

# Waikato River & Hydro Lakes

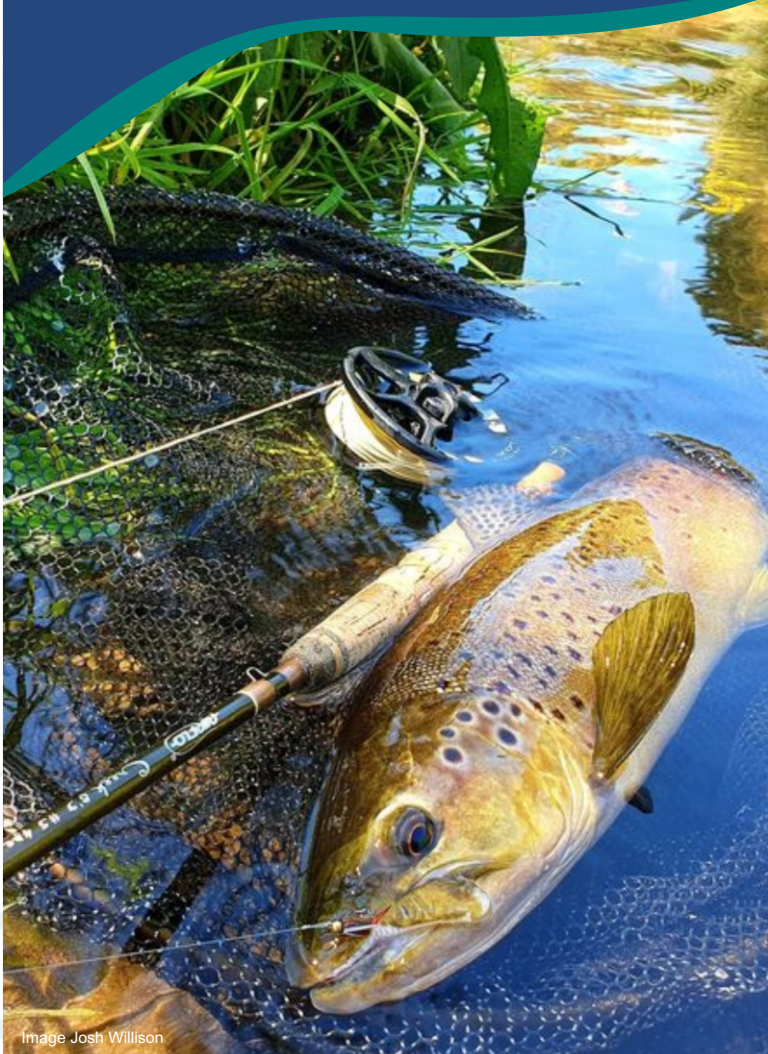


Image Josh Willison

## EASTERN REGION

## Waikato River Fishery

**The Waikato River flows out of Lake Taupō, through the central north island and Waikato regions before joining the sea south of Auckland at Port Waikato on the west coast. It is the longest river in NZ at about 425 km in length.**

A considerable length of the Waikato River flows within the Eastern Fish & Game region, and that portion also contains 5 hydro lakes. The Eastern region starts below Huka Falls near Taupō and ends just below Lake Maraetai.

The river and its hydro lakes offer a huge amount of angling opportunity and many parts seldom see an angler. There are opportunities for trolling, fly and spin fishing, and bait fishing is also permitted on the Waikato River and its lakes. In summer when water temperatures rise excellent fishing can be had at the mouths of tributary streams where fish tend to congregate seeking cooler water conditions.

As well as holding rainbow and brown trout the river and hydro lakes also contain other fish species in various areas including pest fish such as Rudd and carp and in some places catfish. If any of these species are caught anglers should kill them and dispose of them carefully and never transfer them to other waters.

As the river and its lakes are used for hydro-power generation the water levels can fluctuate dramatically and without warning and due to this care is needed when on and around the river. Some areas near the hydro power stations tail waters are closed to public access for safety reasons and these are usually well fenced off and signposted.

During the game bird hunting season, which usually starts on the first weekend of May, the river and lakes are also popular with hunters. Anglers are advised to be aware of the game season and it is common at this time of year for hunters to be on the river and lakes.

The Waikato River cycle and walking trail follows much of the river from Maraetai through to the Atiamuri Dam and offers access in many places to the river.

## **Waikato Hydro Power Lakes**

The five hydro lakes on the river within Eastern Region are Lake Aratiatia near Taupō, then Lakes Ohakuri, Atiamuri, and Whakamaru, and finally Lake Maraetai near Mangakino. All offer different features and experiences. Camping is available at Lake Whakamaru. While varying amounts of accessible shoreline are available to fish from, the best way to fish these lakes is by using a boat, and most fishing methods can be very productive. The lakes contain smelt and spring and summer fishing in the shallows or at inflowing stream mouths is recommended. In summer when terrestrial insects are about, drifting around the lake edges fishing to rising trout taking insects off the surface can be spectacular and dry fly patterns, and using beetle and cicada imitations can be very effective. Bait fishing is permitted throughout the system and especially for beginners can be well worthwhile.

## **Hydro Power Stations and surrounding waters**

In various places where it is safe to do so, Mercury, the operator of the hydro power stations, permits angler access.

There is angler access about 150 m downstream of the Atiamuri dam tailwaters, and some limited access downstream of the Ohakuri dam tailwaters. The tailwaters of the Maraetai and Whakamaru dams are not accessible to the public due to steep dangerous conditions and no angler access is permitted at the Aratiatia dam tailwater again due to dangerous conditions in the area.

## **Safety considerations**

The dams create dangerous currents and water conditions. Please keep to areas indicated by signage and avoid the 200 meter exclusion zones in the water around these structures. Note that water flows can change quickly and without warning and conditions can become very dangerous. Even anglers familiar with these areas of the river should be aware that the currents and riverbed are unpredictable and take care.

## **Hydro lake level information**

Lake level information can be obtained at this website: <https://www.mercury.co.nz/lakelevels>

## **Waikato River**

The river outside of the lake areas is accessible in many places from the shore but using a boat opens up a huge amount of water to explore and fish. There are launching ramps located along the river and days can be spent finding new places to fish. As the river is so big and deep and in places fast flowing, unless fish are actively working the surface, deep sinking gear is usually required. Another option is to look for slower backwaters where shallower water may be found, and cruising fish located.

## **Tributary Streams**

The main inflowing tributaries are from the Taupo end are the Pueto Stream, Deep Creek, the Whirinaki Stream, the Tahunaatara Stream, and the Mangakino Stream. These are all good fisheries, but there are many other smaller tributary streams flowing into the Waikato River and hydro lakes, and these are all worth fishing especially at the mouths over the summer.

The Pueto Stream and its mouth are accessible off Broadlands Road near White Road. In summer this stream mouth can fish extremely well, and suits fly or spin fishing.

The Deep Creek Stream mouth is also a very good location to fish and is easily accessible.

## **Fishing Methods**

On the lakes trolling is popular and experimenting with different depths and lures is recommended. Some areas have sudden shallow water or underwater obstacles such as trees and rock outcrops so it is wise to watch out for these things if you can. Fishing with spinners or soft baits or fly casting near weed beds or into deeper water can be productive, and most popular lures will work. In summer dry fly fishing is fun and productive and provides variation from trolling and deep-water methods.

The river and lakes do hold some large trout and even trophy size brown trout are not uncommon.

## Fishing Regulations

Check the current Sports fishing regulation guide for up to date regulations. Anglers are welcome to call Fish & Game at our office for information.

### Access

The map on this brochure shows most accessible parts of the river and lakes including public access areas and launching ramps for boats. There is plenty of water to explore especially by boat. Private landowners adjoining the river and lakes will also often grant permission for access to anglers if they receive a polite request.

### Biosecurity

As the Waikato River system does contain pest fish and aquatic pest plants anglers are reminded it is essential to 'check, clean, drain and dry' all gear used. This includes not only fishing gear, but waders, boats, kayaks – anything that contacts water. Please check your boat thoroughly before and after launching. Make sure that bilges and ballast tanks are drained and dried, and no water or weed is transferred into or out of the river system. If you have used boats or gear in this system, please ensure they are clean and dry before using anywhere else.

### Popular Fishing Locations

Listed below are some of the most popular and readily accessed fishing locations. As well as these locations there are many areas where anglers may find good places to access and fish. Regardless of where fishing, take extreme care and remember water levels can fluctuate rapidly, it is recommended even shore-based anglers consider wearing a lifejacket or floatation vest of some type.

- 1 **Lake Maraetai.** A good boat ramp with plenty of parking is available in Mangakino, and the lake offers a variety of water to fish from secluded arms to the inflow of the Mangakino River. There is shoreline access near the boat ramp and on lakeside reserve. This lake commonly produces very large brown trout. Note there is no access to the shore near the dam face, and there is no boat access downstream of the

personnel boom for safety reasons including fast currents and difficult exit from the water. Some limited access is possible to the river below the Maraetai dam tailwaters exclusion zones, but anglers should take extreme care as the riverbanks are steep and river currents swift and water levels can change dramatically.

- 2 **Lake Maraetai – 'Twin Lakes'**. This is an arm of Lake Maraetai, intersected by SH32 which offers a small lake experience. There is no boat passage under the road bridge, but small boats such as dinghies or kayaks can be launched near the bridge on both sides accessing both into Lake Maraetai and the Twin Lake arm.
- 3 **Mangakino River**. The river is accessible upstream from the lake for some distance in a small boat and offers good fishing especially summer through into autumn.
- 4 **Lake Whakamaru. Pokuru Road**. The road provides access to the lake shore in several places.
- 5 **Lake Whakamaru**. A camping area is situated off SH32, this is operated by the South Waikato District Council, and a small boat ramp is situated on the end side of the camp.
- 6 **Lake Whakamaru. SH30 – Dunham's Point reserve**. This provides a camping area, toilets, picnic area, and a small boat launching area.
- 7 **Lake Whakamaru. Ongarahu Stream**. This stream mouth can be productive in summer in cool water inflows in the lake, best access is by boat.



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Fish & Game web page

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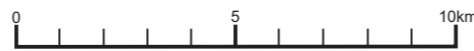


Image Rob Vas

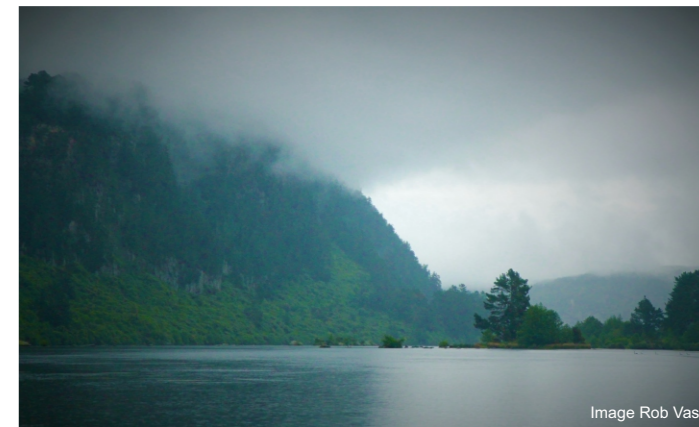


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- 8 **Mangaharakeke Stream mouth.** This stream mouth can fish very well in summer and autumn. Small boats can be launched from a track near the highway bridge off SH30.
- 9 **Atiamuri Dam tailwater.** Turn off SH1 into Atiamuri Power Station Road and take the Waikato River trail to the left. A short walk along the trail gives access through a reserve to the river about 150 metres downstream of the tail race. The river can be accessed downstream to the SH1 bridge.
- 10 **Lake Atiamuri.** Drive through the village to a boat ramp, jetty and parking and picnic area.
- 11 **Lake Ohakuri Dam tailwater.** To access the dam tailwater take the road below the dam on the true left, and park by the bridge with a locked gate on it. Walk across the bridge and find 2 access tracks on the true right bank, these give access to some areas to fish from along the riverbank below the tailwaters.
- 12 **Lake Ohakuri.** A boat ramp and parking area is situated on the true left of the dam, accessed off Ohakuri Rd.
- 13 **Lake Ohakuri. Whirinaki Arm reserve.** Boat ramp, toilets, carpark and parking area. Give access to the Whirinaki Arm, the road bridge a short distance downstream is low and prevents most boats travelling under it.
- 14 **Lake Ohakuri. Whirinaki Arm.** A small boat ramp, jetty and parking area below Whirinaki Valley Road. From here boats can access the main body of Lake Ohakuri going downstream.
- 15 **Tutukau Road bridge.** A boat ramp and jetty gives access to the river both upstream and downstream. This is an alternative ramp to access Lake Ohakuri with plenty of good areas on the river in between to explore.
- 16 **Deep Creek (Torepatutahi Stream).** Access off Vaile Road to a river side reserve which has a good boat ramp. Good fishing at the Deep Creek stream mouth especially in summer.
- 17 **Ohaaki Road Bridge.** On the true left of river upstream of bridge is a small boat launching area.
- 18 **River Road. Boat ramp and parking.** Give access to the upper river.
- 19 **Pueto Stream.** Look for the Angler Access sign on Broadlands Rd and take a 500m track to the stream mouth. There are some side-tracks which access the stream between the road and the mouth in various places.
- 20 **Upper Waikato River.** There is no angler access below the Aratiatia Dam due to swift and dangerous flows that can increase river height by several metres within minutes. However further downstream there is access to the Waikato River from the Reserve along Nga Awa Purua Road. Take extreme care in this area as the river can rise rapidly when water is released from Lake Aratiatia.
- 21 **Lake Aratiatia.** A Department of Conservation walking track follows the lake shore on the true right to Huka Falls and the lake and river can be fished in various places from this track. This lake has no public boat ramp, but small boats or kayaks can be launched near the start of the track above the dam.



**KEY**

- Eastern Region Boundry
- ~~~~~ Rivers and streams
- ~~~~~ Lakes
- ==== Roads
- ..... Walking tracks
- ▲ Camping
- ⚓ Boat ramp



**Protect our waters**

Unwanted aquatic weeds, algae and pest fish threaten freshwater environments for the trout fishery, native species, and all recreational users. Be a responsible user...

**Check, Clean, Drain & Dry**

Anglers should refer to the latest North Island Sport Fishing Regulations for season duration, bag limits and methods applying to the Eastern Fish & Game region. It is available through licence agents or from Fish & Game, and can be downloaded from the Eastern Fish & Game web site. Anglers should seek the permission of landowners before accessing private property.



Image Rob Vas