



Akerama Improvements Project

PROJECT UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2017



The Akerama Improvements Project covers State Highway 1 (SH1) near Hukerenui, about 30km north of Whangarei, from Barnes Road to Rusk Road. The NZ Transport Agency is creating more passing lanes and removing tight corners to provide road users with a smoother, safer journey.

MAJOR PROJECT MILESTONES



The route passes through a significant wetland area which has posed some challenges for the project team. Other challenges include unusually long periods of wet weather and being a long way from suppliers. As the project nears completion, the team continues to undertake work in the wetland area to protect species such as the black mudfish.

The mudfish are monitored in winter along the section of road which is being realigned. The mudfish in these areas will be transferred to the newly restored wetland when ecologists and freshwater fish specialists confirm that the water quality and environment is suitable. The project team aims to relocate the mudfish by winter 2019.

Overall, mudfish numbers in the wetland have increased, which is likely to be the result of stormwater improvements we have completed as part of the project. These improvements have allowed water to flow into the wetland rather than drain away.

During the winter, the contractor planted trees, shrubs and ground cover at the road edges to reduce sediment and stormwater runoff into the wetland areas.

SHANE WHATARAU CARVING

Along SH1, towards Kawakawa is an intricately decorated pou carved by Shane Whatarau of Ngāti Hau. The pou represents Kahukuri, a tupuna (ancestor) of Ngāti Hau, and is crafted from tōtara found in the Akerama Forest. The design reflects the species of mudfish and eels in the nearby wetland.

A dawn blessing by iwi elders of Te Parawhau and Te Uriroroī, close relatives of Ngāti Hau, was held on site on 27 July 2017. Just as the mihimihi (speeches) ended, the first rays of sun unveiled the pou. It was a magical moment for all present and a fitting way to introduce something of such beauty and importance to local iwi.



An intricately decorated pou by carver Shane Whatarau of Ngāti Hau
Photograph by Clive Burnett

MUDFISH - A VERY SPECIAL FISH

There are five species of mudfish in New Zealand, all of which have a threatened or T risk status under the New Zealand Threat Classification System. Mudfish closely resemble eels and have long, stocky bodies, thick slippery skin, and no scales. They vary in size between species, but adults can grow to between 9 and 12 cm long.



Black mudfish. Photograph by Ben Herbert and Mike McGlynn

Mudfish can survive during times when there is no surface water – something most other fish are unable to do.

During these 'dry' spells, their metabolism slowly drops and they absorb oxygen through their skin. Mudfish still need damp surroundings and cover such as logs, tree roots and vegetation, to keep them alive during these times. They can usually only cope with short periods without water, but have been known to survive for several months after surface water dries.

The 'dry' periods are hard on mudfish, and after water returns, mudfish are often thin, in poor condition and can have reduced breeding success.

Throughout New Zealand, lowland wetlands have been extensively drained and modified, which has greatly reduced suitable mudfish habitat, and has threatened remaining mudfish populations.

We would like to acknowledge the Department of Conservation for providing the above information.



Planting to reduce stormwater and sediment runoff entering the wetlands

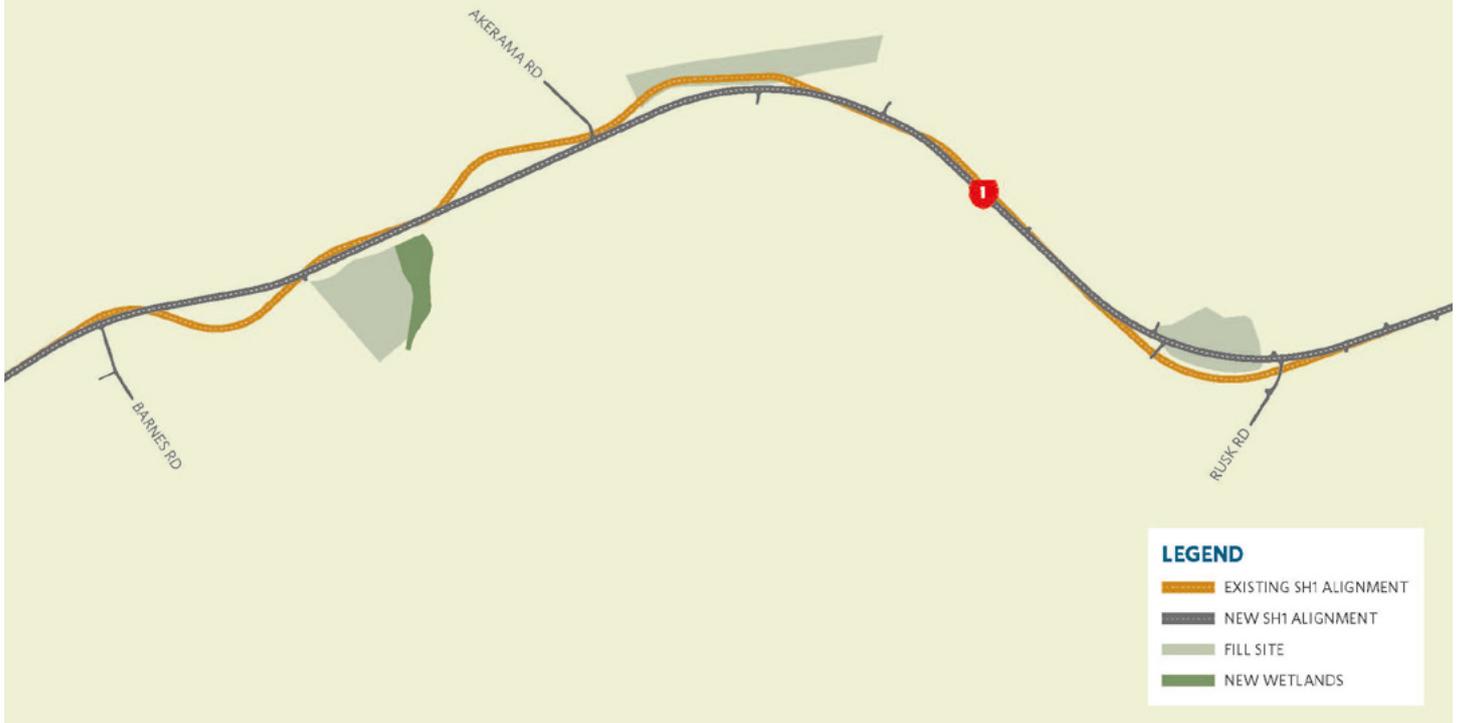


Wetland development site and new home for the black mudfish



Akerama Road intersection

SH1 AKERAMA IMPROVEMENTS



PROJECT CONTACTS

Please contact Barbara Ware 027 809 8186 or barbara.ware@nzta.govt.nz
Keep up with progress at: www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/sh1-akerama-improvements

