

The Waitaki River



Digging deeper...

Project Aqua would have produced enough electricity to supply a city the size of Christchurch but was abandoned due to public opposition, cost and the length of time it would have taken to build. Alternative electricity generation projects, mainly using wind, are under consideration.



Local lingo

River length: 110km
 Catchment area:
 Approximately 10,000km²
 Average flow rate: 370 cubic metres per second

Formed from the large amounts of gravel and sediment that come down from the glaciers in the Southern Alps, the Waitaki River is a stunning natural feature, both for its beauty and for its importance as home and breeding ground for native species. It is one of the South Island's braided river systems, the lower reaches of which form the northern border of Otago.

At least 25 different bird species forage and breed on New Zealand's braided rivers. These include the Black stilt, wrybill, oystercatchers, shags, terns and dotterels. Many other forms of wildlife including insects and native fish species also make their homes here.

The Waitaki River is one of the most popular fishing rivers in the South Island, boasting good numbers of the introduced Rainbow trout, Brown trout and salmon. The river is also a popular camping destination for locals who value its climate, unique geology, cleanliness and tranquility.

The upper Waitaki River produces more than 20% of New Zealand's electricity. The lower part of the river has also been targeted for power production in Meridian Energy's now shelved 'Project Aqua' scheme. This scheme would have diverted a large part of the river's flow into a separate canal dotted with power stations.



The Waitaki River mouth



Aerial view of the Waitaki River

