

# 6 How to set up a Landcare Group.

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## Five good reasons to set up a Landcare Group.

### 1. Land management issues don't respect property boundaries.

Caring for the land and our natural resources often requires community participation. If you have a problem, it's highly likely your neighbours will share a similar problem. Weed seeds blow across property boundaries, erosion prone gullies cut through boundary fences and streams flow across multiple properties in a catchment. Landcare Groups encourage neighbours to work together to overcome common problems.

### 2. Landcare Groups come in all shapes and sizes.

There are no set rules about what a Landcare group should look like. Each Group decides on its own focus and activities, and can be as big or small as it needs to be.

### 3. Landcare Groups are a proven successful approach to local land management issues.

Experience has shown that the group approach achieves better results than individuals working alone. Sharing information leads to an improved understanding of both problems and solutions. Groups often have access to a wider range of advice and financial support making them more effective than the individual working in isolation.

### 4. Landcare Groups involve local people dealing with local issues.

Setting up a Landcare Group is not just about trying to solve complex, large-scale environmental issues. Many Groups find sharing knowledge and resources, learning new things and social aspects of Landcare are important for the community and a good reason to be involved.

### 5. Landcare Groups develop practical solutions that make a difference – 'action on the ground.'

Real solutions to land and water degradation problems need to be both profitable and sustainable. Landowners working together to address local problems will ensure that management solutions are practical and fit together with production objectives whenever possible. Adopting a proactive approach ensures landowners and local communities maintain control of what happens in their own 'back yard,' with expert advice called upon when needed.



# Getting started.

If you're thinking about starting a Landcare Group in your area, there are a few key steps you might like to follow to help get things off the ground. The steps below are a guide only, as all groups and communities are different.

## Identify the issue.

Start by getting clear in your own head what the issue or problem is. From there, it's important to get a feel for what others in the community think. Talk to a range of local people to see if they share your view and are interested in taking action – for example, landowners, farm discussion groups, local businesses, schools, your regional council, your district council, Federated Farmers, DOC, forest managers, local hapu. Think about who's likely to have an interest in the issue, who might be affected by any actions and what agencies might have a legal responsibility or interest in the issue. This will also help you check that there aren't any other groups in the area already looking at the matter.

## Get together.

Once you feel there is enough interest in the idea, hold a 'get together' to discuss everyone's ideas. This could be as informal as a gathering of neighbours around your kitchen table or could involve a formal public meeting in the local hall chaired by a council or Landcare Trust staff member.

The main purpose of a first meeting should be to:

- Bring together people who are interested in the issue or problem
- Allow for discussion about the issue or problem
- Confirm whether the project is a 'goer' for a community effort
- Identify the next steps, which may include getting commitment to form a Group  
*(from DOC 2003)*

It will be important to write down the ideas discussed and to agree on the next steps by the end of the meeting. This might be as simple as agreeing that you want to form a group or could go as far as setting some goals for action on agreed key issues. Don't forget to pass round paper for people to add their name and contact details to help you organise the next meeting.



### Top tip.

It can be helpful to have someone from an existing Landcare Group come along to share their experience.



### Top tip.

Get actively involved 'on the ground' at an early stage. This helps build on the initial enthusiasm and encourages people to stick with the project.



# Working out your Group structure.

There are no hard and fast rules about how a successful Group should be structured. The approach your Group chooses may depend on:

- The level of commitment available to run a formal group
- Whether you need to formalise project detail in a constitution or similar
- The amount of funding needed for your planned action and possible sources for that funding – many funding organisations require groups to be a legal entity to show financial accountability

Groups can be informal, with members sharing the coordination role and teams established for discrete tasks. Alternatively Groups can choose to be formal, with assigned roles, such as treasurer, secretary, chairperson and a committee.



## Top tip.

Both formal and informal structures can work successfully, although a more formal approach can improve your eligibility to access funds and grants.



## Formal Groups.

Roles in a more formal Group structure will generally include:

- Chairperson – represents the group (spokesperson), chairs meetings and ensures everyone has their say
- Secretary – takes minutes, deals with all correspondence and may circulate minutes or send out an agenda before the meeting
- Treasurer – handles the financial side of the group's operation

Other members may be given designated roles, for example, publicity officer, fundraising coordinator, volunteer coordinator.

If your Group is taking on a large-scale project and needs to be established as a legal entity, you will need to form either an incorporated society or a charitable trust. Both structures can obtain charitable status with the IRD for tax purposes and both are able to employ people, receive grants and enter into contracts.

An incorporated society requires a minimum of 15 members and key decisions are made by members at general meetings and in committee. There is a fee of \$100 to establish an incorporated society, which can be either charitable or work for profit. You must be registered with the Companies Office, who will require annual financial accounts.

A charitable trust requires a board of trustees of at least two people, which makes the key decisions. Trustees are appointed or elected for a fixed term. There is no establishment fee and annual accounts are not required by the Companies Office. However, you must satisfy the Charities Commission that the main purpose of the trust is charitable.

While becoming a legal entity means more administration work and incurs a cost to audit accounts, it means group members are not personally liable if the group gets into financial difficulty. It also enables a group to hold assets and enter into contracts if need be.

## Informal Groups.

For some groups, a formal structure at the outset isn't appropriate because projects are small scale, administrative resources are limited or members simply aren't ready to go down that path. There will still be some funding and support available to groups without legal status. An alternative option to help access more significant funding is to negotiate with an existing legal group or agency to handle the funding aspects.

For more information about the common structures available to community groups and for help with deciding what will best suit your group, check out the links on our website at [www.landcare.org.nz/landcareguide/](http://www.landcare.org.nz/landcareguide/).

Other administrative areas that your group may need to consider include the need for membership fees, any OSH implications of particular projects, and what kind of processes you'd like to use to run your meetings.

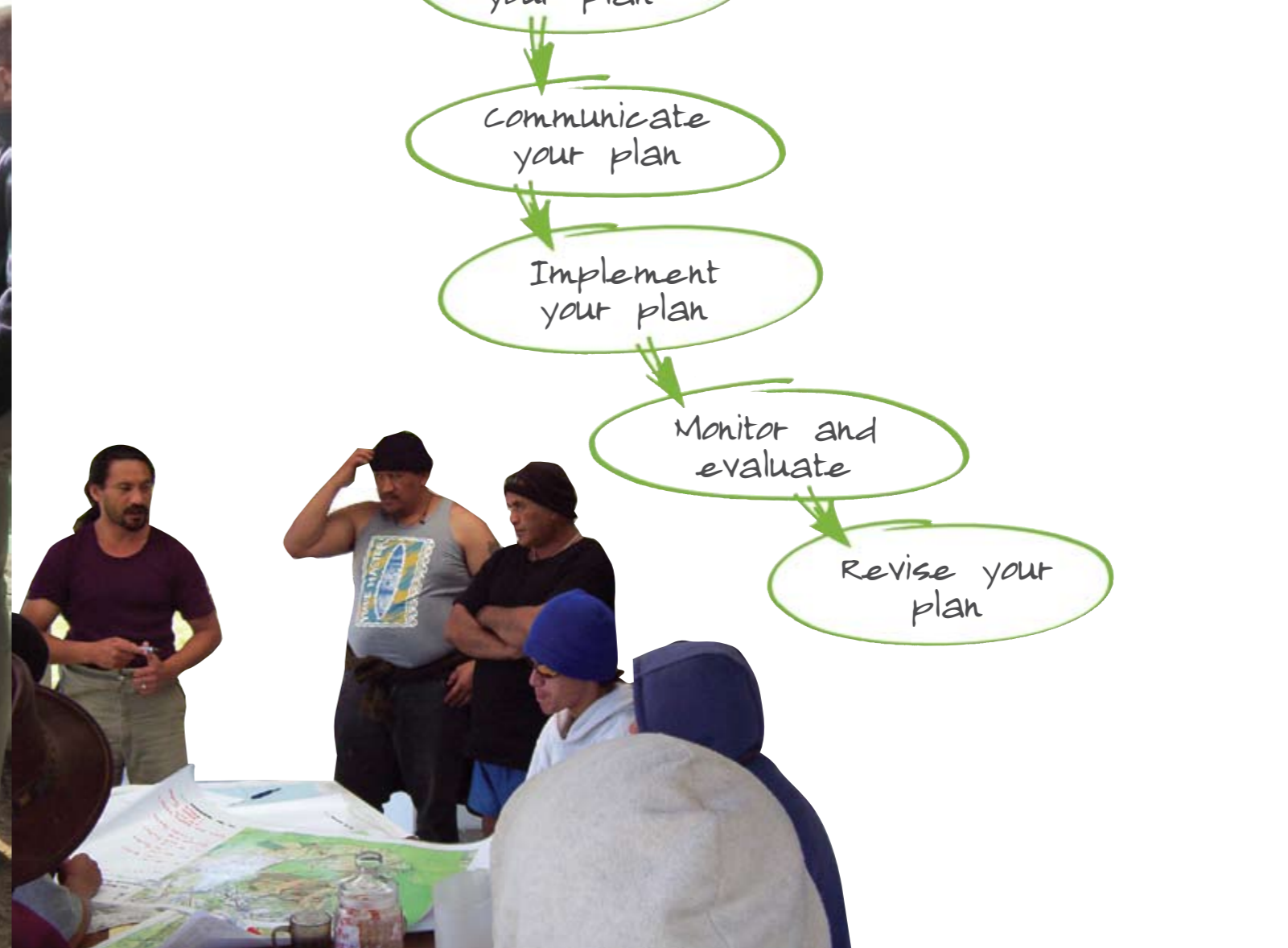
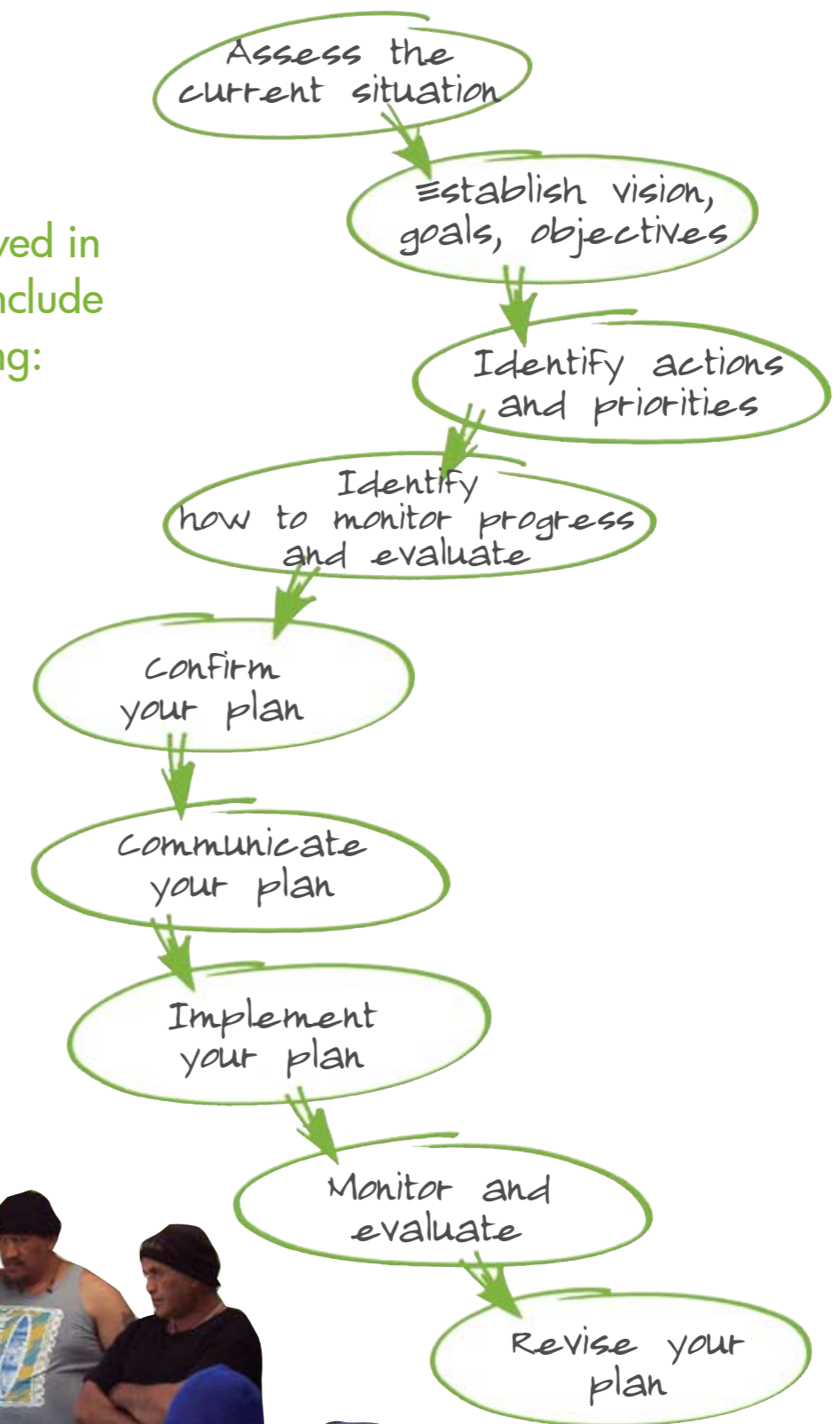
# Hatching a plan.

Good planning from the start will mean that your Group's activities have a much greater chance of being effective. It also helps everyone to be clear on what's happening and why. Preparing a plan of action is an excellent place to start and it doesn't need to be a lengthy document.

A good action plan should include:

- The results you want (your vision, goals, objectives)
- Actions that will be taken and what needs to be done first (priorities)
- What resources are required and how resources will be provided
- Who will take which roles and responsibilities
- How coordination, communication and decision-making will take place
- Time lines
- How progress will be monitored

Steps involved in planning include the following:



## Maintaining momentum.

### Take some concrete action.

Once your Group has decided on a structure, has agreed some goals and established a plan, it's time to put things into action. Having a clearly defined task to work on at the outset will help the Group come together and will keep everyone's interest high. Start with something simple that is easily achievable to build the Group's confidence – there is nothing like a sense of shared achievement to motivate people.



### Top tip.

Include a social component like a shared lunch or a BBQ to help celebrate what you achieve.

### Keep up motivation and enthusiasm.

The success of your Group will come down to how well you work together. Consider the following ideas to help ensure your Group maintains enthusiasm and continues to enjoy the work:

- Make sure your group maintains regular communication – agree as a group how you will communicate, e.g. telephone tree, reports at regular meetings with clear records of who's doing what and by when, circulating minutes to all members, newsletters etc.
- Make sure everyone in the Group is involved in planning and decision-making to maintain a sense of ownership and purpose.
- Share the workload amongst as many people as possible to avoid a few people doing all the work and burning out. Find out about the different skills and interests of Group members and encourage people to use these to support the Group. Try to keep all tasks manageable and realistic and don't forget to build in rewards, which can be as simple as a cake for morning tea.
- Fielddays and workshops provide an excellent opportunity to share information. Why not invite experts such as scientists to come along and answer questions?
- Deal with any conflict as it arises – this is an inevitable part of working together but can be managed constructively by acknowledging all points of view and looking for win-win solutions.
- Celebrate achievements – everyone likes to know they are appreciated and to celebrate the results of hard work. Individual acknowledgements are important, as are social events and positive publicity.
- Reflect on how your Group is doing and take time to learn from your experiences. This doesn't have to be an arduous process and can involve the Group discussing simple questions such as “what's working well?”, “what isn't working so well?” and “what could we be doing differently?”



### Running events and workshops.

At some point your Group might decide to run an event. Events come in all shapes and sizes and can include farm walks, field days, a working bee, a public meeting or a fundraising activity. You might like to consider running an event together with one or more partner groups or agencies if there is a common interest or you need help with resources.

It's helpful to consider the following points when planning an event:

- Be very clear within your Group what the purpose of the event is and who your audience is – these will be the key influences in how you design and run the event
- Check if you need permission to hold the event.
- Make sure you have a venue or environment suitable to the event
- Ensure conditions are safe and comfortable
- Make sure you have suitable funding and resources for what you want to achieve
- Consider the need for publicity and reporting
- Make sure you have enough people power to plan the event well and to manage it on the day

It's a good idea to assign one person within your team to be the event coordinator – someone who keeps track of the big picture and makes sure all the aspects of the event come together on the day. Develop a task list and timeline together as a group and make sure tasks are allocated to a number of people. One person can't do it all! The event coordinator can then keep track of how each task is progressing.

If there are costs associated with your event, it will be important to set a clear budget that everyone in the Group is aware of. Make sure you check actual costs against your budget as you go, so you don't overspend.

A key part of running an event is letting your audience know it's on. Before you set a date, check for any clashes with other local events that might involve your audience. Once you have a date, you might choose to develop a specific invite list and contact key people individually. Alongside this, wider promotion using local media is a good idea, as well as putting posters and flyers targeted to your audience in local shop windows, halls and on notice boards. For more information about working with the media, see the following section.

It is also prudent to think about risk management for your event. Consider what could go wrong, what you could do to minimise this risk and what you will do if something does happen. It's always better to be prepared for unplanned situations when the safety of others is involved.

At the end of the day, don't forget to acknowledge the effort people have put in to an event. It can also be useful to reflect on how the day went. This can include checking in with participants to get their feedback on positives, negatives and what could be done differently next time.



### Keeping others informed and dealing with the media.

Once your Group is up and running, make sure you inform the local NZ Landcare Trust Regional Coordinator (for contact details check out [www.landcare.org.nz/contact-us/](http://www.landcare.org.nz/contact-us/)), local councils and any other agencies that might have an interest in what you are doing. This will help you keep informed about what's happening in your area, including any training, events, support or grant opportunities.

Don't be afraid to involve the local radio station and newspapers in the promotion and reporting of your group activities. The media love feel-good stories involving local people and are often happy to help publicise Landcare Groups. Effective media liaison will help you gain support from funding bodies, corporate partners and volunteers.

It's a good idea to choose one person from your Group to be your media spokesperson. Ideally this will be someone who speaks well in public, can respond quickly and succinctly to questions and has good knowledge about what your Group is doing. Your spokesperson can then introduce themselves to the editor, environmental or rural journalist at your local newspaper and/or radio station and let them know about your Group and any plans and projects. Over time, your spokesperson can feed these media contacts information and photos about progress with projects and invite them to any events the Group might run.

Posters and displays in local public places are also a good way to encourage new members and promote what you are doing in your community.



# Examples of how Landcare Groups form.

Landcare Groups can be any size, from two or three individuals upwards. The scale and structure of a group is determined by the issues being addressed, the geographical coverage and the number of people willing to get involved. The follow examples help explain how this works in practice.

## Formation of small Landcare Group.

Smaller Groups can sometimes be made up of only 2 or 3 people but it is more usual to have somewhere in the region of 10 active members. They might simply be neighbours who have a shared interest in an area of bush located on private land. In many such cases the focal point will be the protection of native flora and fauna or a desire to clean up a creek. This in turn drives them to find out more. Where should they start? Is funding available? Who can help? The more support a group can get the more likely it is to succeed. NZ Landcare Trust can answer these questions and help identify other key agencies who can be of further assistance.

The Tuamarina-Blind Creek Landcare Group in Marlborough formed when a group of neighbours got together to re-plant the margins of the stream near their homes. The idea was to improve the habitat and establish an ecological corridor for tui and other birdlife. A three stage plan over 6-9 years was identified. The small group of 3-5 neighbours holds regular weeding days and calls on Outward Bound for support with these events.

The formation of a small Landcare Group is often a good way to give structure to the project and help its continued development and success. Smaller Landcare Groups sometimes require lots of help during the first year. With growing experience comes greater independence and the involvement of NZ Landcare Trust reduces.

## Formation of a medium Landcare Group.

Some smaller landcare groups find that they have a complementary interest in a given land area and on that basis they get together and form a larger entity. This was the case with the Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum.

Whangarei Heads has high biodiversity values including a rare coastal forest, a population of Northland Brown Kiwi and other threatened species. However this was under threat from invasive weeds and animal pests. A mosaic of habitats within the 6000 ha of the Heads reflects a varied land use with large scale sheep/beef farms, dairy farms, lifestyle blocks and coastal settlements. All are complemented with a community that is passionate about caring for what is in its backyard.

Small informal Groups 'sprang up' with the assistance of NZ Landcare Trust. They started looking at the active management required, such as possum control, establishing community nurseries, rat trap lines, fencing and revegetation projects. Although separated in some cases by only a few kilometres each project was essentially stand-alone. Helen Moodie, NZ Landcare Trust Regional Coordinator began to organise opportunities for the various Groups to come together and share ideas. It didn't take long before these 'forums' forged a strong link between the separate Groups.

One of the Landcare Groups found the absence of a legal status limited its opportunities to gain funding, so Papakarahi Landcare Group Incorporated Society was born. With this formation of a legal entity came the compliance costs of auditing, minute taking and establishment of a bank account. As other Groups started considering taking similar steps the potential for needless duplication became obvious. Following the needs of the constitution and requirements of the Companies Office, the Papakarahi Landcare Group (Inc) underwent a review of its constitution and a name change to become the Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum (inc).

## Formation of a large Landcare Group.

Large formal Groups are usually the product of geographically large or complex issues. The Upper Taieri Project provides a good example of how such a Group forms.

The Upper Taieri catchment in Central Otago receives between 350 and 450mm of rainfall a year. This rainfall feeds the Taieri River which services around 150 irrigators. The river is also a highly valued trout fishery, home to several rare native fish and adjoins the popular tourist destination, the Central Otago Rail Trail. Water allocation is managed through a diverse mix of scheme shares, individual RMA consents and a historical system of 'Mining Rights'.

Historically there had been a lot of friction around competition for water. More recently mining right holders became aware of the need to reapportion water amongst themselves in the modern day policy setting. However, they were not sure how to go about uniting the community in discussing this once taboo subject. A setting of fear of the unknown and awareness of a need for a community voice sparked the formation of the multi-stakeholder Upper Taieri Group.

In 2006 Chairman of the Maniototo Irrigation Company Geoff Crutchley sparked community discussion around the advantages of wide community involvement in determining a fair water allocation model. Local authority support for the idea was followed by a series of stakeholder meetings facilitated by NZ Landcare Trust Project Coordinator Gretchen Robertson. The Trust's involvement continued with a successful grant application to the Sustainable Farming Fund.

A public meeting was held to nominate representatives for the Upper Taieri Water Resource Management Group. At least one representative from each of the 5 Upper Taieri irrigation sub-catchments was nominated along with representatives from Fish & Game, Department of Conservation, Otago Regional Council and Central Otago District Council. Attendees developed an innovative vision for a community self management model and also supported an open door policy to attendance at the Group's future meetings.

