

## Special panellist session: **Should we bring back Upokororo, and if so, how, where and why?**

Panel chair and discussant: Dr Simon Stewart

The most stringently protected native freshwater fish in Aotearoa currently receives the least management consideration. That is because it has not been seen since 1923 and is assumed extinct. Upokororo, the New Zealand Grayling (*Prototroctes oxyrhynchus*) were once so abundant that they were reported to have prevented watermills operating on the Hutt River due to the sheer volume being caught in the wheel. However, less than 30 years following these reports of comical abundance, they had all but disappeared from our rivers. Upokororo were thought to be our only herbivorous fish; the combination of their unique functional niche and their abundance suggests that they likely had a significant impact on the state and function of our lowland rivers and lakes.

Around the world, managers and the wider public are opening to the idea of rewilding our ecosystems; reintroducing species to facilitate lost trophic interactions. Upokororo stands out as a prime candidate for rewilding, which begs the question; Should we bring back Upokororo, and if so, how, where and why? In this panel discussion we will hear 6 different responses to this question, engaging topics such as de-extinction, functional surrogates, whakapapa, speciation, and distribution modelling. Our expert panellists include Prof. Gerry Closs, Dr Finnbar Lee, Dr Michele Melchior, Dr Aisling Rayne, Dr Georgia Thomson-Laing, and Dr Joanne Clapcott. Panellist responses will be followed by a moderated discussion with attendees. We encourage you to come to this session with an open mind, curiosity, and creativity. While we do not expect this discussion to immediately galvanise management actions, we hope that it can act as the start of a conversation about reimagining the future of our lowland aquatic ecosystems.