

OCTOBER  
2021

# Environmental issues, awareness and action

MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

**TRA**

## Background

**As part of creating a wider content strategy, MfE are looking to better understand their audiences and how they can connect with them moving forward.**

Specifically, MfE would like to understand their audiences' attitudes, behaviours and habits. Audience research can help inform branding, customer experience, as well as organic paid marketing strategy. Deep insight on audience engagement will explore their willingness to act on environmental issues and how MfE is placed to educate and raise awareness.\*

## Methodology

# A mixed-method involving two stages

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### Qualitative Stage – Phase 1

15x 45-min Zoom Interviews across stakeholder groups:

- Famers / farmer representatives x 3
- Local government representatives x 3
- Youth representatives x 3
- Māori representatives x 2
- Pasifika representatives x 2
- Business representatives x 2

Interviews took place in July 2021. See appendix 1 for more detail on who we spoke to.

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### Quantitative Stage – Phase 2

10-minute survey which was shaped by the findings from the foundational qualitative stage.

The survey captured responses from a nationally representative sample (age, gender, region, ethnicity).

Sample of n=1,000

Survey was live from 10th to 17th of September





**Our connection with the  
environment**

**TRA**



# Kiwis are deeply connected to our natural environment

We give a score of 9.1 out of 10 for the importance of ‘natural scenery and environment’ in our lives – sharing the top spot with ‘freedom, rights and peace.’

Source: Statistics New Zealand's general social survey (GSS) 2017

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But with busy lives, too much screen time and a growing population, there's a sense that this connection is not as strong as it once was.

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As a result, nature is a value we continue to connect with rather than a cultural code we're currently living by.

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In fact, of all the cultural codes within TRA's Kiwi Cultural Codes study, connection to nature is the code Kiwis feel has changed most over time - for the worse.

Source: TRA's Kiwi Cultural Codes study

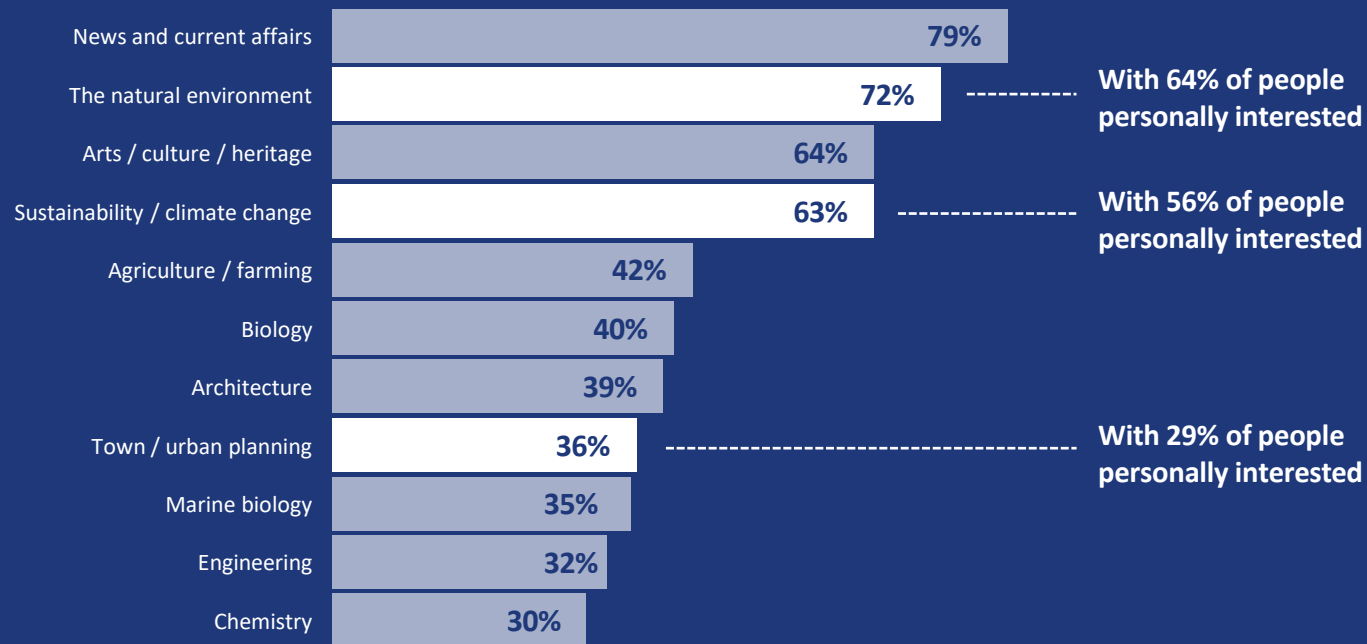
TRA's Kiwi Cultural Codes study looks at what it means to be Kiwi today and how this is changing over time.

There are six Kiwi Cultural Codes:

- Humour
- Earned success
- Individuality
- Social equivalence
- Outward world view
- Connection to nature

# As well as a cultural connection, the environment is a topic of personal interest for Kiwis

Personally, professionally or academically interested in each topic:



The amount of people with professional and academic interests in each topic is consistently low – **it's personal interest which drives connection.**

Do you have a professional, academic or personal interest in any of the following? Base: n=1,010



# But while it's a part of our lives that we value, we don't always protect it as we should

61%

I'm doing all I can to  
reduce my  
environmental impact

88%

It's important  
to me that NZ's  
environment is  
protected

Of those who believe it's important to them that NZ's environment is protected, only 61% are doing all they can to reduce their impact.

That means that 39% of people care but know that they could be doing more - a **decent opportunity for engagement exists.**

How much do you agree or disagree that.... Base: n=515

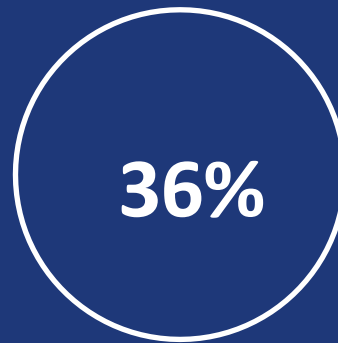


# And for all our connection, we are not particularly knowledgeable about the state of environment

And there's a core group who feel like they don't know much at all...



**Knowledgeable** about the state of NZ's environment



**Not knowledgeable** about the state of NZ's environment

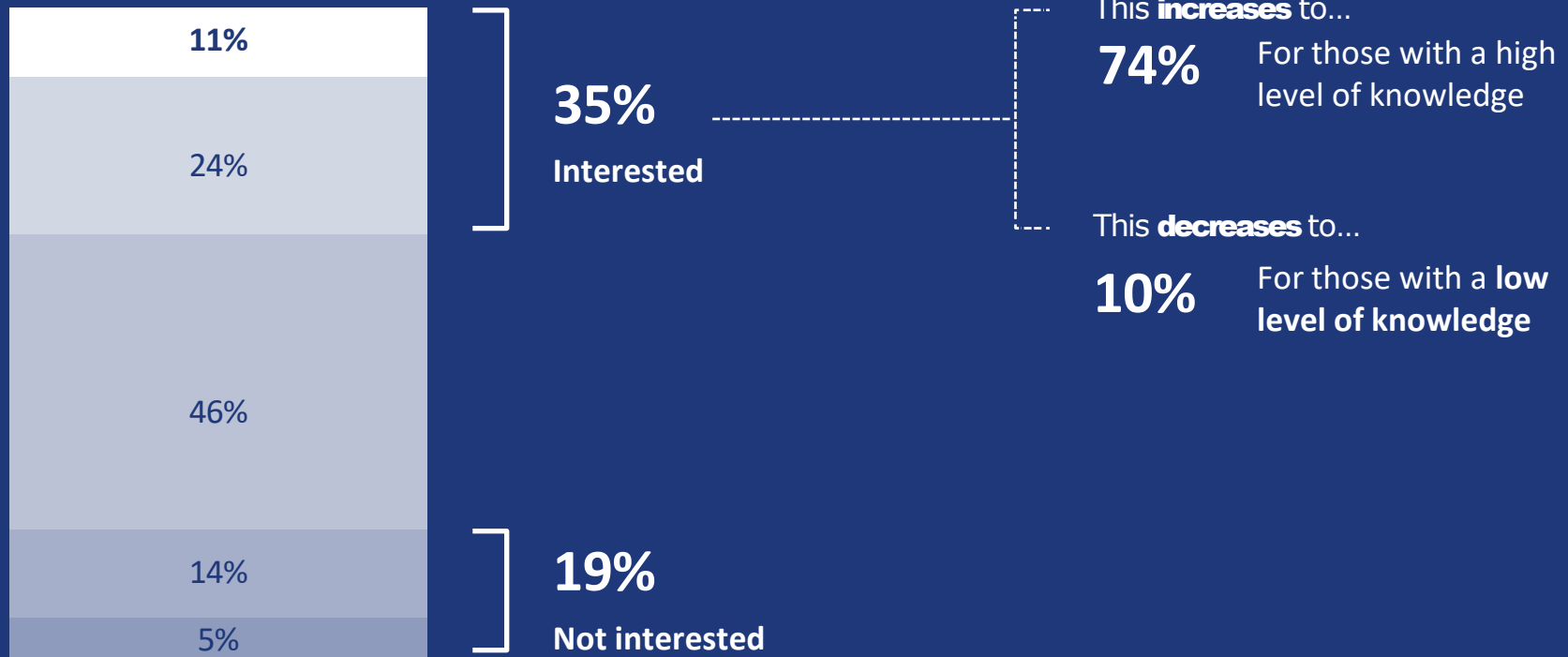
Q24 - Using the following scale, how would you rate your level of knowledge about the state of New Zealand's environment? Base: n = 481



# And we're reasonably apathetic about finding out more

Interest and knowledge levels are highly related.

## LEVEL OF INTEREST IN INFORMATION ABOUT THE STATE OF NZ'S ENVIRONMENT



Q25 - And how would you rate your level of interest in information about the state of New Zealand's environment? Base: n = 481

## IMPLICATION

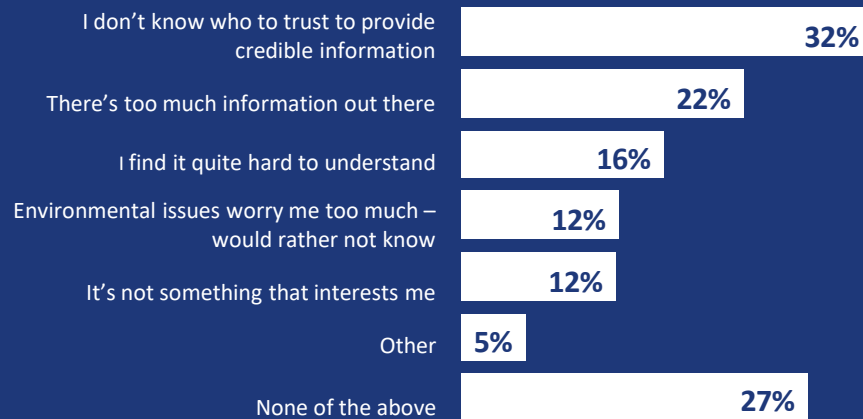
## Caring about the environment is not the same as engaging in its protection

Either actively protecting, or even understanding that it needs protecting.

*So given our deep connection, what's standing in our way?*

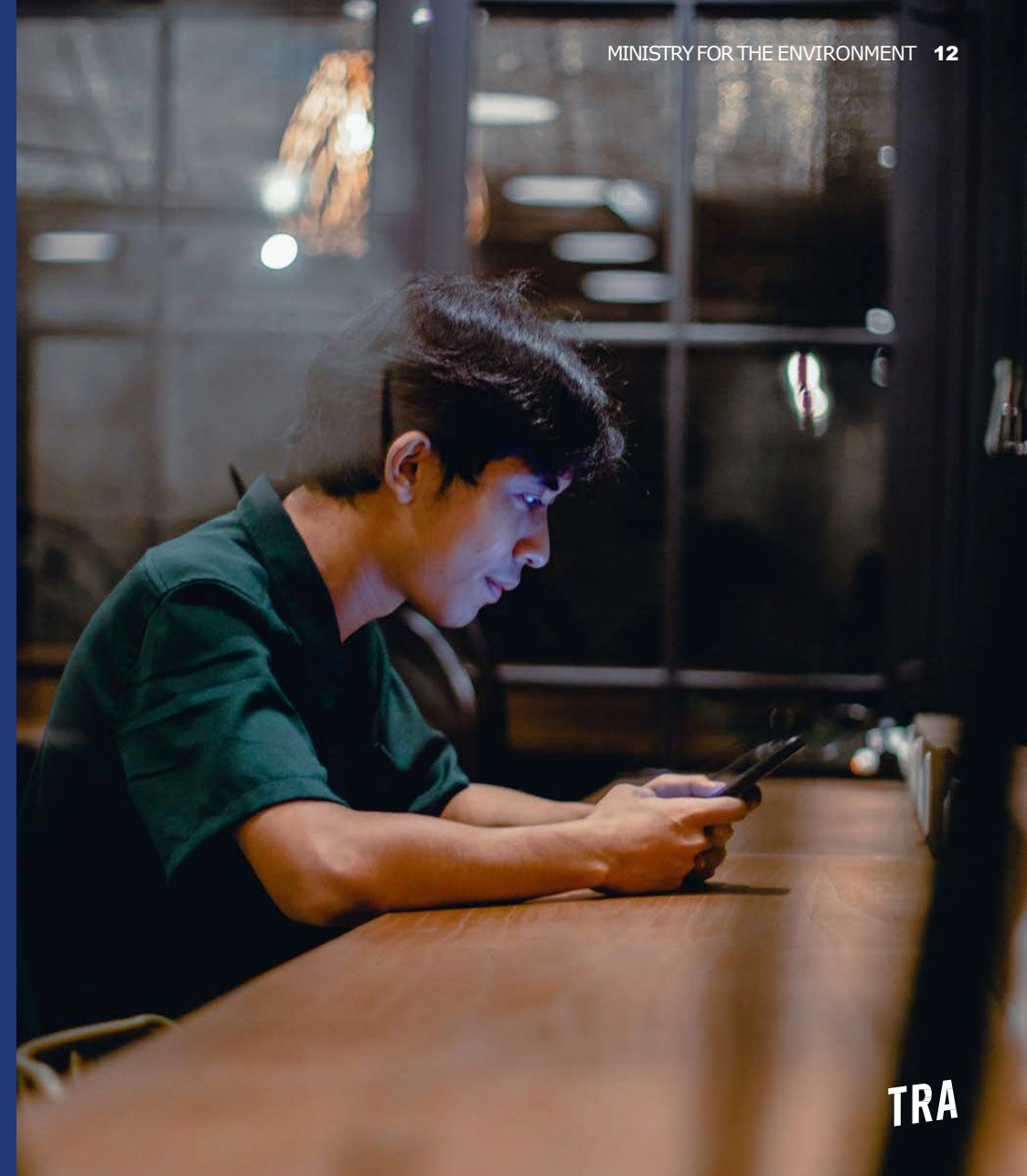


## Trust is a barrier to more Kiwis engaging with information about the state of the environment



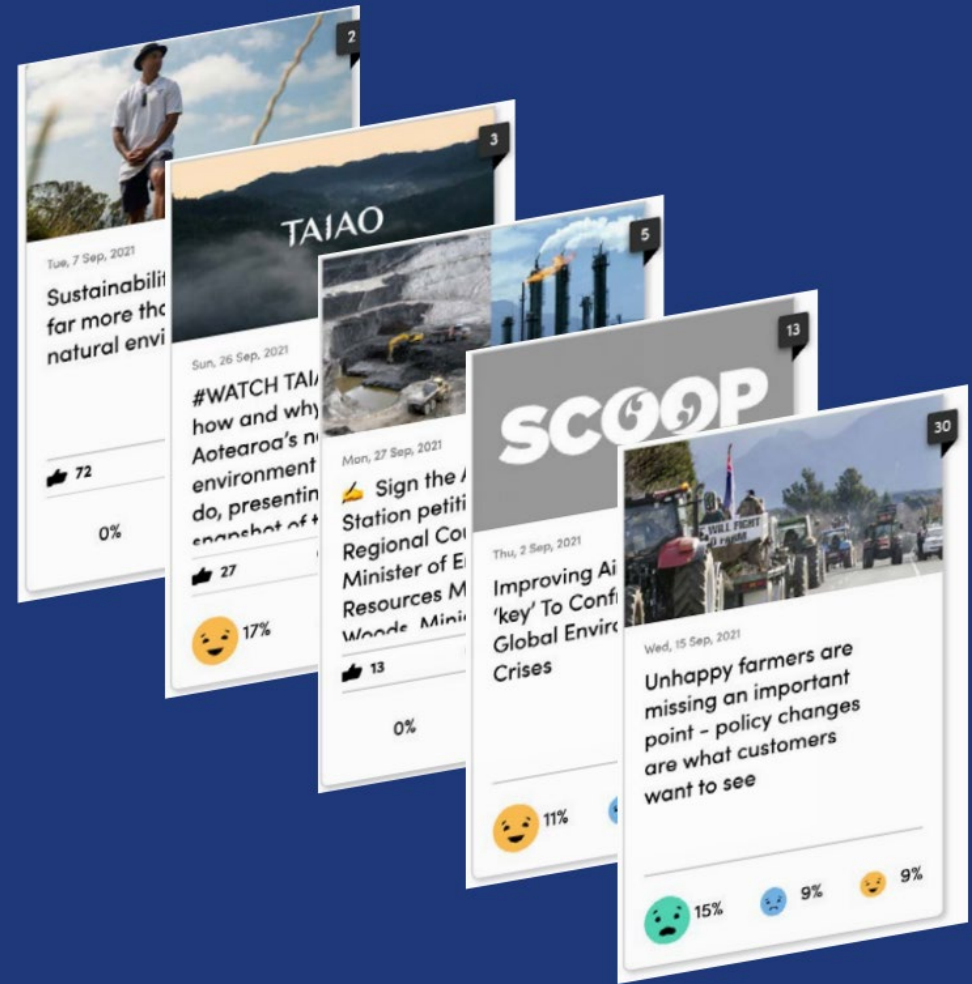
Around 7 in 10 New Zealander's cite at least one barrier stopping them from engaging with information about the state of the environment.

And which, if any, of the following stop you from engaging with information and news about the environment more often? Base n=515



# Lack of trust can come from the size of the issue – and sheer number of subsequent voices and opinions

With Zavy calculating around 650 articles in September alone relating to the environment/ climate change in New Zealand.



Source: Zavy Radar



And climate change is a longer-term problem: most see economic concerns as a greater priority today



Now thinking more broadly about different issues in New Zealand's society, which do you think are the top three most important?  
Base: n = 971

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## Most important issues facing New Zealand:

- No. 1 Cost of living
- No. 2 Affordable housing
- No. 3 Mental health
- No. 4 NZ's Economy
- No. 5 *Climate change***
- No. 6 Access to affordable healthcare
- No. 7 Pollution of lakes, rivers and seas
- No. 8 Plastic in the environment
- No. 9 State of our transport infrastructure

# Climate change and environment are also large, all-encompassing topics, that aren't always defined

Environment, sustainability, climate change – can often be used interchangeably by people, without any real understanding.

Source: EECA Foundational qual study

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New Zealanders believe that the number one action they can take to tackle climate change is recycling.

*“It’s hard to engage people in big picture, faceless issues, about ocean acidification - it’s hard to make people care about it. Human stories are what we connect to.”*

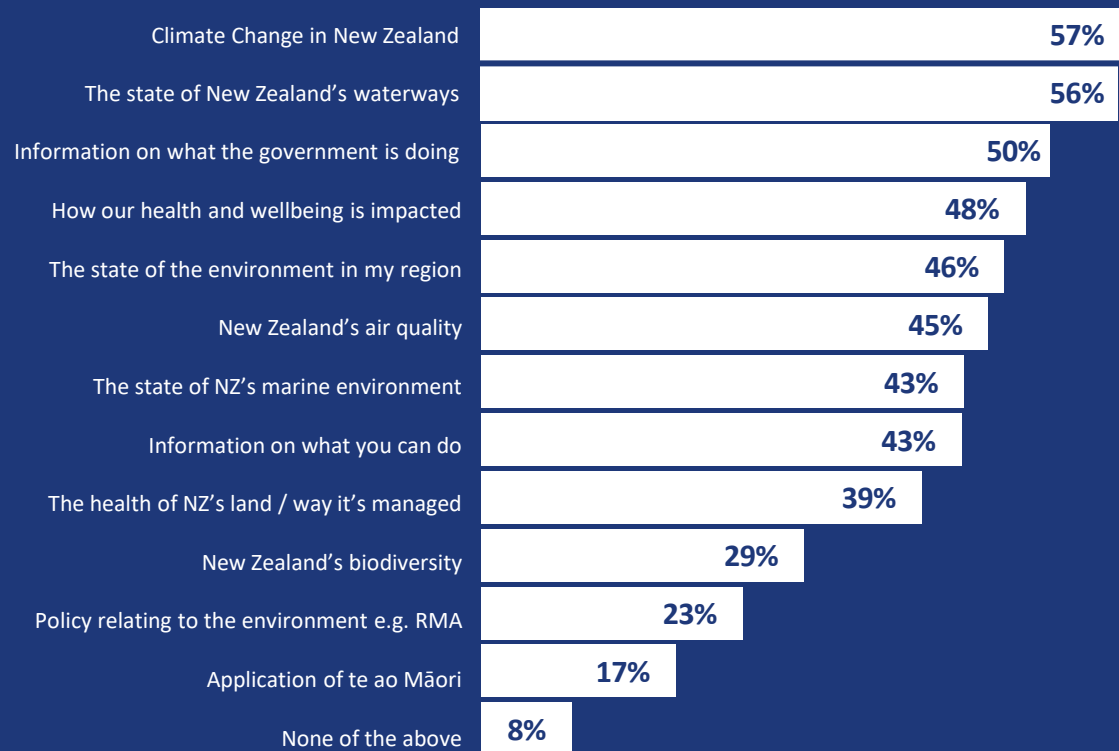
Under 25

**The sense of bigness can be a hindrance to engaging.**



# But we know interest increases once this broad topic is broken down

## INTEREST IN ENVIRONMENT-RELATED TOPICS



**92% of people have an interest in at least one of the topics.**

Engaging people in their smaller areas of interest will be important, and will cover most people.

*“If you want behavioural change you need to be in the grassroots. Tell stories of people... making a positive difference.”*

Which of the following topic areas, if any, are of interest to you? Base: n = 481

## IMPLICATION

**We need to think small,  
not big, if we want people  
to engage in protecting the  
environment**

This can be at a topic level, a local level, or thinking about specific communities and their interests.