

Indigenous Vegetation on Māori Freehold Land in the Waikato Region

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This research analyses indigenous vegetation on Māori Freehold Land, with considerations to threats and management. An indigenous vegetation inventory will help target restoration activities for hapū, iwi and Waikato Regional Council (WRC) to enhance indigenous ecosystems in the Waikato.

GIS analysis and literature reviews were applied and the results will focus on a) the Waikato Region; b) a case study site: Mt. Kokako Forest.

a) Land tenure in the Waikato Region consists of 70% Private Land, 18% Crown Land, 11% Maori Freehold Land and 1% Local Authority Land. Although Māori Freehold Land is only a small portion of the regional land area, 44% of this land contains indigenous vegetation. This is comprised of forest (61,520 ha), scrub and shrubland (45,002 ha) and other indigenous vegetation types (5, 631 ha). Most indigenous vegetation is found on moderate to very steep slopes (89,420 ha), while the remaining lowland forest and shrubland are at high risk of habitat degradation.

b) Mt. Kokako Forest has an area of 6,429 ha and is located at the southern end of the Hākarimata ranges. This site is identified as a Significant Natural Area and ranked Regionally Significant by WRC. It is the largest remaining indigenous forest in the Raglan Ecological District of which the land tenure is 71% Māori Freehold Land, 21% Private Land and 8% Crown Land. Fauna species include Longfin eel (*Anguilla dieffenbachii*) and New Zealand bush falcon (*Falco novaeseelandie*). However, this habitat is greatly threatened by pests. Collaboration among key stakeholders would be valuable to enhance habitat protection.

Indigenous vegetation on Māori Freehold Land encompasses a core part of the natural heritage and cultural importance in the Waikato Region. Recommendations include combining Mātauranga Māori (Indigenous Knowledge) with Ecological Management. Furthermore, maintaining relationships between hapū, iwi and key stakeholders is essential for indigenous biodiversity sustainability.