



**APPLICATION FOR EASEMENT CONSESSION  
ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS**

**TE ARAROA TRAIL AND SWING BRIDGE  
WHANGAEHU RIVER**

**WHANGAEHU**

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**Limitations**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Te Araroa Trust (the applicant) seeks an easement concession for walking access across the Whitiāu Scientific Reserve (the reserve) and the construction and use of a swing bridge across the Whangaehu River to provide a river crossing link in the Te Araroa Trail.

A separate resource consent application for the construction and use of the bridge has been lodged with Horizons Regional Council.

This report provides a description and assessment of effects of the activities for which the concession is sought.

## 2. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Address and Legal Description

Address: NA  
 Approximate map reference: NZTM 1780110, 5567050  
 Legal description: North side parcels are covered by gazette notices.  
 SEC 2 SO 421260 SEC A B SO 34170 SEC A SO 34171 SEC 547  
 SO 34291 SEC 516 SO 27717 BLKS IX X XIII IKITARA SD -TNA -  
 SUBJ TO NATURAL GAS PIPELINE EASEMENT ON DP 61898 -  
 SEC 516 WHITIAU SCENIC RES -SEC 547 WHITIAU SCIENTIFIC  
 RES

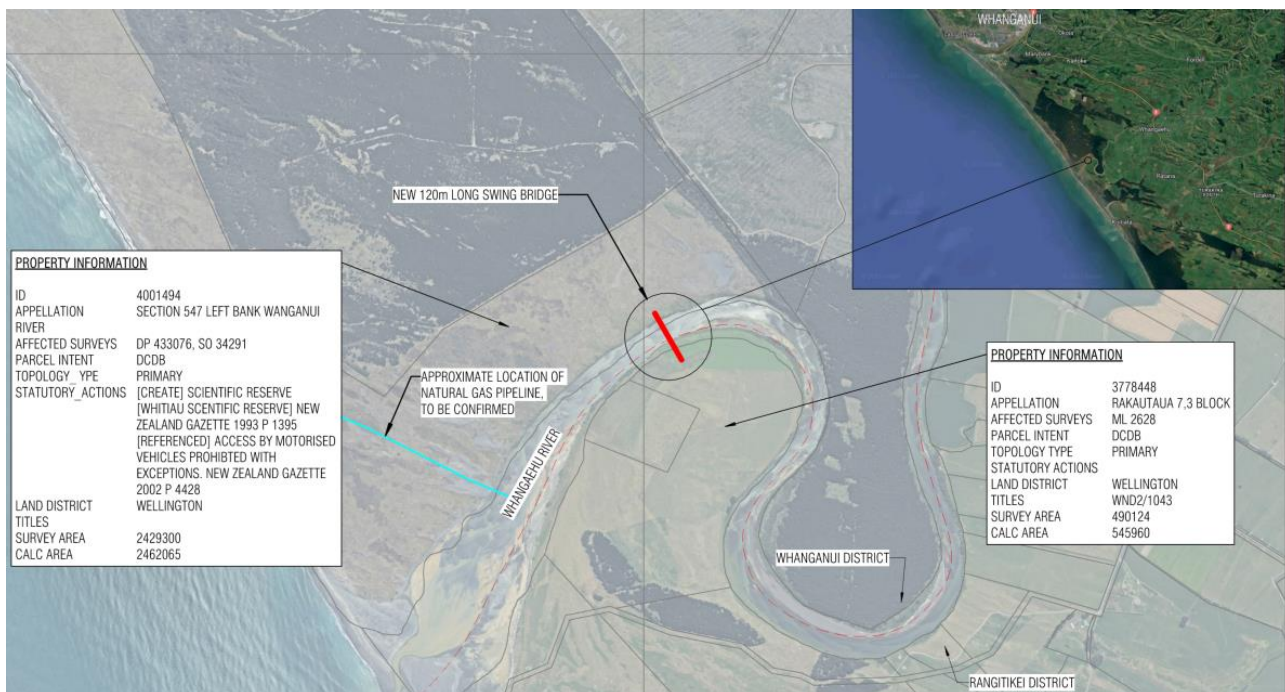


Figure 1: Land parcel information at the proposed new swing bridge location. Note: bridge spans between the Whanganui and Rangitikei Districts.

### 3. BACKGROUND

The Whangaehu River currently imposes a barrier to the Te Araroa Trail such that walkers must travel south from Whanganui via State Highway 3 (SH3) and the SH3 bridge at Whangaehu, approximately 12km south-east of Whanganui. To avoid the experiential effect and hazard of walking along the state highway, the Te Araroa Trust proposes to realign the trail along the beach from Landguard Road near Whanganui airport to the Whangaehu River mouth and then via existing 4WD/foot track up the northern side of the river to a new footbridge. Beyond the bridge the trail will link via farm land across and an unformed legal road to access the beach south of the river.

Walkers can continue south along the beach and ford the Turakina River. At a future date it is proposed to provide a similar footbridge over the Turakina River.

### 4. SITE DESCRIPTION

#### 4.1 General Site Description

The proposed bridge location is approximately 1.6km upstream of the coastal outlet of the Whangaehu River and approximately 400m upstream of the river mouth, which is mapped at NZMS 260 S23: 896-283 (NZTM 1779571 5566595).

The north side (true-right) of the proposed bridge location is located within the Whitiua Scientific Reserve (the reserve), managed by the Department of Conservation (DoC) and protected in perpetuity under Section 21 of the Reserves Act 1977. Walking access to the bridge site will be via existing 4WD tracks from the beach. Construction access will be via existing 4WD track from the adjacent commercial pine forest and Pauri Road.

The characteristics and values of the Whitiua Scientific Reserve are described in the attached *Assessment of Environmental Effects for the Whangaehu River Bridge, Te Araroa Trail*; prepared by Singers Ecological (Ecological Assessment) provided in **Appendix A**.

This area has been identified as a scientific reserve for its intact sequence of vegetated dunes and damp dune hollows that extend approximately 1km inland from the shore. There are various species of native plants that have been identified within the reserve, including several threatened plant species and one critically endangered species. Fauna known to be present within the reserve includes North Island fern bird, New Zealand pipit, swamp harrier, katipō spider, and northern grass skink. Other lizards are noted as possibly present. The reserve has a statutory limitation of 'access by motorised vehicles prohibited'. Permission to override this for the construction period comprises part of the concession sought.

The north side area of proposed disturbance associated with installing the bridge support tower, tie back anchors and staircase adjacent to the true right bank is dominated (>80% cover) by two grasses, cock's foot and fescue (*Lolium arundinaceum*). Most other common species are also exotic, being herbaceous dicots and grasses. The proposed bridge abutment locations are not located within, or within a 10m setback from any natural wetlands. Two natural wetlands are present within 100m of the proposed bridge location. This includes a narrow strip of riverine marsh associated with the rise and fall of the Whangaehu River.

The south (true-left) side of the proposed bridge location comprises flat pasture as part of a working dairy grazing property. It is accessed across paddocks from the end of Whangaehu Beach Road. Works and access on that side are not addressed in this application.

The *Archaeological Assessment of Proposed Pedestrian Swing Bridge Across the Whangaehu River, Te Araroa Trail*; prepared by inSite Archaeology Limited, September 2024 (Archaeological Assessment)

provided in **Appendix B**, describes the archaeological environment of either side of the river. It is noted that there is a very high density of identified sites within the paddock on the south side, with only a few sites to the north side. The Archaeological Assessment does not identify any archaeological material within the footprint of the proposed bridge end structures where land disturbance will occur.

No works are proposed within the Whangaehu River or within a 10m setback from the river and therefore no native fish and other aquatic species will be impacted by the proposal.

## **4.2 Statutory Planning Environment**

### **4.2.1 Conservation Estate**

As noted above, the Whitiāu Scientific Reserve is established and protected in perpetuity under Section 21 of the Reserves Act 1977.

It incorporates the Whangaehu River Marginal Strip conservation unit (No. 70624 Map Ref S22) and is managed under the Conservation Management Strategy: Wanganui Conservancy 1997-2007 (CMS). It falls within the Foxton Ecological District Boundary (Section 7 of the CMS) and the Manawatu Plains Ecological District Boundary (Section 8 of the CMS).

As stated in Section 1.2.1 of the Ecological Assessment, scientific reserves are classified to protect and preserve (an area) in perpetuity (Section 21). The relevant legislation is included below.

- (1) ...reserves classified as scientific reserves, purpose of protecting and preserving in perpetuity for scientific study, research, education, and the benefit of the country, ecological associations, plant or animal communities, types of soil, geomorphological phenomena, and like matters of special interest.*
- (2) Every scientific reserve shall be so administered and maintained under the appropriate provisions of this Act that—*
  - (a) except where the Minister otherwise determines, the indigenous flora and fauna shall as far as possible be preserved.*
  - (c) where scenic, historic, archaeological, biological, or natural features are present on the reserve, those features shall be managed and protected to the extent compatible with the principal or primary purpose of the reserve: provided that nothing in this paragraph shall authorise the doing of anything with respect to fauna that would contravene any provision of the Wildlife Act 1953.*

Relevant sections of the CMS include:

Section 2.3 Coastal Environment

(b) Estuaries

*Estuaries are a coastal feature from Patea southwards and from Waitara northwards. Both the Whanganui and Manawatu Estuaries are heavily used by a range of aquatic species and birds. The estuaries in the Conservancy were once an important source of kai for the Maori people but pollution has severely reduced estuarine food resources. Threats to the estuaries in the Conservancy include point source discharges both into the estuary itself and watercourses flowing into the estuary. Pollution in rivers from diffuse sources such as urban and farm runoff is also significant.*

(c) Dunes and sea-cliffs

*Dunes, estuarine edges and cliffs are the main habitats for terrestrial plants and animals of the coast. The Manawatu-Wanganui coast still has dunes which are dominated by the native sand-binders, spinifex and pingao, with hardy shrubs like sand coprosma. Damp dune hollows retain tall harakeke (New Zealand flax), toetoe, shrubs and ti kouka (cabbage trees), and further inland are dune swamps and lakes. Some dune hollows have temporary wetlands, (ephemeral) the habitat of some nationally rare plants. Small areas of dunes occur along the Taranaki coast as well, but cliffs predominate. Hardy plants, with fleshy, grey, or shiny leaves are typical of the cliffs, species such as native spurge, Hebe elliptica and, at their natural southern limits in North Taranaki, karo, pohutukawa and houpara. Although small in area, mats of tiny native plants on certain cliff-tops contain a range of unusual and rare native herbs. Fernbirds and gold-striped gecko are uncommon animals, and a number of insects are endemic, or are in few other places. Many of the Conservancy's threatened species are dependent upon such habitats, and have already been lost from areas where the habitat has changed. Except for steep sites, many of these areas have been subjected to heavy damage from livestock, recreational users, commercial uses, urban developments, roading, weeds and other modifiers. Before human intervention, forest grew close to the entire coast, apart from the young dunes. Only a few fragments of these forests remain.*

Section 7 Foxton Ecological District

7.2 Vison

*The active sand dune country and adjoining marine environment is valued by all users for its distinctive natural landforms (sand-derived drylands and wetlands), native plant and animal communities, landscapes, historic resources and remote-experience opportunities. Representative areas of land and marine environment are formally protected. Threats to remaining natural areas in the sand country have been removed or managed in such a way that natural character has increased. The area of natural dune lands has increased as some coastal lands are retired from farming and other land uses.*

Section 8 Manawatu Plains Ecological District

8.2 Vison

*The significance of the remaining small remnant indigenous forests and wetlands to the health and character of the landscape is accepted by residents and visitors. All significant remnants are formally protected and threats from weeds, possums and grazing are under control. Riparian areas are managed to retain or restore natural cover and help reduce pollution to rivers and streams. Areas of indigenous forest and wetland are created to replace some areas lost in the past.*

#### 4.2.2 National Policy Statements

##### **National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity**

The National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS:IB) came into effect in July 2023 and is engaged by this proposal. Whitiāua Scientific Reserve qualifies as a significant natural area for its very high representativeness, diversity and pattern, rarity and distinctiveness and ecological context. For this reason, the NPS:IB is engaged.

Objective 1 states:

(1) *The objective of this National Policy Statement is:*

- (a) *to maintain indigenous biodiversity across Aotearoa New Zealand so that there is at least no overall loss in indigenous biodiversity after the commencement date; and*



- (b) *to achieve this:*
  - (i) *through recognising the mana of tangata whenua as kaitiaki of indigenous biodiversity; and*
  - (ii) *by recognising people and communities, including landowners, as stewards of indigenous biodiversity; and*
  - (i) *by protecting and restoring indigenous biodiversity as necessary to achieve the overall maintenance of indigenous biodiversity; and*
  - (ii) *while providing for the social, economic, and cultural wellbeing of people and communities now and in the future.*

The objective is reflected in 17 policies, of which (1), (2), (3), (7), (10), (13), (14), and (15) are of most relevance.

### **National Policy Statement for Freshwater 2020 (NPSFM) and National Environmental Standards for Freshwater 2020 (NES-F)**

The NES-F provides a policy frameworks for the management of activities that can impact on freshwater. The proposal is not located within close proximity to any natural inland wetland. While it is downstream of the mapped extent of the coastal marine area (CMA) it is upstream of the mapped river mouth. Consequently, the NES-F does apply.

Objective 2.1(1) states:

- (1) *The objective of this National Policy Statement is to ensure that natural and physical resources are managed in a way that prioritises:*
  - (a) *first, the health and well-being of water bodies and freshwater ecosystems*
  - (b) *second, the health needs of people (such as drinking water)*
  - (c) *third, the ability of people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well-being, now and in the future.*

The objective is reflected in 15 policies, of which (1), (2), (3), (5), (6) and (9) are of most relevance.

#### **4.2.3 New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010**

As the site is within the coastal environment, the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) is engaged. The purpose of the NZCPS is to state policies in order to achieve the purpose of the Act in relation to the coastal environment of New Zealand.

Policy 1 recognises that the coastal environment extends beyond the CMA and incorporates a range of values associated with the broader environment. In this case, Policy 11 (indigenous biodiversity), Policy 13 (preservation of natural character), Policy 15 (natural features and natural landscapes), Policy 18 (public open space), and Policy 25 (subdivision, use, and development in areas of coastal hazard risk), are relevant; as is Policy 2 (the Treaty of Waitangi, tangata whenua and Māori heritage).

#### **4.2.4 Regional Plan**

As shown in Figure 2 below, the One Plan maps the mouth of the Whangaehu River approximately 1.2km upstream of the point that the river discharges to the coast and maps the CMA boundary a further approximately 400m further upstream. The proposed bridge location lies between these two points, such that the bridge will cross the CMA.

This reach of the river is also mapped in the One Plan as an Estuary Water Management sub-area.

As shown on Figure 2, the bridge location will cross the Whangaehu River Protection Zone, which reflects the following Schedule 9 values.

Rule CMA-STR-R7 – Structures for public access as a Restricted Discretionary Activity. Except as otherwise regulated by CMA-STRR8, the erection, reconstruction, placement, alteration or extension of any public walkway or foot accessway structure pursuant to s12(1) RMA, and, as an ancillary activity, any:

- 1. occupation of space in the CMA pursuant to s12(2) RMA.
- 2. disturbance of the foreshore or seabed pursuant to s12(1) RMA.
- 3. deposition of natural marine substances on the foreshore^ or seabed pursuant to s12(1) RMA.
- 4. discharge\* of water\* or contaminants\* into the CMA pursuant to s15(1) RMA.
- 5. damming or diversion of water\* in the CMA pursuant to s14(1) or s14(2) RMA.

The proposed swing bridge will occupy space above the CMA as the bridge is downstream of the Cross-river CMA boundary. No disturbance to the foreshore or seabed is proposed.

As an activity triggering a rule applying to the CMA, Objectives CE-CMA-O1 and CE-CMA-O2, and Policies CE-CMA-P4 (appropriate use and development) and CE-CMA-P5 (public access) are most relevant.



Figure 2: Location of river mouth and CMA (Source: Figure 31 of the One Plan)



Figure 3: Whangaehu River Protection Zone (Source: Figure 30 of the One Plan)

#### 4.2.5 District Plans

The north side of the river (true right bank) is zoned Open Space in the Whanganui District Plan. It is also subject to a Flood Risk Area B overlay (100 year to 200 year flood extent).

The south side of the river (true left bank) is zoned as Rural under the Rangitikei District Plan and is not subject to overlays.

The proposal does not trigger any reason for consent under the district plans.

### 5. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

Te Araroa Trust proposes to install a footbridge across the Whangaehu River, to facilitate walking access along the coast between Whanganui and areas south of the Whanau River mouth. This will require walkers to access the bridge via an existing 4WD track within Whitiāu Scientific Reserve, and then via a paddock and walking track to the beach on the south side. Details are provided in the Ecological Assessment.

The bridge details are shown in the Design Drawings (**Appendix C**) and described in the Technical Specification (**Appendix D**). The bridge will be a 120m long x 0.75m wide swing footbridge suspended from towers adjacent to each river bank. The towers will comprise timber frames bolted to a concrete cap, and timber piles driven to a depth of 6m. The towers will be braced to outrigger timber piles and the main cables will be slung over and anchored with in-situ reinforced concrete anchored blocks. Catenary wind bracing cables will be fixed to the bridge deck and braced back to timber anchor piles. The main span will be accessed via 11.5m long x 0.75m wide timber staircases. Each staircase will have two landings incorporated and Type 'B' high barriers on either side.

The structure has been designed such that the lowest point of the bridge deck will have 1.2m minimum freeboard above the 200 year recurrence interval / 0.5% annual exceedance probability (AEP) flood level.

The installation will require approximately 64m<sup>3</sup> of earthworks over 40m<sup>2</sup> for each of the abutments (total 128m<sup>3</sup> of earthworks over 40m<sup>2</sup>). Minor smoothing of the existing access track may also occur although this will be avoided if possible or otherwise kept to a minimum.

Excavated topsoil and material will be cut to waste and disposed of in an appropriate location that does not impact on the river or ecological values of the reserve.

No disturbance to the river banks or river bed is proposed or required.

The only vegetation removal required will be grasses at the bridge tower and backspan anchor block sites.

Best practice erosion and sediment control (ESC) measures will be implemented in accordance with Auckland Council Guideline Document 2016/005 *Erosion and Sediment Control Guide for Land Disturbing Activities in the Auckland Region* (GD05). Because the land disturbed will be very minor and comprise sandy silt soils, best practice will likely comprise temporary covering exposed excavation areas, progressive stabilisation as the structures are built, and mulching the disposal surplus soil using grass cleared from the works footprint. Silt socks can also be available if required although there will be a very low risk of any material adverse effect from sediment discharges from the works site.

The Te Araroa Trail that is proposed to use these bridges will also not require any additional land disturbance as the trail will utilise existing tracks for walkers.

Construction access from the north will utilise the existing formed vehicle tracks for trucks and a medium size excavator (circa 12T). Vehicles will include a concrete truck that will be driven into the site as far as possible without disturbing areas outside of the existing vehicle track alignment.

An existing aggregate parking area will be used as the site compound and laydown.

The excavator will be used to clear vegetation required within the immediate works area such as for the bridge staircase, foundations and anchor footings. All indigenous vegetation will be excavated, will be stockpiled on the alluvial terrace near the harakeke flax land. This will be later used for remediation of any areas of bare soil.

Pile holes for the stair cases, out riggers, and wind cable bracing towers will be drilled using an augur head on the excavator. To prevent soil slumping of potentially wet silty materials, the foundation pile holes will be encased in a steel or plastic cylinder to the required depth. Excess water will be pumped from these holes into a vegetated depression where it can drain to the sand soil horizons. The main tower timber pile foundations are will be driven using a digger-mounted drop hammer and will therefore require no excavations.

Works on the southern side will be similar but simpler, as access for the same vehicles and machinery will be across the paddock from the end of Whangaehu Beach Road and the works area will be within grazed pasture.

## **6. TERM OF CONCESSION**

A 50 year term of concession is sought to justify the capital expenditure required to construct the bridge. This also aligns with the design life of the bridge.

## **7. CONSULTATION**

### **7.1 Mana Whenua**

The Te Araroa Trust has engaged with Chris Shenton of Ngāti Apa (Te Rūnanga o Ngā Wairiki – Ngāti Apa) and Casey Paki of Māori Trust Rakautaua No 9, which is the owner of the coastal land to which the walkway connects, but not the land on which the bridge will be directly connected.

In accordance with section 62(3) of the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011, comment will be sought from groups seeking customary title. Any responses from that process will be provided to Council, noting that this process is separate to the direct engagement undertaken with Ngāti Apa and Māori Trust Rakautaua No 9 that is relevant to the RMA consent process.

Te Waiū o Te Ika, the Whangaehu River (Ngāti Rangī Claims Settlement Act 2019) is acknowledged as the legislation to enact the Ngāti Rangī settlement. The settlement contains a co-governance framework for Te Waiū o Te Ika, the Whangaehu River. The proposed bridge location is not within Te Rohe o Ngāti Rangī.

### **7.2 Department of Conservation**

Consultation has been undertaken with DOC, as the manager of the land that the bridge will connect to on the north side. DOC is supportive in principle of the project.

### **7.3 Land owner (south side)**

Rob and Sarah Craig own the farm on the eastern side of the river that the walkway would pass through to link back to the beach or to Whangaehu Beach Road. These owners are supportive of the project.

## **8. ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS**

### **8.1 Ecological Effects**

Please refer to Sections 4 and 5 of the Ecological Assessment for the consideration of potential effects of the proposal on the 4WD track within Whitiāu Scientific Reserve.

### **8.2 Flooding Effects**

The bridge and wind bracing cables will be suspended with a minimum 1.2m freeboard above the 0.5% flood plain. The support structures (e.g. stairs, wind cable bracing towers, out riggers, and main towers) will have a very small cross-section within the flood plain and will not impede flood flows in a material way. The bridge deck itself will be permeable and will also be suspended over the water surface of the river. Consequently, it does not constitute an additional area that could contribute to increase peak flow or volume.

### **8.3 Archaeological Effects**

While the bridge site is assessed as being within the vicinity of many identified archaeological sites, no archaeological material has been identified at the specific tower sites where land disturbance will occur. The Archaeological Assessment states:

*The proposed pedestrian swing bridge is situated in a landscape of high archaeological potential and significance to local iwi. However, there are no affected archaeological sites on the true right bank of the river and adverse effects to archaeological sites/values on the left bank are expected to be nil or*

*negligible. Of the 29 NZAA recorded archaeological sites within the general landscape of the left bank (Figure 2), the pits and terraces of the nearest site (S23/27) are located more than 50 m beyond the extent earthworks and will not be affected. The 13 archaeological sites that will or may be crossed by the works crew to access the left bank construction site could be adversely affected to a minor or low extent by repeat movements of heavy and light vehicles, but this risk can be mitigated to a nil or negligible level by:*

- limiting the number of vehicles that travel to the work site daily (i.e., carpooling);*
- restricting vehicle movements to established formal (metalled) or informal (visible depressions in pasture) tracks; and,*
- undertaking construction in the late summer when ground conditions are firm and the potential for ruts forming in the topsoil is limited.*

*Finally, although no trace of archaeological material was identified in the multiple auger samples collected on the left bank, it is possible that unknown archaeological remains could be discovered in this area between NZAA recorded site S23/27 and the river. However, given the limited extent of earthworks at this location (approximately 44 m<sup>2</sup>) any adverse effect is expected to be no more than minor. Any adverse effects on Māori garden / horticultural soils, given their likely substantial extent, is likely to be negligible: there is even a potential benefit to archaeological research values if the bridge construction provides an opportunity to collect analytical samples.*

The applicant notes that an archaeological authority will be sought from Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga to address the potential accidental discovery of archaeological material.

#### **8.4 Impacts on CMA values**

The bridge will not impede navigation up the river during navigable flow conditions.

The bridge will be clear of flows up to the 0.5% level. Increases in flood level due to climate change within the life of the bridge have been incorporated in to the 0.5% AEP level. In the event that flooding does occur to or above that level, it will comprise widespread flooding across the adjacent flood plain.

In the event that large woody debris passes down the alignment of the main channel during very high flows near or above the 0.5% AEP level, that could entangle with the lowest point of the bridge deck. To mitigate this risk, a 1.2m minimum freeboard above this flood level is provided to allow for the passage of large, floating debris as recommended in the New Zealand Bridge Manual. If debris does entangle with the bridge, this may result in damage to the bridge but will not cause any increase in flooding of adjacent land, due to the wide flood plain at that location. The risk of this occurring is assessed as low and the consequence of that occurring will be limited to damage to the bridge. In a high flood condition, pedestrian access to the bridge will be prevented by general flooding of the surrounding land.

The site is mapped as the Whangaehu River Protection Zone and the Estuary Water Management sub-area. The Ecological Assessment has taken account of the specific values of the zone, being the habitat for migratory birds, and recognising the values of the Whitiua Scientific Reserve. It is also noted that the zone recognises the presence of archaeological sites adjacent to the estuary.

The bridge will create a built structure within a modified natural environment. That will have a landscape and visual effect. The scale of that effect will be localised, as the bridge will be a relatively narrow, light-weight, and visually permeable structure. The extent that it will have visibility will be a benefit for track users, in the sense of wayfinding. The towers and staircases will be constructed from timber that will weather to a more natural appearance over time. The decking material will be a dull, natural grey or green

to blend with the natural hues of the site. It will have significant less bulk than a farm building that could be constructed on the southern side. It is also a significant distance from the beach and so does not directly impact on the immediate coastal landscape.

Overall, potential adverse effects on CMA and coastal environment values are assessed as minor.

## **8.5 Section 104(1)(b) Planning instrument provisions**

### **(i) Conservation Management Strategy: Wanganui Conservancy 1997-2007**

With the adoption of the recommendations of the Ecological Assessment and the proposed bridge construction methodology, the concession sought is assessed as compatible with the conservation outcomes sought by the CMS. It will provide safe continuity of Te Araroa Trail in a manner that does not compromise those outcomes, and the vision and values of the relevant ecological districts.

### **(ii) National Environmental Standards**

No National Environmental Standards are relevant to this proposal.

### **(iii) Other regulations**

No other regulations are relevant to this proposal.

### **(iv) National Policy Statements**

#### *National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020<sup>1</sup>*

For the reasons discussed in Section 7.1 above, the proposal is consistent with the policies of the NPS:FM. Minor vegetation clearance will be undertaken in a manner that will minimise the potential adverse effects on mobile species (birds and lizards) that may be present within the clearance area. Potential temporary adverse effects on existing vegetation will be limited to grasses.

As stated in Section 1.2.3 of the Ecological Assessment:

*The NPSFM defines wetland habitat and provides policy direction for wetlands, with the objective of no loss of extent. The NES provides regulations for managing effects to natural inland wetland habitat from activities. Activities are permitted if located 10 m away from a natural inland wetland, or 100 m away if there is a hydrological connection between the activity and the natural inland wetland.*

*The Proposal is not located within a natural inland wetland habitat as defined by the NPSFM 2020. All components are greater than 10 m away from a natural inland wetland.*

*Two wetland areas occur within 100 m of the proposal. These include a narrow strip of riverine marsh associated with the rise and fall of the Whangaehu River. This marsh is dominated by crack willow (*Salix fragilis*), rautahi (*Carex geminata*) and harakeke (*Phormium tenax*). Dense harakeke flaxland habitat, which conforms to schedule F 'Swamp and marsh' is approximately >80 m upstream of the bridge staircase foundations and northern deadman. Similarly, this area has an intermittent hydrology associated with periodic flooding of the river.*

*Whilst these structures are within the 100 m zone which under the NES requires consideration if there is a hydrological connection with the proposed activity. It is my opinion that there is no connection*

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<sup>1</sup> The assessment is provided for completeness, but noting that the Whangaehu River at this location is mapped as CMA.

*between this activity and the hydrology of these wetlands which are entirely dependent on the natural rise and fall of the Whangaehu River. This activity, primarily being excavation of soil to construct foundations and a deadman anchor will have no effect on this hydrology.*

*For these reasons it is my opinion that the NPSFM and NES are not relevant to this proposal.*

### *National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023*

Based on the findings of the Ecological Assessment, the proposal is consistent with the relevant provision of the NPS:IB. The approach to the project design, outcomes and engagement gives effect to the decision making principles and takes into account the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. It takes a precautionary approach to avoidance and management of potential adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity by relying on existing access tracks and locating the proposed bridge where it will not necessitate direct impacts on high value vegetation or habitats. The safe access across the river and facilitating trail walkers away from SH3 will contribute to New Zealand's social, economic, cultural, and environmental wellbeing.

As noted in the Ecological Assessment:

*“realigning the Te Araroa Trail through Whitiāu Scientific Reserve has the potential to increase the risk of wildfire, which could have significant adverse effects on these values. Although the risk is very small and manageable, with climate change, increasing drought and fire risk is predicted. It is recommended that advocacy signage and information within digital platforms be used to inform users of the very high ecological value of the area and that overnight camping is prohibited. Monitoring should also be undertaken to ensure that over-night camping does not occur. Further, the Reserves Act (1977) provides provision to restrict access from time to time and this measure should be used when required, such as during periods of high to extreme fire risk periods, especially when adjoining plantation forest land has enforced these same requirements. These measures are consistent with policies 3 and 4 of the NPSIB 2023.”*

### **(v) A New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010**

Policy 1 recognises that the coastal environment extends beyond the CMA and incorporates a range of values associated with the broader environment. In this case, Policy 11 (indigenous biodiversity), Policy 13 (preservation of natural character), Policy 15 (natural features and natural landscapes), Policy 18 (public open space), and Policy 25 (subdivision, use, and development in areas of coastal hazard risk), are relevant; as is Policy 2 (the Treaty of Waitangi, tangata whenua and Māori heritage).

The project will avoid biodiversity effects as listed in Policy 11(a) and avoid significant effects as listed in Policy 11(b).

From a planning perspective, the bridge is assessed as resulting in a minor adverse on natural character. The site is not identified as an area of regionally outstanding natural features or landscapes and is not mapped as having outstanding natural character or high natural character. The bridge design is a back-country style of walking track structure. While it will be a structural element in the landscape, it is of a type that is not unexpected in a wilderness area. It is also noted that the surrounding landscape includes commercial pine forest, grazing farm land and associated buildings and farm races, and access from the south-east via Whangaehu Beach Road. For these reasons, the bridge is assessed as not inconsistent with Policy 13 in that its design and purpose does preserve the natural character of the coastal environment and does not constitute inappropriate development or use. This conclusion does recognise the subtle differences between natural character, natural features and landscapes. The proposal will not adversely impact the wider elements of natural character, including the biophysical, ecological and water quality elements.



The proposal will not impact outstanding natural features and outstanding natural landscapes, and will avoid significant adverse on other natural features and natural landscapes in the coastal environment. Any effect on the landscape will be minor and appropriate in the context of the location and the purpose of the bridge.

The proposal is strongly supportive of Policy 18 by enhancing access and appreciation of public open space (on the north side of the river) and also default public access and experience across land to the south (via the farm land), and between the coastal margin north and south of the Whangaehu River mouth.

The proposal is not inconsistent with Policy 25. The public walking access across this area is an appropriate use and does not increase the risk of environmental harm from coastal hazards.

Policy 2 is being given effect through the ongoing engagement undertaken with mana whenua.

Overall, the proposal will be generally consistent with the NZCPS policies and will not be inconsistent with those policies.

**(vi) a regional policy statement or proposed regional policy statement:**

The relevant regional policy statement provisions are addressed in the subservient regional plan provisions addressed below.

**(vii) a plan or proposed plan**

As an activity triggering a rule applying to the CMA, Objectives CE-CMA-O1 and CE-CMA-O2, and Policies CE-CMA-P4 (appropriate use and development) and CE-CMA-P5 (public access) are most relevant.

In accordance with Policy CE-CMA-P4. The bridge does have a functional need to be located over the CMA, being across the river. Its purpose is to provide pedestrian access across the river. It does not facilitate restoration or rehabilitation of natural features, but that requirement of CE-CMA-P4.2 is only required "where reasonably practicable". That is not a reasonably practicable outcome for a pedestrian bridge. The bridge and its use will avoid the adverse effects listed in CE-CMA-P4.3 to the extent reasonably practicable and such effects have been minimised through location, design and construction methodology so that they are mitigated in accordance with the final clause of that policy. The proposal is not inconsistent with CE-CMA-P4, based on the location, context, purpose and design of the bridge.

The proposal is strongly consistent with Policy CE-CMA-P5. The purpose of the bridge is to enhance public access.

## **9. CONDITIONS**

It is anticipated that conditions will be imposed on the concession that reflect the management of the construction of the bridge and ongoing walking access through the reserve. It is requested that draft conditions be provided to the applicant for review in advance of a decision being made on the application.

## **10. NOTIFICATION**

As a concession term greater than 10 years is sought, it is understood that the application must be publicly notified.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

The purpose of the project is to improve the amenity and safety for walkers of the Te Araroa Trail by diverting the trail away from State Highway 3 between Whanganui and Whangaehu. It is part of a wider initiative to allow walking access along the coast to south of the Turakina River.

Potential adverse effects of the proposal will be appropriately managed and minimised. These effects will be compensated by the improved public access, safety and amenity afforded by the use of the track and bridge.

## **APPENDIX A: ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

## **APPENDIX B: ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

## **APPENDIX C: DESIGN DRAWINGS**

## **APPENDIX D: TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION**

**APPENDIX E: RECORD OF TITLE**