

EnvirosOUTH

Autumn 2025

Wetlands
borne out of
passion for
planting

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Privilege
of being a
guardian

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environment
SOUTHLAND
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Te Taiao Tonga

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EnviroSOUTH

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Cover

◀ **Renee Bull takes samples from Ōreti Beach.**



Thank you to the many hundreds of people who have given us their views on the coast.

We were out at summer events – all the A&P shows and others – finding out about your special coastal places and what you value.

This feedback, along with online contributions, is being analysed and will assist us with reviewing Southland's Coastal Plan, which is the rule book for managing the coast into the future.

We are keen to get your views on a range of other matters, too – the changing climate and how it affects you, changes to our fees and charges and how we rate for flood protection.

I can't emphasise enough how much your input assists the Council's decision making and I encourage you to get involved.

Wilma Falconer, Chief Executive, Environment Southland



I'm keen to see motivated candidates standing for the regional council in the local elections this year.

I'm retiring and won't be standing again, but after nearly two decades at Environment Southland I can recommend it as an interesting and challenging space to work in for the benefit of our region and its people.

Not all existing councillors have declared their intentions yet, but there will be gaps.

What a lot of people don't realise, is that half of our 12 council seats represent Invercargill and Rakiura. The others represent constituencies across the region.

No matter which constituency you represent though, you are here for the whole of Southland and decisions you make today will impact generations to come.

Nicol Horrell, Chairman, Environment Southland

Environment Southland



A thriving Southland – te taurikura o Murihiku



Where town meets country

Waiiau A&P Show president Jamie King credits the success of their annual show to the support of the local community.

Celebrating the 85th anniversary year this year, Jamie describes the show as a very small, rural show that focuses on animals.

“A&P shows all over bring the town and country together.

“Our show has always been about the animals. It’s huge on the horse side of things, and we get a big dairy section, although the sheep numbers are declining.”

He says it’s always been held at the Tuatapere Domain and that’s a great location as the crowds can get up

nice and close to the action, like the showjumping.

There’s plenty of activities for kids, and categories for them to enter, and this is an area he and the committee want to expand on. “That’s what it’s all about, getting the kids out and about,” he says.

The entry cost is just \$5 and he says the committee is determined to keep it low to make it an affordable day out.

Jamie is a sheep, beef and deer farmer in the Lilburn Valley, and has been president for four years and involved as a sheep steward for 12 years.

Some families have been attending almost since the show began, and he says the future looks bright, with new committee members and dedicated volunteers.

“We’re lucky to have such a supportive community and some major sponsors. It’s the community that’s kept it going.”

This year they had perfect weather and a record turnout.

“Without the local community we wouldn’t be able to pull it off,” Jamie says.



▲ Tamariki enjoy petting puppies at the show.

The team from Environment Southland attended the Waiiau A&P Show and other community events over the summer. We chatted with people about planting, funding environmental initiatives, farm plans, the coast, and our changing climate. Follow our Facebook page for events we’ll be attending near you.

Murihiku Kai Collective going strong five years on from award win

Steve Broad reckons there's a fair bit of looking over fences going on in his neighbourhood, but he doesn't mind at all.

The recently appointed Murihiku Kai coordinator says he and his Invercargill neighbours have developed somewhat of a food sharing culture. He remembers one neighbour knocking on his door and enquiring about the rhubarb in Steve's backyard. Others got in on the act too.

"Now we're texting each other. We're sharing rhubarb, tomatoes and cucumbers. We've been swapping rhubarb crumbles."

In late December he took up a pilot role as the region's first Murihiku Kai Coordinator, based in the Healthy Families Invercargill team at Active Southland. His role is looking for solutions to ensure that everyone in our community has access to good food, at an affordable price.

"The big picture is can we essentially feed our people from within?"

Formed in 2020, the Murihiku Kai Collective consists of several community groups and

individuals working together to create food resiliency in Southland. It was formed after a Healthy Families study on the local food system highlighted concerns around access to affordable and nutritious food. It also highlighted a lack of co-ordinated leadership within our community – and the need for a collective vision.

In 2021, the Collective won the Environmental Action in the Community Award at the Environment Southland Community Awards.



▲ Steve Broad proudly showcases produce from the South Alive community gardens.

Since then, the Collective has continued to support community initiatives and led the way in planning for food resilience. A design workshop was held in Invercargill in August 2022 with a wide range of participants, to begin to develop a strategy.

Participants shared their vision for Southland's food system, mapped out the region's local food systems and identified burning issues. This led to the release of the 'Feeding Murihiku Good Food Road Map' in 2024. It's a free, downloadable resource of question tools, regionally relevant conversation topics, and successful, replicable models to share far and wide.

"I've always been really fascinated by the kai space, by how we tell our historic stories of the region as a food basket, where we are now, and what we can achieve," Steve says.

Many of the problems have already been identified and there's lots of 'legends' working to help meet the kai needs in the Southland community, so he sees his role as "elevating, connecting, and bringing collaboration to a sector that he reckons is pretty well equipped".

We know we have the power to meet the issues faced, and what success looks like.

There's great examples around New Zealand of models that are working, and cherry-picking what could best work for Southland makes sense.

In Auckland, the Papatoetoe Food Hub model involves the community working with a local supermarket, plus a community garden and a composting service.

The supermarket's unused food goes to the hub, so there's savings for them on landfill costs.

It's a 'profit for purpose' model where hub staff turn that food into ready-to-serve, pre-prepared and frozen meals for the community.

"There's a whole system to make use of the excess food."

The big supermarkets are a part of our community, and we need to work out ways to work alongside them, like Kiwi Harvest is, Steve says.

There's excess kai across Southland.

Kiwi Harvest takes unused food from supermarkets and other food producers, and supplies it to community social service agencies to help combat food waste and help feed families in need.

That's one side of the coin – meeting immediate need. The other side is helping people to create kai out of raw produce – whether it's from our local producer market, supermarket, their own

"I've always been really fascinated by the kai space, by how we tell our historic stories of the region as a food basket, where we are now, and what we can achieve."

STEVE BROAD, MURIHIKU KAI COORDINATOR

garden or a community garden.

"We presume things about people's knowledge of what a plant is, how to harvest it, and how to cook it."

Steve wants to be able to respond in a practical way to what the sector needs now, which could be help with funding applications, letters of support, or facilitating access to a bigger kitchen for groups training people in food preparation.

"How do we make sure that we are achieving actual systems change, and we're not just skimming the surface of a great idea."

It's a matter of heat-seeking where the barriers and the opportunities are, he says.

"I want to sink my teeth into the meaty systems-based issues."

Helping ensure Southland-produced and supplied food is the easiest, most affordable option is another key challenge, Steve says.

Beyond these more immediate issues lie some really big questions.

"Our ability to feed our region will be around conversations like: what does food production look like moving forward

Community Awards

Nominations for the 2025 Environment Southland Community Awards will open in May. There are several different award categories covering a range of environmental projects and actions undertaken by individuals, community groups, businesses, farmers, and students.

The winning entries will receive cash prizes courtesy of our valued sponsors. All nominees will be invited to attend the awards dinner, which will be held on Friday, 3 October at the Ascot Park Hotel, Invercargill, where the winners will be announced.

Do you know any environmental champions? Would you like to nominate them for an Environment Southland Community Award – get in touch es.govt.nz/awards25

into a change of climate?; How are we supporting our producers?; What crops are we producing?"

Everyone from the grassroots through to the biggest agencies and government have to play a part, Steve says.

"There are great people at the forefront of this. If this community is feeling more connected and there's more collaboration happening, then in 12 months that's a massive win."

Five Rivers wetlands borne out of passion for planting

As Dot Stevens went quietly about constructing wetlands at her Five Rivers farm, the thought that she was becoming one of her region's environmental leaders never crossed her mind.

Dot and husband Geoff own a significant farming operation in Northern Southland, beside the Acton Stream, a tributary of the Ōreti River.

The Stevens run sheep and cattle on a mixture of rolling and flat country with a good part of their land leased to surrounding farmers.

The farm has two magnificent, constructed wetlands, spanning around six hectares, with Dot spearheading the efforts to develop them over the past six years.

Dot admits that the resulting boost to water quality and biodiversity wasn't at

the front of her mind when she got stuck in.

While not strictly focused on specific environmental outcomes, undertaking work for the good of the land and the good of those living on it, was at the heart of Dot's motivation.

All of which has been built on her family's passion for planting.

"I have always loved planting. Dad was a great planter; he loved planting tree lines all over the farm," Dot says.

"I just think the aesthetics of having areas planted out is good for the soul."

Dot's family has deep roots in the Five

Rivers area with their farm originally part of a much bigger farming block that was run by her forefathers, who settled in the Five Rivers area.

The history of the farm is part of the drive behind the work to make improvements, of course combined with Dot's passion for planting.

"I have lived here my whole life so I want to look after the place," Dot says.

"But to be honest, I just love trees."

"And I love wetlands – I don't know why, I never did when I was young."

"I think when you have an area planted out, it is just good for the soul."



Dot also admits there was no grand plan to establish two significant wetlands at the Stevens' farm.

She and Geoff originally owned a much larger block of surrounding hill country.

Around two decades prior, they had worked to fence significant areas of native vegetation, but that work was halted during the tougher times the farming industry faced.

Following the sale of that land, the Stevens continued to look at improving their property, which included fencing off waterways and establishing riparian plantings.

Developing wetlands at the bottom of their hillier country was something Dot was keen to do.

"I used to get annoyed looking out the window, I could see that stocking those areas just wouldn't work.

"Where the wetland at the bottom of our hill is, I just thought it would look really cool."

"It took ages to get things underway; first of all, I got a cattle fence around it.

"Then one day I looked out the window and Geoff and the digger man are out there digging two wetland ponds."

Dot then worked extensively to plant out the wetland in a range of native species.

Looking out over the wetlands at Acton Downs from the nearby rolling hills, you'll see well established toi toi, pittosporum, kahikatea, carix and native reeds and flaxes.

With their two wetlands now in their sixth year, the Stevens can see the improvements in biodiversity they have driven.

"It doesn't have to be a big area and you don't have to do a lot of planting to begin with."

DOT STEVENS

A visit to the impressive wetlands at the Stevens' property may set something of a daunting task for farmers who want to undertake similar work.

But the message from Dot is that it can easily be done, especially by taking small initial steps.

"It doesn't have to be a big area and you don't have to do a lot of planting to begin with."

"To start you can fence off an area, it will come away and then you can see what you have."

"You don't have to rush in and plant the whole area out, you can work away at it over time."

In early 2025, the couple successfully applied to Environment Southland's two catchment improvement funds - Land Sustainability Mitigations Fund and the Southland Native Planting Fund.

Up until this point, the wetlands were funded by the Stevens.

Both funds have been established to assist landowners in undertaking work aimed at improving water quality in Murihiku Southland.

Each fund provides assistance, matched by landowners on a 50-50 basis.

After being successful in their applications, the Stevens can action their plans for further plantings, fencing and maintenance at their wetlands.

▼ Dot and Geoff Stevens at home at Acton Downs.



The privilege and responsibility of being a guardian

Renee Bull's strong connection with the sea has been instilled in her since she was very young and she credits much of that to her Pōua (Grandfather) Ronnie Bull and Dad, Rewi Bull.

While Renee grew up in Invercargill, her family marae, Te Akau at Colac Bay, forms a cornerstone of her connection with her whānau, iwi (tribe) and Southland's wider environment.

Now with a small family of her own and in her first year working at Te Ao Mārama as a Kaitohutohu Taiao (Māori environmental advisor), she's recognising that what she thought was a fairly typical upbringing, really wasn't.

From spending a month or more on the Titi Muttonbird Islands with her Pōua and cousins every year, to leaving school at 15 and joining her Dad in the family fishing business working all areas of the Fiordland coastline, Renee's connection with the moana (sea) is something she now describes as a privilege.

"I never really thought about it because it was just normal," she says.

"It's taken working at Te Ao Mārama to really open my eyes, and working

with other people from the area; other extended whānau and realising we didn't all have that."

"I see it as a privilege. Knowing that and having these experiences, they come with responsibilities of kaitiakitanga (guardianship)."

"It could be seen as a burden. Sometimes I think I'd love to step back and spend more time with my kids, but who am I to take that privilege, turn my back on this

▼ Renee Bull takes samples at Ōreti Beach to understand the diverse species living in the sand.





▲ Renee collecting kaimoana near Solander Islands/Hautere.

mahi, and not give back to our whenua (land), our taiao (environment).”

Renee’s education was more mainstream than her parents and grandparents had been, but the education she’s received from spending time with her parents and grandparents on the land and out at sea has shaped her world view and how she applies that today.

“It could be seen as a burden. Sometimes I think I’d love to step back and spend more time with my kids, but who am I to take that privilege, turn my back on this mahi, and not give back to our whenua (land), our taiao (environment).”

RENEE BULL

She tells the story of her Pōua planting different species of trees and shrubs from the Titī Islands at Colac Bay.

“He planted all along the coastline, but some of them disrupted the views of the sea so he was asked to remove them. He kept them on our land though, and they’re still thriving and protecting that land from erosion.”

“There’s always going to be battles between Tāne-mahuta and Tangaroa – and this causes the erosion. They’re fighting constantly.”

She uses stories like these to explain her perspective, drawing on this matauranga (traditional knowledge) that’s been passed down to her to understand what the environment needs.

“I use this because I see the value in the old tikanga and the old matauranga and the knowledge that our elders held.

“It’s not about what I know, it’s about what has been passed down.”

Renee’s work and personal life combine when it comes to her connection to the coast.

Living at Green Point with her family, across from the harbour, she’s a regular when it comes to gathering kaimoana (seafood). But it’s not as accessible as it once was.

She’s working to pass on her knowledge to her children, who attend kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa here in Murihiku Southland. “Language is an important aspect of understanding how our tūpuna (ancestors) used to think.” And it’s now their turn to head down to the Titī Islands with their grandparents.

“Ko au te whenua, ko te whenua ko au – I am the land and the land is me. It’s not just a nice saying, it really does mean that,” Renee says.

“I can’t be healthy if the place I’m living in isn’t, and that’s including the awa and the moana.”

Review of the Regional Coastal Plan

Environment Southland is reviewing its Coastal Plan, which is the ‘rule book’ for how we manage the use, development and protection of our region’s coastal marine area. This is the area that extends from the beach out to 12 nautical miles offshore, all around the Southland coast.

The current plan has been in place since 2013, and it is time for a review to ensure the rules remain relevant to the community, protect the things we value as Southlanders and are in step with current legislation.

Over summer, we asked Southlanders to tell us about their favourite places on the coast and why those places are important. This information will be used to help shape the next Coastal Plan. We really appreciate everyone’s feedback.

We’ll be seeking more feedback as the draft plan is put together, so to get involved in these opportunities sign up to our e-newsletter: es.govt.nz/subscribe

“If it’s not healthy, I’m not going to be either. If I’m gathering from there, if I’m bathing in there, if I’m sending my kids down there.”

In the year she’s been with Te Ao Marama, she’s had a steep learning curve supporting the small team with consent processing, cultural impact assessments and supporting farmers with advice on environmental actions.

She’s been out on farm offering her perspective. “I really enjoy that side of the role. One hundred per cent of the people I’ve met want to do the right thing. And all they want is the knowledge to know how. It’s about collaboration.”

Reducing pests one possum at a time

Growing up, Toby Haliday's early years were filled with hunting adventures, which would eventually lead him to a career in pest control and environmental enhancement.

As a child in Hawkes Bay, Toby and his friends would hunt possums for their fur, which provided pocket money.

"We'd run around with dogs and air rifles, catching possums and getting the fur. Back then, it was like \$60 for a kilo," Toby says.

After leaving school, Toby ventured into forestry, unaware that pest control could be a viable career.

Eventually, he moved to Australia where he drove tractors. Upon his return to New Zealand, a friend in Napier asked him

to join a pest control company which worked on possum control for the TBfree and OSPRI programmes.

"I had a really good boss and a great team. I loved it," he says.

Meeting his wife, Samantha, a former nurse, brought another pivotal moment. They visited Murihiku Southland for a family event and fell in love with the region.

As a keen hunter, Toby saw how well the region could work for him.

"I always envisioned Southland as this mountainous, uninhabited area. But it was an outdoors person's paradise," Toby explains.

A month later they called Murihiku home.

Once settled Toby sought a new career path, but his 12-month foray into dairy farming was short-lived.

"I absolutely hated it," he admits.

With his wife's support, he returned to possum trapping, buying a used

▼ Toby Haliday.



ute and four-wheeler, and securing trapping permits from the Department of Conservation. He also supplied pet food companies with rabbits, hares, and possums.

While he was having a great time out in nature doing what he loved, he wasn't doing enough to earn a sustainable living to help support his growing family.

A chance call to Environment Southland led to a new opportunity.

"I was so lucky. They had just had a contractor leave and needed someone to fill the role," Toby recalls.

He quickly proved his worth, taking on various Pest Control Areas (PCAs) and building a reputation for his work.

As Toby's business, now called NZ Conservation Services, grew he hired subcontractors and full-time employees. However, the unexpected loss of a contract in Otago brought unforeseen challenges.

"I took a huge financial hit," Toby says.

By January 2020, Toby was once again the only employee in his company. Despite the setbacks, Toby persevered.

The Covid-19 pandemic further tested his resilience, but he adapted by starting a native plant nursery.

"I always envisioned Southland as this mountainous, uninhabited area. But it was an outdoors person's paradise."

TOBY HALIDAY

With the lockdowns, there were rules in place about movement and because Toby wasn't considered an essential worker he was limited in what he could do.

"I started freaking out again, nearly called it quits.

"You hear all these stories about people that actually came up with all these business plans and ideas and really successful stuff during Covid to get by, and I thought, well, why can't we do that? I'd



▲ Toby and his team from NZ Conservation Services Limited.

never worked in retail before, didn't know anything, and then I thought about plants."

Toby started eco-sourcing native plant seeds and advertised riparian planting services through his business. This diversification helped sustain his business during tough times.

He started getting calls and was able to bring his brother Levi in as an employee. Eventually he picked up a contract to complete the planting of the Charlton-Waimumu Riparian Project.

With the end of lockdowns and an expanding demand for services, Toby decided to return his focus to pest control, with Levi taking over operations for the environmental enhancement side of the company.

Demand for pest control continued to grow, with forestry operations looking for deer and pig culling and councils wanting help with rabbits. Those connections led to the formation of a new business, Southern Forest Services Ltd, which deals in silviculture planting and monitoring.

The growth in business has also led to growth for the family, with Toby and Samantha welcoming a daughter, 5, and a son, 2, and purchasing a home in Otautau.

In 2022, NZ Conservation Services was a finalist in the Environment Southland Community Awards for Environmental Action in Biodiversity and Biosecurity.

Since beginning with Environment Southland, he has steadily added to the number of Possum Control Areas he

covers and now he services all 63.

This has given Toby real insight into the importance of keeping on top of pest numbers, with the areas covered by PCAs able to maintain steadily low rates, while possum populations continue to increase outside of them.

From a country kid running around shooting possums for fur to a fully-fledged businessman, Toby has hit a few bumps along the way.

While he says he's a positive person generally and has great support from his wife, Toby doesn't skip a beat when it comes to maintaining his mental health and stress levels. One of his tools is listening to self-help books, which he admits can sometimes contain mumbo-jumbo and be a bit corny, they can also contain a lot of wisdom, especially when facing difficult times.

And he has his own wisdom to pass on to others now too.

"Always keep an open mind and realise when there's an opportunity. Make a decision on whether to pounce on it quickly, I think I've had more benefits out of that than I have negatives.

"I suppose those times that it's been tough, instead of just sort of packing in and having to cry, just try and sort something else out, like ring around get on the phone, and someone will have something."

Pourakino deer farmers embrace farm plans

John Watkinson has finished the velveting for the season and says his fingers are just about coming right.

It's a fiddly-sounding process – involving safely removing the antler above where a tourniquet is tied on to ensure the animal's welfare – and when you replicate it across hundreds of animals, it's understandable that your hands could be pretty sore. The velveting is done under strict animal welfare and food safety conditions.

John and wife Liz have been on the Pourakino Valley farm, near Riverton, just shy of 60 years.

After sheep farming for 35 years, they converted to deer in the early 2000s on their 530 acres, with about 1400 deer. John trapped the original wild deer.

They are one of relatively few deer farmers left in the immediate area, with much of Southland's deer farming in northern Southland.

It's a two person operation, plus the occasional family ring-ins to help with a task or two.

Deer are very different to farm compared to sheep or cows, John says.

“You've got to give them space and expect the unexpected. There's quite a few characters.”

Deer are very social animals amongst themselves, but people are well advised to keep away when the stags are roaring.

“When you're lambing, you're working every day in it, but with fawning it's up to them, and you leave them alone.”

The deer industry like many had its challenges during Covid when the restaurant market took a downturn, but retail venison sales have picked up since then. The Watkinsons operation is about

75% venison and 25% velvet. Their venison is processed by Duncan NZ Venison, near Mosgiel, with about 650 animals going out the farm gate each year. The velvet mostly goes to China for further processing, but markets can be a bit volatile.

So, how often do they eat venison?

“All the time,” John says, laughing. His favourite way to cook it is quickly in a really hot cast-iron pan.

John loves the challenge of bringing everything together to get the result on farm – as every little job has its reward. Management and planning, and having a Plan B are also pretty important, he says.

And like many farmers, most of that knowledge was in his head.



The Watkinsons belong to the Pourakino Catchment Conservation Trust and are members of Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ). A couple of years ago DINZ had funds to pay for the development of a farm plan, while Ballance helped them put the plan together.

It was an informative process and having someone come on farm and help with it was quite a good learning experience, he says.

“It’s a useful exercise.”

“All the planning in the world, including winter grazing best practice, couldn’t really help much when confronted with a spring like the “relentless” one just experienced in Southland.”

JOHN WATKINSON

Using his smart phone more as a farm tool and having more of a plan around riparian planting were two things he got out of it – and if he’s worried about something he’s doing, he will have a look at the plan.

Making sure plans are straightforward and farmer-led is important, he says.

“They’re the ones doing the groundwork and they know their land,” Liz adds.

All the planning in the world, including winter grazing best practice, couldn’t really help much when confronted with a spring like the “relentless” one just experienced in Southland, he says.

“You try your best and hope like hell,” John says.

During one storm, fences were down, and deer congregated into a herd of about 800, which then had to be sorted out.

The picturesque Pourakino River runs along the boundary of the farm, with the Longwood Forest Conservation Area on the other side of the river, a great place for a walk when you want to recharge the batteries, John says.

John and Liz’s farm was formerly the site of the More and Sons Sawmill, which operated through to about 1960. At one time there were 24 houses to house the mill workers, and a school and many sheds.

Notably, the ‘Black Maria’ steam locomotive that transported logs from the Longwoods through the Pourakino Valley to sawmills at Riverton and Otautau ended up buried on the property. It was dug out in the 1970s, then restored, and is now on display in Riverton.

“It’s good where they’ve got it now,” John says.

Bits and pieces from the mill and trams decorate corners of the flower garden now.

John and Liz love the lifestyle and the relative ease of working with deer is one thing that has kept them in the industry.

They encouraged their four children to pursue their own career paths, which at this stage does not include farming. They have had a couple of conversations with people about leasing or selling, but nothing concrete to date, John says.

This is where the farm plan is really useful, as some of its value is that the information is there if someone else needs it, John says.



▲ John and Liz with their granddaughter.

For the meantime, John and Liz are happy to keep on trucking, splitting their time between the farm, spending time with family, lots of walks and maybe even the odd ‘half hour siesta’ here and there, too.

For more information and to subscribe to our e-newsletter visit es.govt.nz/farmplans



▲ John and Liz Watkinson, deer farmers for more than 35 years.

Doing the mahi to w plant threatening isl

For Tāne Davis (Ngāi Tahu) watching his whānau and other Rakiura Māori working to revitalise the biodiversity and mana of the Tītī Islands reaffirms his commitment to the mahi (work) has a kaitiaki (guardian) for future generations.

The Davis family has long been involved in protecting the taonga of the islands, including tītī (muttonbirds), especially Tāne's parents Jane and Bill, who met while muttonbirding.

For Tāne, the first sight of taupata on the Tītī Islands felt like an invasion, a threat to the mauri (natural balance/life force) of the islands.

Taupata (*Coprosma repens*) is a low-growing shrub or small tree that thrives in coastal habitats. It has spread from the South Island, across Te Ara a Kiwa/ Foveaux Strait, and taken root on many of the islands, crowding out iconic native flora and endangering the fragile habitat of tītī (muttonbirds).

This native plant not only threatens the islands' unique ecosystems but also saddens Rakiura Māori, who as kaitiaki guardians, feel a deep responsibility for the wellbeing of the motu (islands), says Tāne, the chair of the Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body.

"The islands are a way of life to us Rakiura Māori, and our whānau. They connect us to exercise our customary practices."

Now, mahi is underway to figure out how to combat this threat.

"The presence of taupata was out of character with the biodiversity of the islands."

Tāne says taupata has gone from being newly present on one island in the 1970s to being the dominant plant by the 2020s, with all of the islands to the northeast of Rakiura now host to the plant. There are also reports from whānau on other Tītī Islands that seedlings have been found and removed.

"We are treating this issue very seriously - but it is a sad time for us as we witness the devastation caused by taupata on a few islands," Tāne says.

Taupata had an original range through the North Island and top of the South Island. It is now widespread across the South Island, Rakiura Stewart Island, and the Chatham Islands, spread by people and birds.

It can outcompete some of the iconic plants on the Tītī Islands such as tētēaweke, tūpare, and muttonbird scrub/pūheretāiko.

"In the process of doing so, muttonbird scrub has gone from being very common



▲ Tane Davis and members from the Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body examine the effects of taupata on the island.

ard off native ands' taonga

Eco-sourcing your natives

to only a few small individuals remaining, and the population of tētēaweke has reduced significantly.”

“This is changing the ecology of the islands,” Tāne says.

The spread of taupata isn't just a threat to flora on the islands, it also effects seabirds, particularly taonga species like tītī.

Taupata grows in a way that means seabirds can get caught in its canopy and roots, and end up dying there, Tāne says.

“Birders also report that burrow stability is decreased under taupata as the ground becomes extremely fragile.”

“It is a case of the wrong plant in the wrong place, so at the end of the day it is a dangerous invader, so we are treating it as that.”

TĀNE DAVIS

This is causing concern among birders about what it could mean for the birds. As tītī nest in burrows, there could be an impact but there is no data to support this yet.

“Our own instinct from a matauranga (Māori knowledge) perspective, is there will be an impact to tītī nesting areas. The coverage of taupata over the whenua (land) could deny the establishment of new burrows. Also, an effect below the whenua where there will be an increase of taupata root systems,” Tāne says.

The kaitiaki guardians of these islands have been working for decades to eradicate predators, so they are not going to let this plant destroy their taonga.

“It is a case of the wrong plant in the wrong place, so at the end of the day it is a dangerous invader, so we are treating it as that.”

The Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body has revised the Management Plan for the islands, which is awaiting ministerial sign off and will be publicly available once that is completed. This document holds a raft of policies and biosecurity procedures to combat taupata.

There are also ways for the Southland community to lend a hand in helping curb the spread of taupata.

“Removal of taupata from at least around Bluff and at Ackers Point on Rakiura would be very helpful to reduce the number of seeds arriving on the Tītī Islands.”

It will be a long journey to tackle the troublesome taupata.

In this, Tāne is heartened to have unwavering support from whānau and Manaaki Whenua to work out the best approach to combatting taupata.

Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research is researching with Rakiura Māori through the Te Weu o te Kaitiaki programme to better understand how to manage the plant.

“We have great hope for our motu. The islands are, by and large, in good shape and are now home to many endangered bird and lizard species. We are guided by our matauranga Māori and science and that gives us the best chance to preserve our precious taonga.”

Some New Zealand native plants we now find in Southland aren't originally from the region and are causing problems. Did you know that pōhutukawa is not native to Southland? But the related and beautiful Southern rātā is.

Introducing new plants to our gardens increases the risk of them spreading into the wild. While exotic plants escaping into native bush isn't new, more New Zealand natives not originally from Southland are now invading and outcompeting local plants. So, next time you're buying a 'native' plant, ensure it's native to Southland and ideally sourced locally.





With a deep love for Southland and a life-long commitment to community action, Chairman Nicol Horrell has a lot to reflect on as he prepares to move on from the Council after 18 years of service.

Committed to Southland

Nicol has been chairman of Environment Southland for nine years (three terms). All up he will have served six terms on the regional council when he stands down at the local body elections in October this year, but he well remembers those early days.

“The first term was quite a learning curve. There’s a lot of reading and you’re making sure you don’t miss things. As time goes on it gets easier to pinpoint the things you need to focus on and deal with.”

Nicol quickly took up the role of deputy chair – in his second and third terms – and he has chaired many Council committees over the years, motivated by a drive to make a difference.

“The problems are wicked problems and there’s the challenge of trying to stick around and solve them. If it was easy I would’ve probably gotten bored.”

A lot of factors come into play. Nicol says central government can knock you sideways.

“But I’ve been here long enough to be able to look back and say, well actually we have made lots of progress and there are a lot of things we can be proud of.”

One of those things is the Southland Water and Land Plan.

“We probably have the most up-to-date plan in the country because everyone else is on pause. It is a good foundation to move forward on. It’s been through a robust process, which was slower and more costly than I would have liked, but at the end of the day it is there and it’s ours.”

The aim, says Nicol, is always to be connected with the community and to be on the journey together. He cites freshwater as an example: there are currently 37 catchment groups across

Southland working to improve land practices that impact water quality, yet a decade or so ago we had none.

“The problems are wicked problems and there’s the challenge of trying to stick around and solve them. If it was easy I would’ve probably gotten bored.”

NICOL HORRELL

“Ten or 12 years ago, a lot of people would say, ‘really, have we got a problem?’ The conversations now, in most cases are, ‘what do we have to do.’ That’s really the community saying, ‘this

is our place and we want to be part of the future and part of the solution’. And I think that’s really powerful.”

Nicol says it’s important to him to prepare the way for new councillors coming on to the regional council as many are unaware of the ‘depth and breadth’ of the work.

“You want to leave an organisation in good shape so the next generation of councillors has a platform to work on.”

He says we live in a world where there are expectations of instant results, but it’s not like that when it comes to making progress on the complex matters regional councils deal with.

“With the environment and local government, nothing’s instant. You just have to keep working away. Over time, if you have your destination firmly fixed in your head, you get there.”



▲ Chairman Nicol Horrell on the job at Environment Southland (Southland Regional Council).



▲ Nicol in the stock yards on his sheep farm.

Nicol was born in Southland and raised on the family's 260-hectare sheep farm at Tetua in the hills beyond Tuatapere, in western Southland. The eldest of six children – five boys and one girl – he attended primary school locally and secondary school in Invercargill, boarding at Southland Boys' High School.

He followed his parents into farming, working on the family's farm and buying his own 200-hectare property at nearby Alton in 1976.

The property is a mix of "flats and hills" with the Alton stream meandering through. Currently he leases 20 hectares to a neighbouring dairy farm and stocks the rest with composite Coopworth/Texel sheep, and is going into this winter with 1600 breeding ewes, about 360 hoggets and 20 rams.

In the beginning, with big debts to pay down, Nicol worked both his farm and the family farm.

"I did double lambings for a long time, which was pretty exhausting."

When the recession of the 80s hit, times got very tough.

"The family farm was sold and my father grieved. At the time my farm probably had negative equity and we hung on by our fingernails. My wife, Anne, worked right through, which kept us afloat. You question all your past decisions, but eventually farming picked up and I felt motivated to start improvements again."

Nicol married Anne, an Australian from New South Wales, in 1985 after promising her dad they would visit every two years, which they have. Anne originally came to Southland for work after graduating from teachers training college and is the current chair of the Tūātapere Te Waewae Community Board. The couple has three grown children – a daughter and two sons.

Grandchildren are part of the picture now, too, and ensuring Southland continues to thrive for future generations is a driving force behind Nicol's work for Environment Southland and his involvement in other community projects.

"I want my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to enjoy the special environment that Southland offers in the future and have the opportunity for exciting jobs without having to go further afield," says Nicol.

He sees the economic potential, "if we can just land some things", aquaculture being one of them.

"I want my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to enjoy the special environment that Southland offers in the future and have the opportunity for exciting jobs without having to go further afield."

NICOL HORRELL

While returning to the family farm is not in his children's future and the time will come when Nicol and Anne will have to sell off some of their farm, they do intend to stay on the land.

"We have no ambition to go and live in Central Otago like many people, when we've got a good view out of our



▲ Chairman Nicol Horrell at the 10-year celebration of the Waihopai restoration planting project in Invercargill, with James Hargest Junior students, February 2023.

windows. You can see the native trees, the Longwoods forest. You can see the Takitimu mountains from the top of the hill, and on a good day looking out the other side, you can see the coast and Stewart Island. So, it's a special part of the world."

Both politics and community service have always been a part of Nicol's life.

A "life changing" experience on an Outward Bound course as a young man gave him insight into his abilities and the power of a unified team working together, which became a precursor to the leadership roles that would follow.

"You realise your potential is greater than you think."

He became tour leader on a youth exchange to Australia and went on to join the National Party as a Young National. After attending a Young Nationals conference in Marlborough, he decided to organise one at Borland Lodge and attracted good numbers.

"We [Young Nationals] had good debates that opened your mind and a reputation for good parties."

Nicol became chairman of the Young Nationals in 1976 and divisional chair of Otago/Southland in 1979.

"We had some of the strongest numbers in the country and I've always had some involvement in the party since."

In Southland, when community boards came on the scene, Nicol stood for the Tūātapere Community Board, serving from 1989 to 1998. When the community faced the prospect of losing its maternity hospital and later, its doctor due to health reforms, Nicol took up the fight, a move that would keep him highly involved in two health trusts for the next 21 years.

He was chairman of the Tūātapere Hospital Trust to save the hospital and involved in setting up and running a second trust to buy the doctor's practice and provide associated services such as district nursing. It meant taking on governance roles, negotiating with DHBs and using his political connections and nous to save the maternity hospital.

"With Bill English's help I managed to get a bill through parliament that allowed us to close the hospital when there were no patients."

That bill was the Hospital Amendment Bill and in it was the '10-bed or less

Local elections 2025

The next local body elections will be held on **11 October 2025**.

KEY DATES

- **12 June 2025**
Candidate information briefing
- **1 July 2025**
Pre-election period
- **4 July 2025**
Candidate nominations open
- **1 August 2025 at 12 noon**
Candidate nominations close
- **9 September 2025**
Voting opens
- **11 October 2025 at 12 noon**
Election Day – voting closes midday

For more information visit es.govt.nz/elections

clause' Nicol had come up with, which exempted small hospitals from having to be open and staffed 24/7, when they didn't have any patients. "It meant we halved the cost."

"I had to go to Wellington and go round the MPs, and all the different parties to lobby for support."

The hospital remained open for another 20 years and nowadays the building is used for allied health services.

Nicol stepped away from his community work in health after he was elected on to the regional council.

During his time at Environment Southland Nicol has become well known for his advocacy for Southland solutions to problems and bringing people together for the benefit of the region with his statesman-like authenticity and keen wit.

Never an advocate for a 'one size fits all' approach, Nicol facilitated work with central government and the Southland farming community to ensure national legislation for winter grazing took account of Southland conditions.

He supported and encouraged parties to progress the Southland Regional Development Strategy and has long been a supporter of shared council services such as Great South (regional development agency) and Emergency Management Southland (civil defence).

Nicol is proud of the long-standing relationship the Council has with iwi, which he says, is based on trust and respect.

In recent times he has been focused on the Government's regional deals opportunities, which requires local government to work together.

"Some people think we are just an environmental agency. We aren't, we're more than that."

Currently, Nicol is the chair of Southland's mayoral forum, a role he describes as "a privilege". The forum is made up of the regional council chairman, mayors, their deputies and chief executives. It provides the opportunity for the councils to work together in a united way on pressing matters, including creating efficiencies, for the benefit of Southlanders.

Southland District Council came up with an amalgamation proposal that has put the debate on the public agenda and Nicol's view is that it's a topic worth discussing.

"Because I'm retiring, I'm probably in a more neutral position to be asking the questions of the community: what should local government look like in Southland going forward?"

Nicol can see the merit in one territorial plan for Southland instead of each local council having one.

"In that plan there might be things that pertain to different areas, but you'd get consistency across the region and eventually, you'd save on staff costs, too.

"Over time, if there was a will to work together, you could do vertical integration."

He also thinks the big areas of responsibility like flood protection, roading and three waters – drinking

water, wastewater and stormwater, would benefit from being run by a board or council controlled organisation.

"Your big ticket items would be better run by a CCO where you've still got the oversight, but have some professional directors that provide consistency and fill skill gaps."

"Once you're in the door and you've taken your oath, you're there to do the best for Southland."

NICOL HORRELL

Whatever the model, he says affordability and having good governance are essential.

"We really have to be concentrating on coming up with rates people can afford to pay and ensuring we have governance that actually has the oversight."

Nicol says anyone coming onto a Council would do well not to do so with a single-issue focus.

"Once you're in the door and you've taken your oath, you're there to do the best for Southland."



Local elections 2025

As the 2025 local body elections approach, now is the time to consider standing for the Regional Council and shaping the future of our region.

Environment Southland is responsible for protecting and enhancing the environment and managing the use of our natural resources sustainably for generations to come. This includes managing land, air, and freshwater, the coast, biodiversity and biosecurity.

The Council also has responsibilities for regional transport, navigational boating safety (harbour master), natural hazards' planning, flood protection infrastructure and leading the region's strategic approach to our changing climate.

As a Regional Councillor you would work with the community to make decisions that make a difference for Southland's long-term future.

Prospective candidates can stand for seats representing the following constituencies: Invercargill-Rakiura (6), Eastern Dome (2), Fiordland (1), Hokonui (1), Southern (1) and Western (1).

If you care about Southland's future and want to find solutions that work for our region, now is the time to get involved.

To learn more or attend the candidate session, visit es.govt.nz

Updates



Annual Plan 2025-26 underway

Our annual plan sets out what we aim to achieve in the next financial year, through our work programmes and associated budgets. Annual plans are effectively an update on the forecasted work and financial information in the Long-term Plan. The Long-term Plan is a ten-year plan, reviewed every three years and it outlines priorities, levels of service and budgets. The Council is not expecting any significant changes to the work programme from the Long-term Plan 2024-34. However, Councillors are acutely aware of the ongoing high cost of living, and are working to balance community expectations around rates increases, with the need to maintain service levels. Keep up-to-date with the annual plan process on our website: es.govt.nz/annualplan



Review of funding for river management

This year we will be asking people for their preference on whether there is a 100% regional rate to fund river management programmes, or a mix of targeted rates and a general rate, for the rest of the region. During 2024 we reviewed our rating system to ensure it was equitable. This year, Councillors have identified three river management rating options to discuss with the community, through a series of engagement events. This will be happening before a more formal consultation phase in April. The options are:

1. As per 2024-34 Long-term Plan – from year 2 100% general rate (capital value), excluding Waiau; or
2. Freshwater Management Unit (FMU) Rate – 70% general, 30% targeted FMU (capital value), excluding Waiau; or
3. Any other suggested option.

There's more information on our website. You can let us know your preference by emailing us at consultation@es.govt.nz



Predator Free Rakiura project

Predator Free Rakiura is a long-held aspiration to restore the mauri of this special place by completely removing rats, possums, hedgehogs, and feral cats from Rakiura/Stewart Island.

A predator-free future will create space for treasured taonga like kākāpō to safely return, and enable those already present to truly thrive, ki uta, ki tai – from the mountains to the sea.

The Predator Free Rakiura project is planning its first operational stage, which will be delivered throughout 2025. This stage is about learning; it will trial proven tools and techniques, refining them to suit Rakiura's needs and informing how eradication can be effectively scaled across the island – shaped at each step by ongoing discussions with the community.

Sign up to receive updates directly, ask questions or give input by emailing info@predatorfreerakiura.org.nz.

Keep an eye on the project website for more information at predatorfreerakiura.org.nz

Out in the field



▲ Tamariki enjoyed our tuna (eels) and drains game at the Waiau A&P show in Tuatapere. We had wonderful conversations with people from communities across the region who chatted about important topics, such as our Coastal Plan review and our changing climate.



▲ As part of World Wetlands Day, we hosted a field day in Edendale to help landowners understand how to improve the habitat for Australasian bitterns in their wetlands. Our team undertook a macroinvertebrate study showcasing the variety of wetland species.



▲ Monitoring and evaluation team leader Darren May collects water samples from Monkey Island, one of the 13 beaches we monitor for *E. coli* and enterococci.



▲ Senior education advisor Josh Sullivan visited Thornbury Primary School for an environmental leader's workshop. Tamariki from Hedgehope School and Heddon Bush School were invited to explore their environmental projects and share what they had learned with each other.

Time to think about...

MAY

AIR QUALITY – Winter air quality monitoring begins – check out breatheasysouthland.co.nz for the latest results and tips on how you can help improve our winter air quality.

WINTER GRAZING – Farmers who are intensively winter grazing should have their consents in place. Check our website for a checklist and advice – es.govt.nz/winter-grazing

MUSTELIDS/RATS – While getting the duck pond ready for shooting season, consider setting and checking traps for mustelids and rats.

OLD MAN'S BEARD – Old man's beard seed heads will be visible at the moment. They look like balls of fluff, and are grey, green and white in colour. This pest plant could be hiding in your garden or on the edge of your local bush. We're trying to stop the spread of the plant. If you see it contact our biosecurity team.

JUNE

RABBITS – Winter is the most effective time for rabbit control before they start breeding in spring.

GERMAN IVY – Have you noticed a yellow flowering ivy in your garden? It could be the pest plant, German ivy, that we're aiming to eradicate from Southland. Check it out on Pest Hub and get in contact with our biosecurity team who will come and investigate.

JULY



WALLABIES – These animals can have huge impacts on Southland's biodiversity and economy if they get established here. This includes preventing regeneration of native bush, depletion of forest understorey, and damage to tall tussock grasslands. They also compete heavily with livestock for pasture and crops. Wallabies are spreading out from their home range of South Canterbury and moving through Otago. If you happen to see or suspect a wallaby in Southland, please report this immediately to 'reportwallabies.nz'. If you have been away hunting wallabies, please do not bring any dead (or alive) wallabies back into Southland and throw away or dump on roadsides, this takes considerable resource to investigate whether they originated from here or outside of this region.

To find out more about pest animals and weeds in Southland, including control advice and the latest rules, visit our Southland Pest Hub at pesthub.es.govt.nz

On the farm



By **JOSEPHINE STEWART**
Land sustainability officer

We all want improvements in water quality – our communities, businesses and lots of our favourite activities rely on our rivers, streams and lakes being in good health. The actions we take today will help shape the future of our waterways.

One action we've taken recently has been offering financial support through two new funds, covering up to 50% of the cost for projects like retiring gullies and critical source areas, constructing wetlands, and planting native trees. It's a great way to make a lasting positive impact on water quality, and we're here to support you every step of the way. Want to get involved? Register your interest in any future funding rounds by calling a land sustainability officer on 0800 76 88 45.

Now that winter grazing crops are well established, it's a good time to review your winter plans. Winter grazing can be a risky activity, so make sure you're on top of things like critical source area management, setbacks from waterways, and grazing on slopes to reduce your impact on waterways. Be sure to write everything down in your winter grazing plan, and if you're not sure about the rules or where to start we're here to help.

We encourage you to learn about the water quality challenges in your local catchment. You can do this by visiting the Southland Catchment Context tool on our website or by reaching out to our land sustainability team who can help you assess the health of your waterways on your farm.

To learn more about pest animals and weeds in Murihiku Southland, including control advice and the latest rules, visit our online Southland Pest Hub at pesthub.es.govt.nz or call the biosecurity team on 0800 76 88 45.



Have you got a couple of minutes to give us feedback on *Envirosouth*?

Environment Southland produces *Envirosouth* three times a year. The magazine is delivered to most mailboxes across Murihiku Southland. You can also pick up a copy at the Invercargill Airport and other locations across the region.

You can read the online version and past editions by visiting our website es.govt.nz/envirosouth

We sometimes get asked how much *Envirosouth* costs. We do as much as we can ourselves – writing and designing and contract out the printing and distribution. This issue cost around \$0.69 per copy, and we printed 42,264 copies.

We are continually looking to improve our service and would appreciate receiving your views to help us with that.



Scan me

haveyoursay.es.govt.nz/envirosouth-survey

- ▶ Fill in the fields below, take a photo and send to communications@es.govt.nz or scan the QR code to complete online.

1. What do you like about *Envirosouth*?

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2. Is there anything you don't like?

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.....

3. What topics appeal to you the most?

.....
.....

4. How do you prefer to read the *Envirosouth* magazine? (Please tick one)

- Online version Hard copy/printed version

5. Currently, *Envirosouth* is produced three times a year. What do you think about the frequency of issues?

- Too frequent Just right Not frequent enough

6. What changes or improvements would make *Envirosouth* more relevant to you?

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