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# Celebrating leadership and inspiring others

AN INVITATION TO BE PART OF THE CANTERBURY BALLANCE FARM ENVIRONMENT AWARDS (BFEA) CATCHMENT SHOWCASE IN EARLY MARCH PROVIDED MID CANTERBURY CATCHMENT COLLECTIVE (MCCC) WITH A VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY TO CELEBRATE LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF CATCHMENT-SCALE INNOVATION, KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND DATA COLLECTION.

MCCC were proud to be selected to take part in the BFEA catchment showcase, which recognises the efforts of rural communities working together to improve water quality in our local rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands.

Established in 2021, MCCC supports coordinated environmental work across the Ashburton District from the Southern Alps to the Pacific Ocean between the Rangitata and Rakaia rivers. With over 200 members across 10 catchment groups, MCCC rapidly evolved as a vital hub for farming, water quality, biodiversity (including pest and predator control) and other community-led initiatives.

Soon after establishing, MCCC received funding support from a Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) Essential Freshwater grant. The committee agreed the strategic vision would focus on encouraging a coordinated and integrated catchment-by-catchment approach to intergenerational land and water stewardship – while demonstrating that profitable farming can coexist with a reduced environmental footprint.

“Communities tend to think long-term and a farmer-led (bottom-up) approach where locals take ownership of the task at hand creates more enduring engagement and relationships than regulation ... or top-down alone,” explains MCCC Coordinator Angela Cushnie.

“We are bringing ideas, action and science together to improve our environmental footprint, support catchment group initiatives and champion community wellbeing, which is proving to be very rewarding work”.

Current funding from Ministry for the Environment (MfE) helps ensure members are able to build on the foundational work that has been undertaken and continue momentum to ensure vital lessons are celebrated and ideally replicated.

Central to a data-driven approach has been the development of their own GIS mapping tool that enables local groups to accurately visualise catchment health.

This is backed up by stream health assessments and eDNA testing which provides baseline water quality data that can be used for decision-making.

On the ground, this data translates into



Garry Brown and Angela Cushnie from Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective received the award from Guy Polson from Tavendale and Partners who sponsor the BFEA Catchment Showcase.

tangible projects. Riparian planting to transform waterways, constructed wetlands to create habitat and remove nutrients plus on-farm risk assessment and mitigation strategies.

Several groups are also carrying out active predator and weed control across the district. For example, in the Ashburton Forks area, coordinated efforts are deploying auto traps, while the Whitcombe Landcare Trust is working alongside agencies to tackle weeds and pests in the Rakaia catchment.

While the collective has a sharp focus on soil health, biodiversity and water quality, its most profound impact may be social.

By facilitating farmer-to-farmer engagement and field days, MCCC has made great strides in strengthening the social fabric of this rural community.

Key focus areas for catchment groups include:

- Community-led water monitoring programmes
- Riparian planting and ecosystem enhancement
- Collaboration through stakeholder engagement and strategic partnerships
- Protecting and regenerating biodiversity
- On-farm risk assessment and mitigation management

- Telling local stories about the 'good stuff' happening across our district
- Pest and weed control

## CANTERBURY BFEA INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Within the wider MCCC network, there were individual farm successes. Kerry Harmer is on the MCCC committee and is current Chair for the Ōtūwharekai Ashburton Lakes Catchment Group. Kerry farms Castle Ridge Station with her husband Paul and received five awards including: Regional Supreme Winner, Beef + Lamb NZ Livestock Farm Award, Ministry for the Environment Biodiversity Award, Environment Canterbury Water Quality Award and the WaterForce Safe Water Recognition Award.

Ashburton Forks Catchment Group members Baden Sommerville and Campbell Sommerville from Somerview Farm won the Rabobank Agri-Business Management Award.

Hekeao Hinds Lowlands Catchment Group members Stuart and Sara Russell from Ngatimaru Farming Company won the New Zealand Farm Environment Trust Innovation Award.

WORDS AND IMAGE PROVIDED BY MID CANTERBURY CATCHMENT COLLECTIVE



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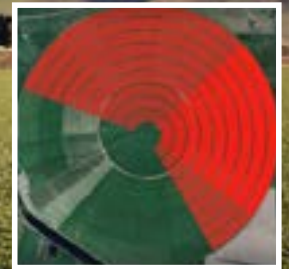
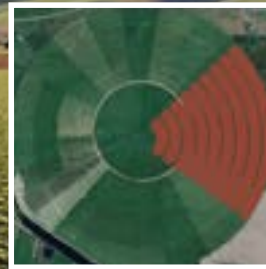


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