New Zealand has designated Wairarapa Moana Wetland as its newest Ramsar Site (no. 2432 on the List of Wetlands of International Importance). Wairarapa Moana, meaning “sea of glistening water” in the Māori language, is a culturally significant wetland on New Zealand’s North Island.

The largest wetland complex on the southern part of the Island, the site contains North Island’s third largest lake, the freshwater Lake Wairarapa. It also includes diverse wetland environments including freshwater swamps and marshes, an estuarine lake (Lake Onoke), coastal marshes, river and streams, and extensive coastal shore habitats.

More than 50 rare and threatened species are found at the site, such as the endangered black-fronted tern (Chlidonias albostriatus). A number of those species are also endemic, including the endangered New Zealand longfin eel (Anguilla dieffenbachii) and the vulnerable torrent fish (Cheimarrichthys fosteri).

The cultural significance of the site stems from its history as an indigenous settlement and rich fishing ground, in particular for freshwater eel, which could be preserved and therefore traded. Nutrient accumulation within the waterways from the surrounding land uses, invasive species and earthquakes in this active tectonic zone all represent significant threats. Lake Wairarapa and the surrounding wetlands are nonetheless highly significant for species conservation, and retain a high degree of natural character, as well as important cultural heritage, recreation and other values.