



Matauranga Māori

Māori have lived in the Awakairangi region, including Waiwhetū, since at least 1300 AD. The Māori population in the area grew significantly in the 1820s, with many migrating from Taranaki, Manawatū, and Wairarapa to escape intertribal conflict. Rather than altering the stream, Māori lived in harmony with the land and adapted to occasional flooding. They cultivated crops such as kūmara and found the awa rich in fish and other resources.

The Waiwhetū Awa holds deep cultural and spiritual significance for Ngāti Toa Rangatira and Taranaki Whānui. Two of the most important pā along the awa are Waiwhetū Pā and Owhiti Pā, as well the associated urupā (cemetery). However, the awa is now one of the most polluted waterways in the Te Whanganui-a-Tara catchment. It has been classified as Wai Kino (unhealthy or unclean water) in the Te Oranga Wai Mana Whenua assessment framework due to contamination from human waste (E.coli) leaking from damaged sewage infrastructure. Despite significant restoration efforts, it remains unsafe to consume eels or watercress from the stream.



Still, there is much to value and protect. While the upper and lower sections of the stream have been heavily modified, the middle section retains its natural character (āhua) and is deeply treasured by Mana Whenua. The river mouth is recognised as an important natural wetland, and the Waiwhetū Estuary was once a vital source of mahinga kai and freshwater for Mana Whenua. (Source: [Te Mahere Wai o te Kāhui Taiao](#), Greater Wellington Regional Council.)

On the banks of the awa stands Waiwhetū Marae. Opened in 1960, its meeting house Arohanui ki te Tangata was established through the vision of founding tipuna Īhāia Puketapu. The marae is now the heart of a vibrant and long-standing urban papakāinga, home to around 120 whānau of Te Āti Awa descent. You can learn more about the marae [here](#). Near the marae, various native harakeke (flax) species have been planted along the banks of the awa and are carefully maintained.





Before the 1855 earthquake, the Waiwhetū Awa was significantly wider and deeper than it is today. Waka were once used to transport food and people along its course. Some of these traditional waka are now preserved in the building opposite the marae.

Mātauranga Māori relating to the awa and the Waiwhetū area emphasizes kaitiakitanga – the stewardship and guardianship of the natural world. It also includes promoting the economic wellbeing of local communities and preserving Māori culture and values.

The degradation of the awa since European settlement has been a source of deep concern for Mana Whenua. The late Te Rira Puketapu was a strong advocate for the restoration of the stream, urging local councils to take action. His leadership sparked efforts to monitor and improve the waterway. Today, community groups such as the Friends of Waiwhetū Stream continue this legacy, working with Mana Whenua to restore the mauri of the awa.

