

Media Release

Threatened native species flourishing in river

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Threatened native species such as longfin eels, inanga whitebait and bluegill bullies are already flourishing in new habitats created for them along the Avon River less than four months after the first stage of work to revitalise the river was completed.

As part of the development of the 3.2km-long Te Papa Ōtākaro/Avon River Precinct, works are underway to restore the river as closely as possible to its original condition. This includes removing built-up sediment to improve the river's health and re-establishing habitats for species that live in the river.

So far work has been done to improve the river between the Antigua Boatsheds to Colombo Street.

Christchurch Central Development Unit director Warwick Isaacs says that making the river healthier is one of Te Papa Ōtākaro/Avon River Precinct's key principles.

"It's always been important that we create a clean waterway as well as an inviting new green space around the river for people to enjoy. The end result will be a thriving urban waterfront," says Mr Isaacs.

"We are continuing to enhance the river to encourage wildlife to return, with the next stage of the river revitalisation from Colombo Street to Barbadoes Street. This will begin in October and is expected to be completed in January 2015."

These enhancements include changes to the river channel to increase the water flow speed and the creation of overhangs and placement of rocks to provide habitats for fish, eels, kōura (freshwater crayfish) and other species.

EOS Ecology aquatic scientist Shelley McMurtrie says the presence of these threatened species in newly created habitats shows that the revitalisation work is creating a strong ecosystem.

"While only initial investigations have been done so far, it is encouraging to find such a diversity of fish in the river, including longfin eel, shortfin eel, inanga whitebait, upland bully, common bully, bluegill bully, and brown trout", says Ms McMurtrie.

"We were particularly heartened to find juvenile longfin eels who prefer faster water and coarse surfaces, which was a habitat in rare supply in the Avon River prior to these works. Their presence indicates that we have done well in getting the environment right for them."

"Elements such as these were a real focus of the Te Papa Ōtākaro/Avon River Precinct design team and so it's wonderful that the benefits are already being seen. As time goes on, we hope that more and more wildlife will return to the river."

If you want to learn more about what's happening down at the river, Christchurch's evolving Te Papa Ōtākaro/Avon River Precinct will be showcased in free guided walks to celebrate World Rivers Day (Sunday, September 28 2014).

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