

# AORERE

*Celebrating the  
Aorere Catchment  
Project, 2006-9*

OUR RIVER OUR FUTURE



Collingwood



PHOTOS: ABBY DAVIDSON, GRETCHEN ROBERTSON,  
JOHN GILARDI AND BARBARA STUART.

THIS PUBLICATION WAS PRODUCED BY NZ LANDCARE TRUST, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE SUSTAINABLE FARMING FUND, TO CELEBRATE A SUCCESSFUL 3 YEAR PROJECT IN AORERE CATCHMENT. ORDINARY KIWIS ARE QUIET ACHIEVERS, BUT IN THEIR UNASSUMING WAY, MAKE EXTRAORDINARY THINGS HAPPEN EVERYDAY! WE HOPE YOU ENJOY SHARING OUR STORY SO FAR AND THAT IT INSPIRES YOU IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY.



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The Naked Possum!  
undressing the possum to redress our forest

Swamp Rd  
No Exit 150-0

COLLINGWOOD MUSEUM

Aorere Valley  
WEKA ARTS  
The Naked Possum  
Pigeon Toe Studio  
LANGFORD'S STORE  
Turner Studio Botany  
Gallery Arts

FAREWELL SPIT

24  
[Horse icon]

Aorere Centre  
helping heritage thrive

Collingwood

Collingwood Museum  
11 LW

HOLDEN  
HX 427



# OUR LAND OUR PEOPLE



## OUR LAND OUR PEOPLE

The Aorere Catchment Project is led by us, local dairy farmers. Most of us (and our families before us) have lived and farmed within the Aorere area for the majority of our lives. We farm only 16% of the catchment, the rest is mainly native bush alive with giant snails, kiwi, rata and nikau trees.

We gladly share a love of this land and water with Iwi, local marine farmers and the wider vibrant Golden Bay community, who along with the many visitors to Farewell Spit and Kahurangi National Park agree that we have something pretty special here! Although there are less than 500 people living in the Aorere Catchment we are a small community with a big heart!



A man wearing a dark cap, sunglasses, and a blue work shirt is standing on the deck of a boat. He is gesturing with his hands as if speaking. In the background, another person is visible, and the sea is blue under a clear sky. Thick ropes are coiled on the boat's railing.

# THE HUGE CHALLENGE

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It's not always easy farming in the Aorere. With up to 4m of rainfall each year we have become accustomed to flooding! We are also fairly remote and are used to a certain level of self-sufficiency away from the limelight.

In 2004 our quiet existence changed. Our local marine farmers faced a real risk of closure due to deteriorating water quality. Harvest rates had been as low as 28% and they had no choice but to raise their issues publicly. Aorere dairy farmers became the centre of attention in water quality discussions. Our initial feelings were shock, hurt and fear. We have always been proud of our farms and our magnificent sparkling waters. A huge challenge faced us if we were to sustain our lifestyles and livelihoods into the future.







# STARTING SOMETHING AMAZING

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The heat was on and instead of going on the defensive, we decided to take action. The NZ Landcare Trust offered to assist us in applying for Sustainable Farming Fund support; an approach that would enable us to make a difference through our own project. We saw this as an opportunity to positively shape our industry and wider community's destiny. All 33 dairy farms supported the project.

As we were unsure exactly what was causing the water quality issues offshore, we decided to commission a scientific investigation into possible causes and then later, the solutions. We found out that the Aorere River is in very good health compared with most other New Zealand rivers. The river does not have a nutrient contamination issue. As marine farms lie near the mouth of the Aorere River, these coastal waters are very sensitive to faecal bacteria however. Shellfish harvesting waters must be very pure to meet criteria for human consumption. Our dairy farming community accepted we need to reduce the levels of bacteria reaching our waterways (a real challenge in this high rainfall landscape) if we are to sustain our special environment, community and lifestyle.

We are all farmers whether we work from a tractor or a boat – our families and community rely on protecting our collective futures.



# BEST PRACTICE ON-FARM

## BEST PRACTICE ON-FARM

It is not possible to completely eliminate bacterial runoff from developed catchments. Our local marine farmers accept this and are realistic. They want to be able to consistently harvest during fine periods. We therefore concentrated on learning how to maintain good water quality during low and moderate flow periods.

These are the best management practices we need to implement:

- **Eliminating stock access to waterways** – through fencing and bridging or culverting waterway crossings.
- **Stopping effluent irrigation to saturated soils** – through increasing our effluent storage capacities to around 3 months. Storm water diversion at the shed is also a very simple way to increase storage capacity.
- **Reducing effluent application rates** – low-rate effluent irrigation (e.g. k-line) with weeping wall filtration is best in our high rainfall environment. This not only reduces the potential for bacterial runoff, but increases the soil's ability to take up valuable nutrients.
- **Looking for runoff hotspots** – e.g. thinking about potential runoff zones and designing our farms and management systems to avoid direct runoff to drains/waterways (e.g. clever laneway drainage and capturing standoff area effluent).

“Our story is about dairy farmers taking ownership of our environmental performance and seeing it as an integral part of future business success, not just a compliance issue”

Sue Brown, Aorere Catchment Group





## AORERE PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS 2006–9

These are some of our key achievements:

- Creating a farmer-led catchment group with full community support
- Visiting and interviewing all local dairy farmers to help us design the most effective project possible
- Commissioning independent coastal scientists to create a model of contaminant sources to the river and surrounding bay (thus establishing how runoff from our dairy farms could impact the coast)
- Openly sharing this water quality modeling info with our local Council and marine farmers
- Investigating specific methods to reduce dairy farming impacts on water quality

- Holding a ‘problem solving field day’ where farmers led discussion (with technical experts on tap not on top) to agree on the appropriate best management practices for the Aorere
- Commissioned expert farm planning assistance to develop individual plans especially for Aorere conditions (targeting reduced E. coli runoff)
- Providing individual farm plans for 14 or our 33 farms so far (outlining \$1.4m in on-farm investments for water quality improvement over 5 years)
- In November 2008 local marine farmers hosted a joint celebration to mark improved water quality. Cleaner water meant local aquaculture authorities could loosen harvest conditions enabling increased harvest rates.

**“As someone whose livelihood depends on water quality, I really appreciate the efforts of all those involved in the Aorere catchment project. I think this project is a marvelous example of what can be achieved”**

Matt Rountree, Waitapu Fisheries





# THE IMPOSSIBLE IS POSSIBLE!



## THE IMPOSSIBLE IS POSSIBLE!

The Aorere Catchment Project is about all sectors of a community pulling together. It is not about finger pointing or going over old ground. It's about going into new territory together, using our combined abilities and resources to invest in our collective future.

In 2002 local shellfish harvest rates were as low as 28%. In 2006 when we started the project they were around 50%. Today they are 79%!

While we are thrilled the trend is positive, we know this is not the end. We have a lot more to do on-farm yet and plan to extend our project well beyond its initial 3 year tenure. High quality water requires ongoing action.

**“Start where you are at, do what you can, use the gifts you have”**

Michelle Riley, Aorere Catchment Group





# QUIET ACHIEVERS



## QUIET ACHIEVERS

The Aorere is a normal kiwi community full of different characters, talents and interests. This project doesn't claim to own these special abilities or achievements, but benefits greatly from the sum of their parts. While us dairy farmers formed a Catchment Group, and started to make changes on our farms, many others are making a difference in their own ways.

Golden Bay Streamcare Group voluntarily plant thousands of seedlings (raised at Collingwood School) along our stream banks. Tasman District Council offer fencing materials to help us exclude stock from these many streams. There are many other interesting and enthusiastic locals using their abilities to make a difference too. For example our remote local café, the Naked Possum, not only serves magnificent food and coffee, it contributes to possum eradication work using pelts for fashion and art while raising rata seedlings and undertaking planting. Collingwood is also a plastic bag free township.







**REAL PEOPLE  
CAN MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE**

During our project we have learnt a lot, not only about cows and creeks, but about how ordinary kiwis can make a difference. One of our project members, Michelle Riley has reflected on some of our key project lessons. We hope they can inspire others too.

Key Aorere Concepts:

- A catchment community approach shares the load
- Utilise your farmers' skills, build confidence and share ideas
- Move past emotion, engage in high quality discussion making
- Everything can't be done at once so take time to explore ideas and technologies. It is best to improve a system well, over time, than do just a quick fix
- Invite others to interact with your group as this enables two-way learning opportunities
- Farmers need to be supported with science ('experts on tap not on top')
- Keep the process open – it is never too late to come on board.
- Communicate well with your members – ask what information they need and how they want to receive it

- We all need to understand fully the land/water interface and the impacts land management has on our waterways
- Acknowledge the problem/s and learn how this affects other land or water based businesses
- Liaise with and utilise outside agencies to build collaborative networks – support is there for you
- It is important to earn back lost respect
- Promote emergent leadership – include your younger members.

- Tell your story in a positive way – substantiate your claims through action and results. Good stories build traction.
- Celebrate success! Make it social and fun.
- Evaluate outcomes and plan the group's future
- and finally – start where you are at, do what you can, use the gifts you have







WE ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER NZ COMMUNITY. NO BIGGER, RICHER, SMARTER OR MORE IMPORTANT. WE DON'T PROFESS TO BE 'SPECIAL'. WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED IS POSSIBLE ANYWHERE. ALTHOUGH WE ARE HAPPY AS QUIET ACHIEVERS WE HOPE OUR STORY CAN INSPIRE. WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE.





GET  
INSPIRED

### GET INSPIRED

You can view further details of the Aorere Catchment Group at:

<http://www.landcare.org.nz/regional-focus/upper-south-island/aorere-catchment/>

<http://www.maf.govt.nz/sff/about-projects/search/06-005/index.html>

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Thank you for sharing in our story!



