



Whitewater NZ

Mo ngā awa te aroha, he waiaroha For the love of rivers

President's Report: 2024-2025

Foreword

As we seem to say yearly, this was a busy year for Whitewater NZ. The change of government brought a slew of new legislation impacting whitewater recreation across the motu. I am proud of the way the board, along with the help of many others, has worked tirelessly this year to advocate for the whitewater community.

A sincere thank you to all those who volunteer their time and guidance to the board and our wider community. I am grateful to be part of an organisation where people care deeply and are generous with their time and opinions.

We're staring down the barrel of what seems to be a heck of a lot of advocacy work in the near future. I feel confident in our volunteers, community, and our relationship with other NGOs, that we are ready to continue pushing for the best outcomes for recreational paddling and the rivers in Aotearoa.

The Year Gone

Fast Track Approvals Act (FTAA) - I don't think I've ever spoken about a single piece of legislation as much as I have this one. This act has been widely condemned by NGO's and it was disappointing to see it passed. The FTAA has been the cause of the vast majority of our advocacy work this year, with several proposed projects expected to have a significant impact on whitewater recreation. We have been working closely with Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC), Forest & Bird and other NGO's to divide the workload and keep on top of new proposals. The legislation has been dubbed by some as the "medium track" since it does not appear to be progressing as quickly as initially anticipated; however, we are now beginning to see projects move through some of the later stages of this process. We will be keeping a close eye on this.

Waitaha - Probably the most well-known project of the year. Whitewater NZ signed an agreement with Westpower that secures recreational protections on the Waitaha River *if the project acquires consent through the Fast-Track Approvals Act*, in exchange for WWNZ adopting a neutral stance on Westpower's Fast-Track application. You can read through the decision-making process here: <https://whitewater.nz/fast-track-waitaha-dam-update/>
We will continue to work with Westpower, FMC and Forest and Bird in this space.

Kaituna - Taheke 8C has applied twice to the Fast-Track process and at this stage, remains unsuccessful. This is a big win for the river, but they have indicated that they are likely to reapply. We're keeping the pressure on alongside key iwi groups and the wider community to protect the lower gorges. Huge thank you to everyone who helped spread awareness, shared media with us and did interviews. This was our biggest PR campaign, and it was great to see our advocacy achieve a global reach and appreciation. This work was made possible by the Mangahao Fund and the Free Rivers Fund, which helped us cover legal and publicity costs. You can read the update we published in April here:

<https://whitewater.nz/kaituna-dam-proposal-the-current-fight-to-protect-the-awa/>

Film Nights - Over 300 tickets were sold across Aotearoa for another great film night series. This raised a whopping \$8,000 for the Awa Aroha Fund. Combining this with last year's total means we now have a strong fund available to support paddlers who need it. Huge thank you to the event organisers and those who donated their films for us to use. Next year, we'll work to better connect with local affiliated clubs and will be fundraising for improving access to rivers.

Access Liability - Aotearoa Climbing Access Trust and FMC led the writing of a joint submission to MBIE to amend health and safety laws to safeguard public access to the outdoors. This act specifies that landowners will not be responsible if someone is injured on their land while doing recreational activities. This is a big win for access advocacy. Please continue reaching out to us if you have any issues with access. We're here to help.

Kakapotahi - Another thank you to the Mangahao fund for governing the costs of some hefty road maintenance to improve Kakapotahi access. Some clearance is still recommended, but your paint job is much safer. We're exploring options for securing additional funding to enhance and protect a few more areas of concern. If you're heading in there over summer, we'd love updates on the road conditions so we can keep an eye on further maintenance required.

Re-consenting of existing hydro schemes - We've also been working on the re-consenting of some of the existing hydro schemes. Tekapō and Pukaki have both been submitted. Interestingly, Genesis, who now runs the Tekapō A scheme, has gone through the Fast-Track process, where Meridian chose to go through the council standard consenting system. These have significant overlaps due to the previously related consents when Meridian owned both schemes. We are closely watching the outcomes for both of these applications. Tekapo Whitewater Trust did a great job advocating for and liaising with both power companies, maintaining the same release agreements as previously secured. Huge thanks to Stu and Nick for their continued mahi.

Work has begun and will continue regarding the Wairoa and Mangahao re-consenting process.

Ngaruroro WCO - After the 2022 Environment Court report recommending the Ngaruroro for a WCO, there have been a number of appeals. These have largely been related to the lower, braided section of the river. All parties have now received a final decision. The final step is for the Minister for the Environment to recommend the making of the WCO, which is then made by the Governor-General by Order in Council. The Environment Court has confirmed that its reports have been provided to the Minister; there is no statutory timeframe for the Minister's

decision. We are frustrated by the delay in officially granting a WCO to the Ngaruroro, and we hope the Minister will soon recommend that a WCO be established. This process began more than a decade ago! We are keeping a close eye on this.

Summary

As I already mentioned, I am very grateful to be part of this community. We could not have achieved so much this year without the support of many and working closely with so many other organisations. Thank you to everyone who reached out this year to share their thoughts, feedback, and critiques. Whitewater NZ exists to serve the community, and without your feedback, this is so much harder. The advocacy work will continue, and I'm confident that problems we've never thought of will arise. Please keep an eye out in your local area for things we can help with. We cannot keep track of all of the regional projects without you!

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Ngā mihi nui,
Nicola Buisman