

BRaid was formed in 2006, so this would be our 21st AGM. Although we have very few meetings, BRaid is still in good heart and widely appreciated, thanks mainly to Sonny and the website, plus the very successful annual conference held on July 8.

Conference (July 8)

We had around 140 participants who listened to 14 presentations - although a major attraction is always the opportunity to catch up with so many like-minded people. Around 70% were salaried professionals, with ECan having the largest number present. The second largest representation was by conservation groups / trusts and DOC. All the feedback was positive, with many stating strong endorsement for the conference. Major thanks, as usual, are due to Sonny Whitelaw for all the organization involved.

We had a useful debrief on August 25. Such was the success of this year's conference, that it was agreed to go ahead with planning for a repeat in 2027 – although needless to say, funding will need to be confirmed beforehand. Sonny will address this later today. The need for more question time was a dominant component of 2026 feedback comment. This raises the challenge of providing such time, whilst still retaining the numbers of varied and interesting speakers – a definite and major attraction of the conference. It was agreed that we try for 11 speakers total (including a keynote), with flexible speaking times. Most would have 20mins, with a 20 min Q&A session before each break. Associated topics to be grouped, with a specialist chair who will facilitate questions. In addition, speakers will be requested to be available for questioning during lunch (and maybe tea) breaks. In early February, 2027, we will gather to start organising a conference for sometime within the first 2 weeks of July.

BFT 'best management practice' manual

The need for such a manual was discussed on July 10 last year, immediately following the 2025 conference. There were more than 30 attendees present, and it was agreed that Ellery Mayence (DOC) prepare a draft, early versions of which have since been circulated to the committee. Ellery will update us on its progress today, and it is on track to be completed by the end of this year.

Promotion.

The general interest in braided rivers, continues to be strong. Hence, our website, newsletters remain even more vital to service this and the public's interest. The website is acknowledged as the nation's leading source of braided river information. Thanks once again to Sonny for maintaining this high level of awareness.

Field operations

In the past we have run BRaid bird surveys, such as in the upper Waimakariri catchment during 2012, 2014 and 2016. We are always striving to promote field work and research in all braided rivers. Although BRaid does not have the resources to be involved directly, we closely follow management and research projects, which are regularly covered on our website, with more detailed reporting on specific studies at the annual conference. We have also been involved with Manawa / Contact Energy to create new shorebird habitat on a delta where the Avoca river enters L. Coleridge.

The future

BRaid could not carry on without the support of ECan. Therefore, there is considerable concern with the present Government's intentions to disestablish regional councils by 2028 and to replace them with smaller unitary councils. Such fragmentation is likely to seriously undermine the collaborative water and catchment management practices which have been developed over recent decades. Plus we risk losing the

technical expertise accumulated by teams of hydrologists, river engineers and freshwater scientists. BRaid's mission of establishing long-term sustainable management of our braided river ecosystems will be seriously threatened. This matter was briefly raised at the July conference, and a commitment was made to express our concern appropriately. All conference attendees will be contacted accordingly.

Thanks

Finally, sincere thanks to the small band of keen people that represents BRaid. There is little doubt that we punch well above our weight, largely thanks to our ability to employ a part-time manager, Sonny Whitelaw. As stated above, this is primarily due to the support we get from ECan. Major thanks also to our treasurer, Sue Mardon. Without all this support it would be very hard to make meaningful progress.

Nick Ledgard, September 17, 2026