

Community & Environment Committee

12 March 2026

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [5]

Department: Strategy & Policy

Title | Taitara: Endorsement of the Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement of the Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan (CAP) and to approve the appointment of a Councillor representative to the Upper Lakes Catchment Governance group.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Community & Environment Committee:

1. **Note** the contents of this report; and
2. **Endorse** the Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan; and
3. **Recommend to Council** the appointment of Councillors Jon Mitchell and Niki Gladding as QLDC Elected Member representatives on the Upper Lakes Catchment Governance Group.

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Context | Horopaki

1. The Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan (CAP) is an action plan that has been developed through the Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) Programme lead by Otago Regional Council. The Upper Lakes area was selected in August 2023 as the second catchment to undergo this collaborative planning process.
2. The Upper Lakes Integrated Catchment Group (ICG) was established in August 2024 to co-develop the CAP over a 12 month period. This has involved holding three hui, six workshops and two public online surveys.
3. The CAP has a 10-year horizon (2025-2035), with an initial focus on prioritised actions over the first three to five years. Spatially, it aligns with the Queenstown Lakes District boundary and includes the Upper Lakes and associated rivers, wetlands, aquifers, productive land, and urban environments. The plan is non-regulatory in nature and does not introduce new rules or compliance requirements. Instead, it provides a shared framework to align, coordinate and support the work already being undertaken by mana whenua, community groups, landholders, agencies and industry.
4. The CAP is community owned and led, non regulatory and designed to be a living plan. It has been developed collaboratively by the Upper Lakes Integrated Catchment Group, comprising of mana whenua, community representatives, local agencies and ORC. This collaborative approach ensures the CAP is grounded in local knowledge, mātauraka Māori, science, and lived experience.
5. The plan aligns with existing community conservation and catchment initiatives and is designed to support coordinated action rather than duplicate existing efforts. The CAP was endorsed by Otago Regional Council on the 25th September 2025.
6. Delivery of actions will be led by mana whenua, community and catchment groups, agencies, landholders and industry partners, supported by council technical expertise and alignment with existing work programmes. The plan recognises the significant contribution of volunteers and community-led initiatives and seeks to support and scale this effort.

Details of the CAP

7. The CAP is underpinned by a strong values framework that recognises the interconnectedness of land, water, biodiversity and people, expressed through the principle “ki uta ki tai” (from mountains to sea). Cultural and community values include waimāori (freshwater health), mahika kai, taoka species, recreation, tourism, sustainable agriculture, scenic landscapes, and community wellbeing. Environmental values span alpine and subalpine systems, beech forest, tussock grasslands, shrublands, rivers, lakes, wetlands, naturally uncommon ecosystems, productive land and urban environments.



Figure 1: Display of the environmental, cultural, and community values identified by the Upper Lakes ICG alongside pre-existing community plans

8. The CAP aligns with, and supports existing community action. It includes the following components:
 - i. 2075 vision for the Upper Lakes Catchment area
 - ii. ICG mission statement
 - iii. Cultural and community values
 - iv. Environmental values
 - v. Environmental health goals
 - vi. Pressure reduction objectives
 - vii. Four programmes (foundational programme, native wildlife programme, native vegetation programme, freshwater programme)
 - viii. Thirteen strategies (within the four programmes)
 - ix. Initial action plan (first 3-5 years) for each strategy
 - x. Monitoring framework

9. The CAP translates its goals into a practical action framework comprising of 13 integrated strategies, grouped across four programmes: 1) foundational, 2) native wildlife, 3) native vegetation and 4) freshwater. The foundational strategies focus on enabling success across all other actions and include securing long-term and diverse funding, improving science and knowledge sharing, strengthening mana whenua partnerships, and improving environmental conditions for mahika kai.

Wider Community Input

10. Wider community input into the Upper Lakes CAP was gathered primarily through two public online surveys and ongoing engagement opportunities.
11. The first survey (61 responses) sought feedback midway through the process on the proposed mission, values, pressures and environmental health goals. The second survey (118 responses) focused on the draft strategies and initial actions. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement and provide written comments. Feedback highlighted strong support for protecting water quality and ecosystems, the importance of visible on-the-ground action, and the need for adequate resourcing and robust monitoring.
12. The CAP will continue to be open for community input via the Upper Lakes Hub, with opportunities for involvement in implementation through existing catchment, conservation and community groups.

Governance, Monitoring and Reporting

13. The Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan Governance Group has been established to oversee and support delivery of the CAP over its ten year timeframe. As set out in the draft Terms of Reference, the Governance Group provides strategic direction, prioritises strategies and actions, supports the establishment of delivery sub groups, monitors progress, and participates in the 18 month health check and five year review processes.
14. The Governance Group is not a formal decision making committee under the Local Government Act 2002. Rather, it operates as a collaborative oversight and coordination body to support collective implementation by mana whenua, community groups, agencies and landholders.
15. In addition to Council staff participating in the Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan Governance Group, it is recommended that the group also has QLDC Councillor representation. While staff provide technical expertise and operational alignment, Councillor representation ensures a clear governance link to Council's strategic direction, strengthens democratic oversight, and enables effective reporting back to Elected Members.
16. Monitoring and reporting will ensure transparency and accountability, with an 18-month health check and a formal five-year review built into the plan. Adaptive management is a core principle, allowing priorities and actions to evolve in response to new information, changing pressures and community direction.
17. The Upper Lakes Hub (upper-lakes-orcnz.hub.arcgis.com) is the dedicated online platform for the CAP, designed to support interactive collaboration and community engagement. It enables spatial mapping, story maps, and online surveys to gather public feedback. The Hub currently hosts the CAP and will serve as the primary tool for tracking implementation progress. Over time, it is intended that a dashboard function will provide an at-a-glance view of progress against actions and strategies, as well as monitoring results for ecosystem health goals.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

18. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002.

19. Option 1 Endorse the Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan.

Advantages:

- Demonstrates QLDC's commitment as a strategic partner in integrated catchment management;
- Aligns with Vision Beyond 2050 community outcomes, including ecological restoration and thriving natural systems;
- Supports delivery of Climate & Biodiversity Plan Action 1.2 to strengthen catchment based approaches;
- Strengthens cross-agency collaboration and reduces duplication;
- Helps to prioritise effort and investment across the district to reduce fragmentation and duplication of work. It helps to align the community and organisations around shared, common goals.
- Provides a shared framework to guide coordinated investment

Disadvantages:

- May create expectations of accelerated delivery or funding beyond current Council allocations.

20. Option 2 Do not endorse the Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan.

Advantages:

- Avoids any perceived future funding or delivery expectations.

Disadvantages:

- Undermines cross-agency alignment;
- Weakens Council's visible commitment to Te Taiao restoration;
- Creates inconsistency with the Climate & Biodiversity Plan;
- Risks reputational impact with partners and community groups.

21. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter because it aligns with Beyond Vision 2050 Community outcomes and the Climate & Biodiversity Plan 2025-2028 commitments to protect and restore the mauri of our natural environment| Te Taiao and to accelerate transformation through partnerships.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

22. This matter is of low significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy 2024 because endorsement of the CAP:

- Does not alter levels of service;
- Does not commit to unbudgeted expenditure;
- Does not amend statutory plans;
- Does not involve the transfer of assets or decision-making authority.

23. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter include:

- Mana whenua (Kāi Tahu rūnaka representatives).
- Strategy partner agencies.
- Local conservation and environmental groups.
- Rural landowners
- Broader community.

24. The Council has supported the development of this CAP collaboratively with partners and community representatives. No additional public consultation is required for endorsement of this non-statutory framework.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

25. Mana whenua representation on the Upper Lakes ICG was sought through Aukaha and Te Ao Mārama. A representative from Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku participated throughout the workshop process and contributed additional feedback between sessions. Aukaha also attended hui and workshops on behalf of Kāi Tahu ki Otago Rūnanga, and cultural narrative points were provided. Existing cultural values statements further informed and strengthened the cultural context of the CAP.

26. The draft CAP was circulated to Aukaha and representatives of Kāi Tahu ki Otago Rūnaka for review. It was also provided to Te Ao Mārama and the Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku representative involved in the ICG. Feedback received to date has been incorporated into the final CAP.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

27. This matter relates to the Environmental risk category. It is associated with RISK10012 Ineffective mitigation response to the declared climate and ecological emergency within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having a high residual risk rating.
28. The approval of the recommended option will allow Council to implement additional controls for this risk. This will be achieved through the implementation of the actions with the CBP 2025-2028. These actions represent a broad risk control response to the challenges associated with emissions reduction, climate change adaptation and biodiversity restoration.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

29. There are no direct financial implications arising from endorsement. Implementation actions will be delivered:
- Within existing approved budgets where possible; and/or
 - Through future Long Term Plan and Annual Plan processes where additional investment is required.

Council Effects and Views | Kā Whakaaweawe me kā Tirohaka a te Kaunihera

30. The following Council policies, strategies and bylaws were considered:
- Our Strategic Framework | Queenstown Lakes District Council
 - Climate & Biodiversity Plan 2025–2028 (specifically Action 1.2)
 - 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy- stormwater and catchment resilience.
 - Queenstown Lakes Spatial Plan
 - District Plan- specifically Policy 24.2.4.2 and related provisions.
 - Economic Diversification Plan- specifically Project 3.3 growth of environmental services.
 - Regenerative Tourism Plan: Travel to a Thriving Future
31. The recommended option is consistent with with these strategies and reinforces cross-plan coherence
32. This matter is not included in the Long Term Plan/Annual Plan.
33. The QLDC Disability Policy was considered in the development of the Climate & Biodiversity Plan.

Local Government Act 2002 Purpose Provisions | Te Whakatureture 2002 o te Kāwanataka ā-Kiaka

34. Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 states the purpose of local government is (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. Endorsement of the Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan enables democratic local decision-making by formally recognising a collaborative framework developed with mana whenua, regional partners and community stakeholders. It promotes environmental, cultural, social and long-term economic wellbeing through integrated catchment restoration and water quality improvement. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

35. The recommended option:

- Can be implemented through current funding under the Ten Year Plan and Annual Plan;
- Is consistent with the Council's plans and policies; and
- Would not significantly alter the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of the Council or transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

Attachments | Kā Tāpirihaka

A	Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan (<i>circulated separately</i>)
B	Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan Summary (<i>circulated separately</i>)
C	Upper Lakes CAP Brochure (<i>circulated separately</i>)