

# NEWSLETTER

2026

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The ability of our small team of trustees, nurseries, contractors, sponsors and our many supporters within the community to coordinate almost 9 000 trees being planted in the Maraetōtara valley is inspiring.

This will be my last year as chairman of the trust. It is a good chance to look back at the history of the trust to see where we have come from and where we are going.

The trust was formed in 2002 through the vision and drive of John Scott, who often fished on the river and saw the encroachment of Crack Willow in particular damaging the ecosystem of the river.

He gathered together an eclectic group of kaumatua, accountants, local farmers, representatives from Forest and Bird, along with a High Court Judge, the late Justice Rodney Gallen.

The settlor of the trust was Andy Lowe, who continues to have significant land interests on the river and continues to support the trust.

Over the first 10 years, the vision was for the trust to have its own nursery and grow locally sourced seedlings which were then planted by the trustees, volunteers and community workers led by our kaumatua, the indefatigable Kepa Toa.

The scale of the project, some resistance from land owners and the difficulties of completing all of the work "in-house" became apparent. A new model was required.



That new model now raises funds from local sponsors, local and central government and charity groups. We use those funds to buy seedlings from local nurseries and pay contractors to spot spray, plant and release the seedlings on the banks of the river.

The Hawke's Bay Regional Council also increased their support substantially by clearing Crack Willow and providing fencing subsidies to incentivise land owners to fence their parts of the river and agree to the planting.

This model has been hugely successful. Depending on funding, it means we have been able to plant up to 15 000 trees, shrubs and flaxes a year.

We hope, based on the current funding and planting rates, that we will be able to complete the original trustees' vision and plant all available parts of the river by 2030-2035.

Through all of this growth, there have been two Totara within the trust who have been there since the start and continue to use their knowledge, skills and energy to ensure the trust continues to succeed. They are Alec Olsen and Hylton McDermott. Their ability to use their "retirement" to give so much back to this wonderful project is truly inspiring.

Thank you to all the trustees, supporters, nurseries, contractors and sponsors who continue to support the trust.

"Ka whāngaia, ka tipu, ka puāwai"  
"That which is nurtured will grow, then blossom" Or as Paul Kelly might sing "From little things big things grow".

Richard Stone  
Chairman, Maraetōtara Tree Trust

## PLANTING REPORT

We have completed another outstanding planting season on the Maraetōtara, and a further 8,500 native trees and flaxes are now thriving on the banks of the river. It was starting to look pretty dry earlier in the summer, but frequent showers in the upper valley should mean that the young plants are now in a happier place as they enter the really hot months.

Each planting season follows a similar pattern. The Regional Council works with local landowners to clear the willows from the riverbed and fence the riparian strip. The Maraetōtara Tree Trust then takes over and in the autumn our contractors pre-spray the planting spots along the riverbank, returning in early winter to plant the young trees and flaxes. We tend to plant early, as the winter can be quite severe in the upper valley and we like to see the plants establish themselves before the really cold weather arrives. Most of this year's trees went into two properties bounding the river beyond Kahuranaki, but we were also able to continue our plantings near the river mouth at Te Awanga, as part of the educational programme we have conducted for many years in conjunction with the staff and pupils of te Kura o Mangateretere.

Over the past twenty-two years a great deal of money and effort has been invested in the Maraetōtara River Restoration Project, by the Hawke's Bay Regional Council, the Maraetōtara Tree Trust and our large community of supporters. It is fair to ask: what return have we received on that investment? Some of the outcomes are visible and readily identifiable, such as the fact that the river is now running faster, deeper and cleaner than it has within recent memory. This is of real benefit to adjoining landowners, with reduced flooding and damage to their properties. And we believe we are helping to bring back the native birdlife to the valley, with our planting of native species. The effects of our tree plantings on water quality are longer term and harder to measure, but the trust, in conjunction with the Regional Council and Water Testing Hawke's Bay, have now been testing water samples from the river for more than twenty years. The temperature of the water is gradually rising, but perhaps to a lesser extent than other Hawke's Bay rivers. In any event, the many little creatures that live in the water are thriving and increasing in number. Phosphorous levels have risen slightly but are expected to level off, once more of the riverbank is stabilised by plantings; and nitrogen levels are showing a significant decline. We are very encouraged by these observations and will continue to work hard to complete the project and present the Maraetōtara River as a model of the environmental benefits that can be achieved by landowners and the wider community working together over a long period of time.

Alan Berry, Treasurer and project planner.





## MONA STEWART

Mona Stewart was one of Hawke's Bay's outstanding educators. For her, education was a total commitment and MTT is so fortunate that Mangateretere School has given 6 years of service, usually around Matariki, to planting at Te Awanga. Mona was at the centre of this commitment and we will all miss her energy and drive. Everything she did was with real focus and zeal. I first saw this at Hastings Girls High School in the 1960s with her prowess at hockey as she zipped down the wing with lightning speed. We worked together in 1968 when she and I were leaders of Gold House. She said then she was going to be a teacher and she became a gifted educator and a real leader. Our aroha goes out to her beloved school and her whanau in Omaha and elsewhere. We will keep our ties with you Mangateretere and hope that in the New Year we can plant a special tree for Whaea Mona. I will miss her as a friend and colleague. So glad to have known you, Mona. Ma te Atua koe e manaaki e hoa. Moe mai, moe mai. Haere atu ra ki te wa kainga.

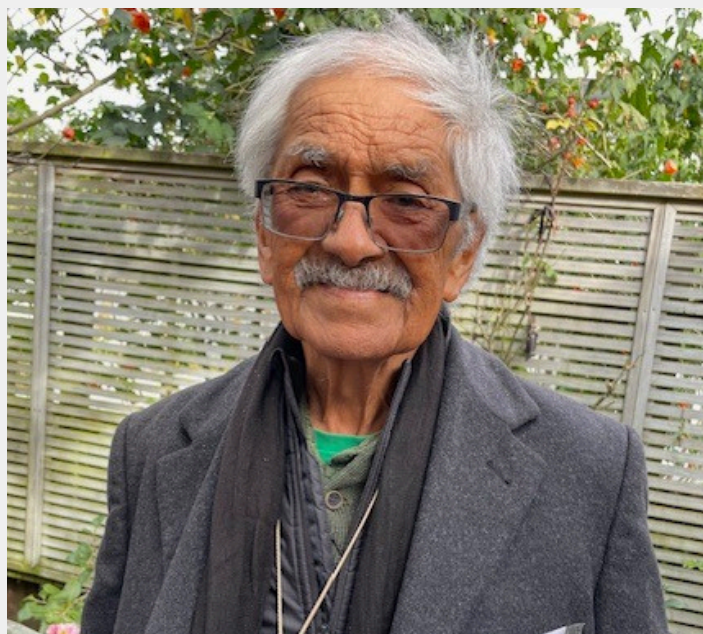
Lisl Prendergast, Trustee



## KEPA

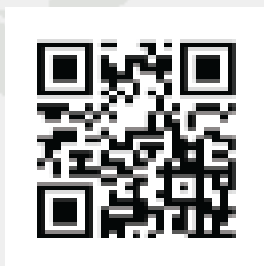
Kepa has been a Trustee of the Maraetōtara Tree Trust and our kaumatua for two decades. He has also been an employee of the Trust and for a decade he looked after our plants. He is very knowledgeable about native plants and has had a huge role in caring for our plants, often assisted by his daughter Sharlene. Kepa is from Omaha which is where his mother was from. His father was from Tuhoe. He was an only child and had serious musical talent. He played for years in a band at Cabaret Cabana on the Napier foreshore. It was so nice to see him honoured by the Trust. Our usual planting for Matariki with Mangateretere School became a special ceremony at which Kepa was presented with a taonga carved by Aaron Greaves from beautiful pounamu from the Arahura river. Sandra Hazlehurst presented him with the Taonga and our kura sang a karakia and a waiata for Kepa. I have worked alongside Kepa on the riverbank and watched him toil away with old man's beard and convolulus. He has a wonderful work ethic and gave the plants amazing care. He also has a profound knowledge of rongoa maori. He is a great teacher and has been hugely generous with his time. Nga mihi nui ki a koe Matua. Ka nui te aroha ki a koe raua ko Clare. Kia ora koe mo tou mahi me tou kaitiakitanga o tou tatou awa.

Lisl Prendergast, Trustee



### PLEASE HELP THE TRUST PLANT MORE TREES

The restoration of the Maraetōtara River corridor is dependent on support from our community. Please donate so we can continue improving the water quality and this beautiful habitat.



Scan the QR code to help.






An Investment in the Future  
Since 2002

More about us and Give-a-Little:

[www.maraetotaratreetrust.co.nz](http://www.maraetotaratreetrust.co.nz)

<https://givealittle.co.nz/org/Maraetotara-tree-trust>

 @Maraetotaratreetrust  @Maraetotaratreetrust  Maraetotara-tree-trust/