

Hawksbury lagoon update February 2018

Legislation in relation to the Hawksbury Lagoon, seldom considered, is important for providing long-term protection for the wetland and its wildlife.

Originally the wetland encompassed most of the modern Waikouaiti township, the racecourse and probably as far north as Flag Swamp and south to the river.

In the 1860's and 70's considerable legislation was passed to enable extensive drainage and forest clearances to occur to enable the influx of settlers to purchase land for farming. This area was no exception. Matainaka (Hawksbury Lagoon) was managed by the Domain Board until 1912 when it morphed into the Waikouaiti Domain Board. An acclimatisation society set up in 1888 had stocks of brown trout, perch and mallard ducks unsuccessfully introduced to the lagoon. Then in 1899 the legal status changed to become a Reserve for Native and Imported Game, this had the effect of providing protection for the native wildlife, but also made it more difficult for tanga whenua to fish or hunt in the area. Earlier, in 1868 a small 1 hectare easement was created as a gesture to local tangata whenua in recognition of the 1848 Kemps purchase agreement for preservation of their mahika kai.

In 1929 the Reserve was upgraded to a Sanctuary for Native and Imported Game in an effort to prevent local hunters scaring waterfowl off the Reserve. In 1953 with the passing of the Wildlife Act, Matainaka became a Wildlife Refuge and disturbance of the wildlife including boating was prohibited.

Control of the area was transferred from the Waikouaiti County Council to the Department of Internal Affairs in 1972, with a number of conditions imposed in relation to water levels, public access and the rubbish tip. From this time a development project was initiated which saw the planting and repair of causeways and the introduction of culverts to manage summer water levels.

In 1974 The Hawksbury Lagoon Refuge Order reduced the size of the area to the water's edge, probably to lessen issues in relation to private properties. In 1977 the lagoon's status became a Wildlife Management Reserve which gave protection to the habitat and the wildlife. These statutes also had the effect of alienating tangata whenua from their fishing easement.

Since 1987 the Department of Conservation, has been responsible for overall management of the lagoon, with the Waitangi Tribunal in 1998 reinforcing the right of tangata whenua to have access for food gathering, then in 1999 the lagoon was included in the East Otago Taiapure, which provides protection of the marine environment. The lagoon is also designated as regionally significant by the ORC and the DCC. Protection of the area for future generations remains a priority.

Ref: Prebble, M. & Mules, D. (2004). *To hikoia mai Hikororoa ki Waikouaiti – kua t era, k ate ahi.*

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