

Top tips: Salvaging water-damaged kākahu

Following these steps will minimise the loss of flood-damaged kākahu, preventing further damage.

Mould can develop within 72 hours, but with quick deliberate action you can increase the chance of a successful recovery.

1. Important considerations.

Kākahu are precious taonga, instilled with the mana of their people. As such, appropriate tikanga should be considered.

Kākahu are made of several materials which react differently to water.

- **Plant materials** are weakened by water, and will swell and shrink at different rates, creating tension.
- **Feathers** are prone to matting.
- **Fur** becomes swollen and weakened.
- **Wool** is highly absorbent and weakened when wet, while some dyes may bleed and stain other components in kākahu.



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2. Handling considerations

Wet kākahu are heavy and difficult to handle, while feathers, fur, hukahuka, and wool are susceptible to snagging and physical damage. Fragile or worn, kākahu are also more susceptible to physical damage. As such, at each stage, kākahu should be handled carefully.

If possible, use a flat, supportive structure to move kākahu. A mesh door and plastic-lined sheets of timber can be used as makeshift handling trays. Ensure enough help is available to assist with handling.

3. Plan, prioritise, proceed

Document your kākahu's condition and photograph any damage, as further treatment may be required.

Carry and treat taonga on a flat surface. Soaked items and those containing wool, or fur will require immediate treatment. Dirt can accelerate damage and should be removed promptly. Use a jug or fine hose spray to rinse your angled kākahu allowing water and debris to drain away. Use large, soft sponges to dab excess water. Rinse partially wet kākahu to prevent tide lines and staining.

4. Air-drying kākahu

Gently sponge away water. Remove excess water with towels, butcher's paper, cotton sheets or paper towels. Place absorbent material beneath rows of feathers, tufts of fur or wool. For fragile or coloured fibres place it around the edges. Monitor and change materials regularly.

Prop up taonga on flat surfaces to encourage air flow. Gently reshape and stretch the kākahu to its original shape while damp. Dry indoors with lights on to inhibit mould growth. Use fans, air conditioning and open windows to circulate air. Use a dehumidifier for wet taonga.

5. Preventing further damage

Whilst treating your kākahu handle it with the utmost care. It may be tempting to speed up the drying process, though this may cause further damage. With this in mind -

- **DO NOT** wring or twist kākahu.
- **DO NOT** attempt to unfold extremely delicate fibres and materials if they are stuck together.
- **DO NOT** hang, drape or stack kākahu as this will create further deformation and damage.

Call a conservator if:

- Your taonga are badly damaged and require extra help.
- You find mould on your taonga and need further advice and assistance.
- Your kākahu remain stuck together after drying.
- You are unsure about any of the steps given here.