

MEDIA RELEASE

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## Waikato Regional Council takes out second Supreme Award win

Waikato Regional Council has won local government's highest accolade, the LGFA Supreme Award, at the 2026 LGFA Taituarā Local Government Excellence Awards for its Pathways to the Sea Strategy – Ngā Rerenga ki te Moana.

The project was also recognised with the GHD Award for Excellence in Environmental Leadership. This award recognizes outstanding initiatives that deliver real environmental benefits and demonstrate leadership in sustainability and responsible environmental management.

Pathways to the Sea – Ngā Rerenga ki te Moana is an initiative that brings together innovation, science, mātauranga Māori, partnership and long-term thinking to address complex environmental challenges while delivering benefits for communities and the environment.

What began as a challenge unique to Waikato has become a nationally recognised framework that is influencing infrastructure design, informing freshwater management and supporting councils across Aotearoa to better protect native species and waterways. Through collaboration and a clear vision, Waikato Regional Council has demonstrated leadership extending well beyond regional boundaries.

Judges said the project's influence and applicability stood out among this year's entries.

“The high level of national and international interest in this project makes this one of the year's most transferable entries.”

Built on six years of research and strong partnerships with iwi, scientists, industry and councils across Aotearoa, the programme has developed and tested practical solutions that allow native tuna and other fish species to safely migrate through flood protection infrastructure.

By combining innovation, evidence-based decision-making and a commitment to Te Mana o te Wai, the initiative is helping restore freshwater ecosystems while creating a model that can be applied throughout New Zealand.



The judges praised the project's environmental leadership and collaborative approach.

“Pathways to the sea successfully reconciles legacy asset management decisions with today’s environmental and ecological expectations. It is an exemplar in its use of new technology, a meticulous compilation of an evidence base over six years, its successful collaboration with 14 funding partners, and its partnership with iwi.”

The Supreme Award is selected from the winners of the Excellence Awards categories and recognises the initiative judged to have made the most significant contribution across New Zealand local government.

This year’s win makes Waikato Regional Council the first council to win the LGFA Supreme Award more than once in the modern era of the awards, since the introduction of the current awards format and awards dinner in 2015. Waikato Regional Council previously won the Supreme Award in 2018 for Kawe Kōrero.

### **About the LGFA Taituarā Local Government Excellence Awards**

The LGFA Taituarā Local Government Excellence Awards showcase and celebrate outstanding programmes, projects, partnerships and initiatives from across New Zealand’s local government sector. The awards recognise excellence, innovation and leadership that deliver positive outcomes for communities and create learnings that can be shared across the sector. The awards are hosted annually by Taituarā – Local Government Professionals Aotearoa.

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For further information, please contact Sophie Prebble | Manager, Marketing and Communications [Sophie.prebble@taituara.org.nz](mailto:Sophie.prebble@taituara.org.nz)