than 150 years, likely to be the primary cause of the widespread expansion of mangroves in Tairua and many Coromandel harbours in recent decades.

In Tairua, comparisons of bed level surveys done in 1982-83 and in 2009 suggest that very rapid infilling is no longer occurring, as we’ve focused efforts on catchment management and returned the forest and scrubland cover over some 80 per cent of the catchment. However, rates of infilling are still likely to be higher than the very slow rates that occurred in pre-human times, so there’s still work to be done.

The upper harbour is also very dynamic and the position of channels and banks change over time, so users of this area will notice quite significant changes over time. It is important to appreciate that these changes are associated with movement of channels and banks rather than net infilling.

It is also clear that natural ecosystems such as the catchment, floodplains and wetlands play an important role in reducing sedimentation. Protection and restoration of these ecosystems will be critical to ongoing management. Council will be looking at priority work to continue to improve management of sedimentation in Tairua and other Coromandel harbours.

To find out more about sedimentation and the work we’re doing, contact our harbour and catchment co-ordinator Alison Smith on 07 866 0172 or at alison.smith@waikatoregion.govt.nz.

Hikuawai Ti Kouka Grove restoration

Running along a 2.2km stretch of the lower Tairua River between Hikuai and Woody streams, Hikuawai Ti Kouka Grove contains one of the region’s last remaining cabbage tree forests. Over the last two years our council, Thames-Coromandel District Council and local iwi Ngati Hei have been working together, along with residents from both Hikuai and Tairua, to remove and control weeds, plant native vegetation and re-grass cleared areas.

Last year we planted another 1200 native wetland plants along the riverside and carried out predator control to protect bird life. A mulch head on a digger was used to mulch a further 2.5 hectare area of privet, blackberry, convolvulus and Japanese honeysuckle. Other weeds were controlled selectively in the ungrassed areas to allow monocot species including grasses and cabbage trees to flourish.

For more information

For more information or to get involved in work identified through the Tairua Harbour and Catchment Management Plan, call Waikato Regional Council’s freephone 0800 800 401 and ask for Alison Smith.

Oturu wetland restoration

The Oturu sub-catchment area was identified in the Tairua Harbour and Catchment Management Plan as an area of potential restoration and was further investigated in the development of the Tairua coastal vegetation management programme, which includes mangrove control.

The Oturu wetland area is a 30 hectare section of the upper Tairua Harbour. The habitat is made up of large areas of saltmarsh, mangroves and small pockets of regenerating native coastal vegetation comprising of flaxes, cabbage trees, manuka, and mapou. The coastal wetland area provides habitat for a range of threatened bird species including North Island fernbird, Australasian bittern and banded rail. This area is ecologically and recreationally significant.

Over the last year we have controlled a number of weeds at the site including wattle, pampas, privet, blackberry and wilding pines. Five hundred native wetland plants were also planted at the site. You may have noticed the change when driving along state highway 25 around the Oturu stream bridge. In the coming year we are looking at carrying out further planting and weed control including controlling the saltwater paspalum at the site.

Mangrove removal: Are you keen to lend a hand?

Join us and other volunteers for the removal of some of the 21.8 hectares of juvenile and mature mangroves covered in the coastal consent we have been granted for the Tairua area.

In the first stage of clearance, we’ll be working directly with the school on the mangroves outside their patch. We also have a keen group of volunteers to help with work around the Grahams Creek inlet on 15 and 16 February, and Pepe Stream inlet on 1 and 2 March, but the more hands we get the less time it will take to get the job done.

In addition to this work, contractors will be clearing around 2 hectares on the Pauanui side of the harbour. We’ll also be clearing mangroves in the mid harbour, but that work will be done in two stages later this year and in 2015.

If you’re keen to get involved, and haven’t already registered your interest, please email jordan.downes@waikatoregion.govt.nz or call 07 862 8376.

Elia Cleary-Morgan (left) and Stella Cory-Wright at the Tairua outdoor classroom where mangrove removal and other restoration will occur.